

The First Qibla Under Threat

On the mounting danger facing Al-Aqsa Mosque and the silence of the Muslim world

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Across the world, forces hostile to Islam continue to advance under the guise of enlightenment and liberal values, working steadily against Muslims and the institutions they hold sacred. Beyond scattered warnings from religious scholars and a handful of organisations, however, there is little sign of any unified, organised resistance to this pattern.

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), founded following the Islamic Summit convened by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Lahore, is often cited as a case in point. One by one, the argument goes, its principal founding figures were removed from the scene — among them King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria, Sukarno of Indonesia, and Bhutto himself. Intelligence assessments referenced in the piece point to American and Israeli involvement behind several of these deaths, after which, it is argued, the OIC lost much of its collective influence.

“The Palestinian tragedy stands before the entire world, yet beyond expressions of concern, no practical step appears to be taken on their behalf.”

The founding of the state of Israel is traced back to British sponsorship, with Jewish communities gathered from across the world in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Today, that state is described as pursuing territorial ambition — “from the Nile to the Euphrates” — with the backing of the United States, even as ceasefire agreements are said to have done little to restrain continued military action against Palestinians and Lebanon.

THE THREAT TO AL-AQSA

The central concern of the piece is Masjid al-Aqsa, Islam's third holiest site, situated within the wider compound known as Al-Haram Al-Sharif in Jerusalem. The mosque is noted in the Qur'an, in Surah Bani Isra'il, and is traditionally associated with the Night Journey (Mi'raj) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The site came under Islamic administration during the era of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA), with further construction added during the Umayyad period.

Following Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem in the 1967 war, access for Muslim worshippers has been steadily curtailed, with even Friday prayers reportedly restricted at times. The piece raises alarm over recent statements attributed to an Israeli minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, regarding plans to convert the site into a “multi-faith centre,” and draws a parallel with the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid in India and its replacement with a Hindu temple.

- **Religious significance:** Al-Aqsa is described as the historic qibla (direction of prayer) prior to the Ka'aba, and remains central to Islamic tradition and the Palestinian cause alike.
- **Restricted access:** Entry for Muslim worshippers has reportedly tightened considerably since 1967, with further restrictions following recent incidents.
- **Reported settler activity:** Western outlets, including the BBC, have documented attacks on mosques and religious schools in the occupied West Bank, including cases of arson and hostile graffiti.
- **Custodianship:** The site remains under the administration of Jordan's Islamic Waqf, which permits non-Muslim visitors but does not allow non-Muslim religious rites to be performed there.

The editorial notes that opposition to any change of status is not confined to Muslims alone; devout Jewish voices have also spoken out against the proposal, with support for it concentrated among hardline nationalist and religious groups. A separate group, reportedly operating with informal backing, is accused of carrying out attacks on Palestinian communities, mosques, seminaries and homes in the West Bank.

A QUESTION LEFT HANGING

The piece closes not with a policy proposal but with a rhetorical appeal — a call for leadership and unity among the 57 Muslim-majority nations and the more than two billion Muslims worldwide, most of whom, it argues, have so far responded to the situation with condemnation alone rather than concerted action.

Taken together, the argument is less a piece of reportage than a call to conscience: it asks why a community of such size and reach has, in the writer's view, been unable to translate outrage into coordinated protection of a site it regards as central to its faith and history. Whatever one makes of the specific historical claims, the underlying question — who, if anyone, will act — is the one the editorial leaves squarely with its readers.

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“Is there another Salahuddin Ayyubi who might yet save the first qibla?”

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