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**Changing Palestine's religious landscape:
the Occupying Power destroys mosques**

Dr. Daud Abdullah

By the time the British mandatory was set up in 1922 the *Waqf* system had emerged and became a major force in the Palestinian national movement and resistance to foreign rule.

Although the demolition of cultural sites and places of religious worship is recognized internationally as a war crime, the Jewish state has, throughout its existence, violated this principle in the most calculating and sinister manner. Following the initial expulsion of the leaders of the Supreme Muslim Council, the Jewish state immediately proceeded to acquire the land and property of the exiled Palestinians. Through a network of laws, the property and wealth of the *Awqaf* were gradually taken away from the Muslims and transferred to the 'state of Israel' and the Jewish National Fund. The Absentee Property Law, first enacted in 1950, gave the 'Custodian' of Absentee property extensive powers. The two most important of these were the right to determine who was an absentee and the right to dispense with his property in any manner.

Significantly, Israeli leaders have always viewed the *Waqf* system as a threat to their stability and to the institutional dominance of the Jewish population. It is this threat that led successive governments to engage in their campaigns to usurp, demolish, close, and transform many of the mosques in Palestine. Of the 313 large mosques that existed on Palestine in 1948, 200 fell within the territory that became Israel. In his newly produced prize-winning film, *Ma'azin fi wajh al Damar - Minarets in the Face of Destruction - Iyab Daud* documented

cases of more than 100 mosques that have been subjected to one form of attack or another.

Notable examples include the ancient Masjid al Ahmar in Safad. Built in 1270 CE by Dhahir Bayberus, it was converted into a night club after the Israeli authorities sold it to Jewish entrepreneurs. The fate of Masjid al Yunusi has not been much different. It was transferred into an art gallery. Likewise, Masjid al Bahr in Tabariya and the great masjids of Bir al Sab'u and Asaqalan were all converted into museums. The list goes on and on.

In the same manner that it obstructs the renovation and repair of Palestinian homes in Jerusalem, the Occupying Power has also placed countless obstacles in the way of the refurbishment of mosques and other *Awqaf*. Once these structures become derelict, the authorities then close them on the pretext that they pose a danger to the safety of worshippers. Thereafter they demolish them. Masjid Sarafand near Haifa was the latest casualty. Although the locals had just completed its renovation they awoke on July 25th 2000 to find it flattened to the ground.

Since Islam makes no division between religion and politics, the masjid has always played a central role in the life of Muslim societies. It was for this reason that the first act undertaken by the Prophet Muhammad (saw), after arriving in Madina, was to establish a *masjid*. It was no accident, furthermore, that both the Second and Fourth Caliphs, Umar and Ali, were assassinated in masjids.

Their predecessor Abu Bakr al Siddiq had previously laid down sublime rules that protected civilian and religious property. Since then, they have had no parallel in the canons of war. While bidding farewell to an expedition to Bilad al Sham, Abu Bakr advised;

"Do not betray or show treachery. Do not be extreme. Do not mutilate. Do not kill children or the elderly. Do not uproot date trees or burn them. Do not cut down fruit trees or slaughter sheep, cows or camels except for food. You will encounter people who have devoted themselves entirely to worship in their sanctuaries, leave them alone and what they have dedicated themselves to."²

While Muslims are still obliged to adhere to these rules, the Occupying Power in Palestine has been aided and abetted by 'friendly nations' to contradict each one of them. It refuses to adhere to the terms of all the agreements signed since 1993. Meanwhile, Israeli settlers and soldiers continue to maim and kill innocent children and the elderly. In the age of 'peace' they have uprooted tens of thousands of olive trees. And, in the name of civilization they have massacred worshippers in mosques. If these acts are not acts of terrorism, then what is? Israel's continued destruction of masjids in Palestine has confirmed that the conflict there is much more than a struggle for land. It is, in every respect, an attempt by the Occupier to change and erase the Islamic character of the Holy Land.

- 1 . Transmitted by Imam Ahmad
- 2 . Z. Khan, *Tareekh Filastin al Qadim*, (Beirut: 1986), p.150

**Benjamin Franklin
'The Jewish Threat on the
American Society'**

I agree with the general Washington- that we must protect this young nation from an insidious influence and impenetration. That menace, gentlemen, is the Jew. In whatever country Jews have settled in great numbers, they have lowered its moral tone, depreciated its commercial integrity, have segregated themselves, and have not been assimilated, have sneered at and tried to undermine the Christian religion upon which that nation is founded by objecting to its restrictions, have built up a state within a state, and, when opposed, have tried to strangle that country to death financially, as in the case of Spain and Portugal.

For over 1700 years the Jews have been bewailing their sad fate in that they have been exiled from their homeland, as they call Palestine. But, gentlemen, did the world today give it to them in fee simple, they would at once find some reason for not returning. Why? Because they are Vampires and Vampires do not live on Vampires. They cannot live only amongst themselves. They must sub-sit on Christians and other peoples not of their race. If you do not exclude them, in less than 200 years our descendants will be working in the fields to furnish them substance, while they will be in the counting-houses rubbing their hands. I warn you, gentlemen if you do not exclude Jews for all time, your children will curse you in your graves.