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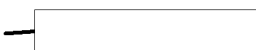
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Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

29 January 1986

THE TEMPLE MOUNT INCIDENTS: THE POTENTIAL FOR ESCALATION [redacted]

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SUMMARY

Intense Muslim reactions to recent confrontations between Jews and Muslims on Jerusalem's Temple Mount illustrate the explosive nature of sensitive religious issues in the Middle East, and their potential for damaging US interests. Although emotions seem to have cooled in Jerusalem, Arab states have convened special meetings of the Islamic Conference's Jerusalem Committee and the UN Security Council to debate the incidents. A US veto of an Islamic-sponsored UNSC resolution on the Temple Mount incidents would advance Libya's anti-American campaign and could trigger anti-US violence in Muslim countries. [redacted]

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] Issues Branch, Issues and Applications Division, Office of Near East and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 29 January 1986 was used in preparing this report. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Issues and Applications Division, NESAs [redacted]

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Earlier this month, a series of incidents on Jerusalem's Temple Mount between Israeli Knesset members and Muslim officials led to clashes between Israeli police and Arab crowds and has renewed debate on the issue of sovereignty over the Temple Mount, a holy site for Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike.* [redacted]

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Reverberations from Temple Mount

Despite the Israeli government's moderate response to the incidents, statements by some Israelis have helped spread the significance beyond its local confines. For example, Deputy Prime Minister David Levy, in a speech in Hebron, remarked, "If in these days, a Jew who wraps himself in a prayer shawl on the Temple Mount is called a provocateur, then we are all provocateurs. This is our country." [redacted]

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The incidents have inflamed Arab fears that their free access to Islam's third holiest site is being eroded. The US Consulate in Jerusalem reports that most local Arabs recognize there is no broad Israeli conspiracy to take over the Temple Mount, and their anger is focused on a few extremist Zionist organizations and personalities. The Arabs fear, however, that if the extremists push hard enough, Tel Aviv will eventually give in to them and permanently alter the status quo on the Temple Mount.

[redacted]

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The consequences of the incidents have resounded far beyond Jerusalem:

- Editorials in the Jordanian press have described the incidents as efforts by Zionist extremists to "storm" Muslim shrines.
- The Egyptian and Saudi press carried inflammatory banner headlines on the Temple Mount events.
- PLO leader Arafat, speaking at the special meeting of the Islamic Conference on Jerusalem, accused Israel of repeated crimes against Muslims and of preparing to erase the Arab identity of Jerusalem and destroy Christian and Muslim holy sites.
- The Syrian press called the "desecration" of the holy sites a part of a wider US-Israeli conspiracy. In addition, Syrian officials urged India as a leader of the Nonaligned Movement to take a strong stand on the issue.
- Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar claimed credit for the Islamic Conference resolution condemning "blatant Israeli activities."
- The Iranian Press Agency headlined "Zionists Renew Attempts to Destroy al-Aqsa." [redacted]

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*See Annex for a chronology of events on the Temple Mount.

[redacted]

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Islamic Conference Condemnations

The 45-member Islamic Conference, which was holding its annual meeting in Morocco when the Temple Mount incidents began, denounced the events as "odious, perfidious, and perpetual aggression against al-Aqsa mosque," carried out with the help of the Israeli authorities. The Conference warned Israel of dire consequences, and noted that Islamic states are compelled to protect their holy places. [redacted]

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A special meeting of the Conference's 17-member Jerusalem committee, held on 21-22 January in Marrakesh, widened the scope of the issue to include political support for the Palestinian people. Moroccan King Hassan, the Chairman of the Conference, called for redoubled Islamic support for Palestinians being forced from their land and holy places in the occupied territories and for preserving the Arab-Islamic nature of Jerusalem. The committee endorsed a number of actions to keep the issue alive:

- Messages were sent to Pope John Paul II, the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, and leaders of other Christian churches to make them aware of the violations in Jerusalem and the occupied territories.
- Islamic Conference Secretary General Pirzada has been dispatched to the UN to take part in the debate over the Temple Mount incidents.
- Sermons on 31 January in all mosques world-wide will be devoted to "Zionist plans to destroy the al-Aqsa mosque, and to change Jerusalem's Arab and Islamic nature."
- A call will be issued for work stoppage throughout the Muslim world on 3 February to protest Israeli violations of al-Aqsa and other mosques in the occupied territories. [redacted]

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The UN Security Council Debate

Islamic country UN members have triggered a Security Council meeting on the Temple Mount incidents and are pushing for a resolution criticizing Israel. King Hassan has sent a letter to the United Nations encouraging broad Islamic participation in the debate on the Temple Mount complaints that seems aimed at transforming the issue from an Arab-Israeli dispute into a Muslim-Jewish confrontation, according to the USUN mission. In his letter, the King warned the West that the incidents "might provoke...legitimate but uncontrollable reaction of revolt, with unforeseen and incalculable consequences." [redacted]

Muslim states friendly to the United States fear that a US veto of the resolution will prompt anti-US violence in their countries, and are attempting to tone down the resolution. Despite King Hassan's letter, the Moroccans appear to have taken the lead at the UN in seeking a compromise. Moderates warn, however, that the emotional nature of the issue will make it difficult to agree upon wording acceptable to the United States:

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- [redacted]
- Jordanian Prime Minister Rifai said Amman would back a substantive resolution that the United States would veto rather than support a meaningless and vague document, according to the US Embassy in Amman.
 - Saudi Arabia indicated that its position as protector of Muslim holy places requires it to take an uncompromising stand on issues touching Jerusalem. Saudi representatives told US officials that the issue is of great emotional significance for all Muslims and of extreme religious sensitivity for Saudi Arabia. [redacted]

Implications for the United States

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Libya's demands for tough anti-US measures, which the Arab moderates oppose, will carry much greater weight at the emergency Arab League meeting scheduled for 30 January in the charged atmosphere now likely to prevail. The emotions that may be fanned on 31 January, when all mosque preachers in the Muslim world are to devote their sermons to the Temple Mount incidents, can only augment the anti-US climate at the meeting. [redacted]

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Confluence of Events. The visceral response of Arab Muslims to the Temple Mount incidents worsens the tense political climate in the Middle East already aggravated by anticipation of Israeli retaliation for the Rome and Vienna airport bombings, uncertainties about US military intentions in maneuvering its fleet off the Libyan coast, and frustration over lack of progress toward a Middle East peace settlement. Under such conditions, individual incidents that would otherwise create only momentary disruptions are more likely to produce the potential for acts of terrorism and mob violence.

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[redacted]

Damage to US Interests. US interests in furthering the peace process are endangered by the prevailing paranoia and suspicion intensified by the Temple Mount events:

- Jordanian-Israeli relations are strained; the Jordanian press has played up the incidents, and some Israelis are interpreting Arab reaction to the incidents as a challenge to their nation's sovereignty.
- The potential for violence among West Bank Arabs has increased.
- PLO leader Arafat's linking of the Temple Mount incidents to the broader issue of Palestinian rights blurs religious and political distinctions.
- Egyptian-Israeli ties are again under attack from Egyptian domestic critics, forcing Mubarak to stall on efforts to improve relations with Tel Aviv following Israel's recent agreement to pursue arbitration over Taba.
- Terrorists looking for popular justification for attacking US and Israeli targets may find a ready-made rationale in the Temple Mount incidents.

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[redacted]

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--A US veto of a UNSC resolution on Temple Mount would offer grist to the mill of the radicals who seek Arab sanctions against the US. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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Strengthened Nonalignment. The Soviets are not currently in a position to capitalize fully on US difficulties. The attempted coup and ensuing civil war in South Yemen has revived deep suspicions about the dangers of the Soviet embrace and cooled existing Soviet ties with Arab states like North Yemen and Kuwait. The trend toward renewal of diplomatic relations with moderate Arabs that Moscow has recently enjoyed may also be interrupted by events in South Yemen. [redacted]

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A rise of anti-superpower sentiment may occur in Middle East populations, strengthening support for distancing from both the United States and the Soviet Union. Arab popular opinion has become increasingly cynical that either superpower can ameliorate the major problems facing the Arabs today: the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Palestinian issue, or the Iran-Iraq War. Any nonaligned drift, however, will be limited by the Arab states' need for military assistance to deal with local and regional security challenges, for economic assistance, and for ties to the superpower patrons of their adversaries. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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[REDACTED]

ANNEX: A Chronology of Recent Temple Mount Events

[REDACTED]

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The Temple Mount in Jerusalem, known by Muslims as Haram al- Sharif, is sacred to Jews, Muslims, and Christians. It contains the "Western Wall," the holiest shrine of Jews, and the Dome of the Rock -- from which Muslims believe Muhammad ascended to heaven, and around which is built the al-Aqsa Mosque. A Muslim Waqf, or religious foundation, has supervised its operation for about 300 years; Israeli courts have reaffirmed the Waqf's functional jurisdiction, and forbid public group prayer by Jews in the Mosque itself, while reaffirming Israeli sovereignty over Temple Mount. [REDACTED]

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January 8, 1986: A group of 25 Israelis, including Knesset members serving on the Interior Committee, visited the Temple Mount to survey the area for suspected illegal construction. The tour had been prearranged with Muslim officials. When a few of the visitors attempted to take video cameras into restricted areas, Muslim guards barred the way, and a shoving match ensued. Nearby Muslims were attracted to the scuffle when a muezzin called for help over the loud speaker. Israeli police arrived and restored order using tear gas to disperse the crowd with minimal injuries. Arab leaders called on shopkeepers in the old city of Jerusalem to strike. Israeli officials called for restraint, and the Knesset Speaker requested that the members not return to the Mount. [REDACTED]

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According to police reports, the incidents were initiated by two Knesset members from the far-right opposition Tehiya-Tzomet Party in collaboration with a right-wing Likud member, and other religious nationalists from outside the Knesset. [REDACTED]

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January 9, 1986: Police detained three Israelis who attempted to hoist an Israeli flag on the Temple Mount. In a separate event, Commerce Minister Sharon paid a highly-publicized visit to the al-Aqsa mosque. [REDACTED]

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January 13, 1986: Mayor Kollek and Knesset Speaker Hillel visited the Temple Mount to help calm the situation, and were well received by Muslims. [REDACTED]

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January 14, 1986: A return visit by some Knesset members and Israeli civilians ended in an even more heated confrontation than the 8 January incident when a few began to pray inside the Haram. Police arrived and used tear gas to disperse the large angry crowd of Arabs that had gathered. Later, a group of Arab youths stoned the Israeli police station on the Haram, and a commercial strike was observed in Muslim neighborhoods around the city. Prime Minister Peres, while reaffirming Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem, pointed out that government policies regarding Temple Mount had not changed -- policies that recognize the shared sacredness of the site

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[redacted]

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and the functional responsibility of the Waqf to manage its daily operations -- and condemned the mass incitement there. [redacted]

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January 19, 1986: About a dozen members of the extremist Israeli Kach Movement tried to enter the Temple Mount, but were stopped at the gate by police. Two were arrested, one in possession of an Israeli flag intended to be hoisted on the Mount. Although Meir Kahane leads the Kach movement, Embassy sources make no mention of his presence at this incident as reported in the popular Arab press. [redacted]

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January 21, 1986: Israeli press publishes official Chief Rabbinate ruling forbidding Jews from setting foot on Temple Mount because of its sacredness; press also noted Director General of Jerusalem Municipality's finding that "there is no illegal construction on the Temple." [redacted]

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