Rethinking the Role of Religion in Arab Antisemitic Discourses

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Abstract: "The Palestinian cause is not about land and soil, but it is about faith and belief," insist Islamists in their attempts to Islamize the Arab–Israeli conflict. This paper examines the instrumentalization of religion in the conflict since its early stages, and its impact on Arab antisemitic discourses. It is based on an ongoing research project exploring references to the Jews in Arab, particularly the Palestinian and Egyptian, Islamist as well as nationalist media, during major landmarks in the conflict's history, from the Arab Wailing Wall riots in 1929 up to US president Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017. It contends that despite the intensified exploitation of Islam in the incitement against Israel, Zionism, and the Jews, and despite the traditional enmity towards the Jews as a group deriving from Islam, preliminary findings show that the most common themes in the Arab antisemitic discourse originate from a more modern, exogenous vocabulary and perceptions. Classical Christian–Western tropes, such as conspiracy theories epitomized in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Nazi terminology, and Holocaust denial, are extensively used and are much more pervasive.

Keywords: Antisemitism; Islam; Arab–Israeli conflict; anti-Zionism; Judeophobia; anti-Judaism

The Temple Mount and Jerusalem, which are considered by the Palestinians and most of the Muslims in the world as Muslim holy sites, were the cause for the explosion of disturbances and clashes between Israeli security forces and the Palestinians in 2017. On 14 July, three Israeli Arabs from Umm al-Fahm assassinated two Israeli police border guards at the exit from the Temple Mount. In response, the Israeli authorities closed the compound for worshippers to enable the investigation of the incident, and decided to place metal detectors at the entrance of the premise. These measures sparked protests and incitement in the Arab and Muslim worlds against what was interpreted as an Israeli attempt to change the status quo in the Temple Mount and as a further step in Israel's efforts to cleanse Palestine of its Palestinians inhabitants, take control of the Mount according to a "grand plan" to destroy al-Aqsa mosque and build the Third Temple.

Shaykh Kamal Khatib, the deputy head of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel accused the Israeli government in a televised interview with al-Jazira TV on 16 July of injecting chemical substances with a long-term effect in al-Aqsa mosque to bring about its destruction. Egyptian al-Azhar Professor, Ahmad Karima, called upon the Muslim world to wage an armed *jihad* (holy war) against the Jews, whom she described as aggressors, thieves, and slayers of prophets during an interview with the Palestinian Authority's official TV channel on 20 July. Imams in Friday sermons, such as Egyptian-born 'Amr Shahin at the Islamic Center of Davis in California, called on 14 and 21 July to "liberate al-Aqsa mosque from the filth of the Jews", and "turn Jerusalem into a graveyard for the Jews". On 21 July, Shaykh Mahmud Harmush of the California-based Islamic Center of Riverside also called for the annihilation of the Jews, and accused them of plotting not only to capture and

destroy al-Aqsa, but also to capture Mecca and Medina. Following negotiations with King Abdallah of Jordan, who serves as the guardian of the holy sites in Jerusalem[1], and with al-Aqsa leaders, the metal detectors were removed, and the previous entrance regulations were reinstated. After three weeks of clashes around the Mount and across the West Bank, especially on Fridays, defined as "days of rage", the protests and demonstrations subsided.

Commenting on these events, Lebanese columnist Jihad al-Khazin in the London-based *al-Hayat* on 22 and 28 July denied any Jewish connection to Jerusalem referring to Israel's alleged futile efforts to find archeological proofs to support its "lies" throughout its 70 years of history. Similar contentions were voiced by ʿAli Muhsin Hamid on 26 July, in an article in the Egyptian daily *al-Ahram* titled "Jerusalem was never and will never be Jewish". If the Israeli claims of Jewish connection were to be true, he claimed, the true Jewish inhabitants needed to be from Palestinian origin and not Russians, Indians, Americans, Ethiopians, and so on.

Another event which triggered similar reactions a few months later was President Donald Trump's declaration on 6 December 2017, recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which also foresaw the remaining of the Wailing Wall in Israeli hands in any future agreement with the Palestinians. Turkey's president Recep Tayyip *Erdo*gan, who aspires to represent the whole Muslim world, convened in mid-December an extraordinary summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul, in which the participants reiterated the significance of Jerusalem in Islam and their support for the Palestinian struggle, and decided to cooperate and take action against Trump's decision. On 12 December, Shaykh al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib, the highest religious authority in the Sunni world, convened the council of al-Azhar scholars, which according to the London-based *al-Quds al-ʿArabi* from 13 December, rejected Trump's declaration and defined it as "an injustice with no historical or legal foundations". The public protests encompassed most Arab and Muslim capitals, and calls encouraging a third intifada and *jihad* against Israel were voiced by Muslim preachers in Arab countries and in mosques of Muslim communities worldwide.

Again, it was Jewish history and the so-called Israel's and Zionism's "invented myths" that preoccupied Arab writers and commentators, denying any Jewish ties to Palestine in general and to Jerusalem in particular. A few of them relied on the controversies among Israeli and non-Israeli historians and archeologists on the interpretation of their findings. "There is no such thing as Israel or Tel Aviv," announced Muhammad al-Mula in an interview with the Kuwaiti TV on 12 December, adding that "Jerusalem is Arab and Islamic. Jerusalem is the city of Islam … It will return to the Arab and Islamic nation". Trump adopted "the Zionist narrative", claimed ʿUmar Hilmi al-Ghul in the Palestinian *al-Hayat al-Jadida* on 9 December. "It is not our goal to examine the falsification of history and Trump's ignorance," he wrote. If he wants to learn the truth he should read what Israeli archeologists wrote after "searching for the past 70 years for one archeological remnant related to the [presence] of a third temple [there were only two], or connecting the Jews to Palestine in general". Similarly, Hamas leader Muhammad Nazzal accused the Zionists of falsifying biblical remnants in Lebanese *al-Akhbar* on 13 December, claiming as well that Israeli archeological scholars, such as Israel Finkelstein and David Ussishkin, "failed to provide important proof that the city [Jerusalem] was inhabited [by Jews] in the 10th Century BC".

In this debate there was a tacit agreement between all Palestinian factions Hamas, the Muslim Brothers in Jordan and Palestinian Authority's (PA) representatives on the perception of Trump's declaration as a new and worse Balfour Declaration. Hamas leader Ismaʿil Haniyya described Trump's statement at a rally marking 30 years to the founding of Hamas on 14 December, as even more dangerous than the Balfour Declaration. Fatah leaders and the PA considered it as a "second Balfour Declaration", whereas journalist ʿAbdelilah Belqaziz in United Arab Emirates (UAE) daily *al-Khalij* of

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[1]　Jordan was recognized by Israel as the guardian of the holy places in Jerusalem since 1967, after its defeat in the War and retreat from the West Bank.

18 December described it as "the first bitter fruit" of the so-called "Arab Spring" and a severe crime, exceeding "Balfour's crime which is exactly one century old". Trump was even compared to Adolf Hitler. Ahmad Qadidi, a Tunisian politician and former ambassador to Qatar published an article in the Qatari daily *al-Sharq* on 14 December, describing the American move as "a final solution to the Palestinian problem", likening it to Hitler's final solution for the Jewish problem—a move in which he "did not succeed". On the same day, the Palestinian Fatah movement posted in its hashtag "Hands Off Alquds" Trump's picture on top of Hitler's picture, with an English title: "I can't see the difference. Can you?"[2]

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion were also invoked in an article by Yasir 'Abdullah on 19 December, in the Palestinian Ma'an News Agency. After describing them and their goals, he claimed that Jerusalem is in danger, and that the US is "a tool for the execution of the Zionist plots throughout the Arab world". Therefore, he suggested counteracting them by drafting the "Protocols of the Elders of Palestine/Arabs" for dealing with Arab weaknesses and inter-Palestinian rifts, and enabling them in the next 100 years "to retrieve the lands and restore Arab pride".

In contrast to these commentaries, a few writers, such as former PA minister Ziyad Abu Ziyad, and the Saudi prince Turki al-Faysal, called to leverage the declaration for the recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state.[3] The head of the Middle East Research Institute in Jedda, 'Abd al-Hamid Hakim, in a televised interview with the al-Hurra TV on 15 December, also expressed his support for Trump's declaration and recognized Jewish history and links to the city. "We must recognize and understand that Jerusalem is a religious symbol for the Jews. It is sacred [to them] as are Mecca and al-Madina to the Muslims." Hamid added that "the Arab mind must clear itself from the legacies of Nasserism and political Islam, both Sunni and Shi'i, which instilled a culture of hatred [towards] the Jews and denied their historical right to the region."[4]

Those two relatively recent episodes are typical examples of the complex entanglement of religion in the Arab–Israeli conflict and its reflection in the Arab antisemitic discourse. They contain major elements: the centrality of symbols such as the Temple Mount and Jerusalem; the pattern and vocabulary of mobilization; the denial of Jewish history in Palestine; the negative perceptions of the Jews; the invocation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*; the usage of the Nazi era terminology; and a few dissenting voices, challenging the Islamist and mainstream discourse on Israel and the Jews. This paper seeks to review the role of religion in the conflict over Palestine between the Palestinian Arabs and the Zionist/Jewish settlers, and to examine the way it impacted the Arab antisemitic discourse. It is a part of an ongoing project exploring references to the Jews in Arab, and particularly Palestinian and Egyptian, Islamist as well as nationalist press, during major landmarks in the conflict's history, from the Arab Wailing Wall riots in 1929 up to US president Trump recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.[5] This is a qualitative research which seeks to establish how and when Islam was used to Islamize the conflict and antisemitism, and to assess to what extent these attempts succeeded.

A basic premise of this article is that antisemitism in the Arab and Muslim world is a religious, cultural, social and political construction of the contemporary era in the wake of the conflict and the rise of Arab nationalism and Islamism. Another premise is that it comprises religious anti-Judaic and Judeophobic themes as well as imported Christian European antisemitic themes. Hence, it is both a continuation of the past and a modern phenomenon, which creates a new authentic brand

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[2]　Memri, "Violent Incitement Against Trump On Fatah Social Media Accounts," special dispatch No. 7239, 19 December 2017, accessed 9 March 2019, at https://www.memri.org/reports/violent-incitement-against-trump-fatah-social-media-accounts-comparisons-hitler-execution.

[3]　Memri, "Saudi Prince Turki Al-Faisal in Open Letter to Trump," special dispatch No. 7225, 13 December 2017, accessed 9 March 2019, at https://www.memri.org/reports/turki-faisal-open-letter-to-trump.

[4]　MemriTV, clip No. 6324, 15 December 2017, accessed 9 March 2019, at https://www.memri.org/tv/saudi-researcher-jerusalem-is-capital-of-israel-opportunity-for-peace.

[5]　The landmarks are: 1929 riots; the period between the two world wars and the 1936–1939 Arab revolt; 1948 in the wake of the establishment of the state of Israel; the Tripartite War of 1956; the 1967 War; the first intifada; the second intifada; and the Arab Spring.

of antisemitism that can be termed as Islamic new antisemitism. There is a great confusion in the terms used to define antisemitism in the Arab and Muslim worlds—anti-Jewishness; Jew-hatred; anti-Judaism; Judeophobia; Islamic antisemitism; Islamic anti-Zionism. For facilitating the discussion, this paper continues to use the term antisemitism, but it suggests to relate the term antisemitism to the imported Western themes, and to refer to the religious-based dehumanization of Jews, especially in the Islamist discourse, as Judeophobia. Whereas Judeophobia encompasses in the Arab/Muslim world: denigration of Judaism, defamation of the Jewish character, discrimination against Jews, and efforts at their destruction, antisemitism encompasses the Western perceptions of the Jews as an omnipotent subversive power, seeking to control the world, absent in Islamic culture which perceive the Jews as meek and coward. (For a discussion on this issue see: Schroeter 2018; Judaken 2018). Such a differentiation refines the understanding of the phenomenon, and avoids the pitfall of essentialism in the search for the roots of antisemitism in the Arab world, common in certain works that claim that it is "an inherent part of the Islamic culture" (Israeli 2005; Bostom 2008). This approach also corresponds with the "schema of paradigms" introduced by Douglas Pratt "to reflect the historical variants and developments of the relationship between Islam and Judaism:" the originating paradigms of the early Islamic era; the historic-legal paradigms or the *dhimmi* regulations of the Medieval period; the contemporary-negative paradigms or the Islamic neo-antisemitism of the modern era; and the prospective-positive paradigms, based on acceptance and affirmation, which can be traced in recent years (Pratt 2010).

Clifford Geertz defines religion as: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, persuasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 1973, p. 90; Marvin and Inge 1999, p. 18). Religion provides the motivation, the justification, the organization, and the worldview. This was clearly apparent in the religiously based mobilization of the Palestinians and Muslims for the Palestinian cause as well as for the later mobilization of global Jihadists (Dawson 2018). "The force of a religion in supporting social values rests on the ability of its symbols to formulate a world in which those values, as well as the forces opposing their realization, are fundamental ingredients" (Geertz 1973, p. 131). Kocku von Stuckrad adds that "Religions are powerful not because they reveal transcendent truths or the effects of an ontologized 'History', but because they serve as instruments in the communicative formation of identity and provide people with a concrete script of action" (Von Stuckrad 2003, pp. 268–69). Therefore, he suggests examining the role of religions as systems of communication and action. Jonathan Fox posited four roles that religion can play in a conflict between groups. First, religion provides an ideological framework for understanding the world; secondly, religion defines codes of behavior that link the faithful and their activities to that framework; thirdly, religion links the individual to an all-encompassing story and at times creates the institutions that organize and recruit individuals towards the realization of these goals; finally, religion provides legitimacy for activities and institutions in pursuit of these goals (Fox 1999).

The gist of these approaches to religion informs my analysis. It comprises of three parts: the first part is a background note on Islam's attitude towards the Jews and the rise of antisemitism; the second part focuses on the deliberate actions employed in the exploitation of religion during the 1920s, and the two intifadas by political and religious leaders; and the third part deals with the major religious themes raised in the contemporary polemics against the Jews.

A major contention of this paper is that Islam played a crucial role in the conflict since its very early stages, and it was naturally so. Most writers on the conflict acknowledged the role of religion but they considered it secondary to the role of the secular, nationalist discourse until the 1967 War, claiming that the conflict underwent an Islamization process with the surge of political Islam in the aftermath of this war (Litvak 1998; Sivan 2008). I will show that from the very beginning of the conflict Islam was used to fan the conflict and mobilize domestic, Arab, and Muslim support for the Palestinian cause. "In contexts of confessional and national-ethnic conflict", Islam often served

"to articulate the nationalism of groups that are living within a political structure," contended Coury (Coury 2004, p. 130). Moreover, as Jonathan Gribetz showed in his study on Muslim-Jewish relations in the late years of the Ottoman Empire, "the intellectuals of this period often thought of one another and interpreted one another's actions in terms of two central categories: religion and race" (Gribetz 2014, p. 3). Religion was central to the empire's relationship with its diverse populations, and continued to be central during the Mandate period. As Palestinian scholar, Musa Budeiri, further elaborated, "the overt articulation of goals and policies was expressed in terms of Islam. Indeed, it could not be otherwise. No other ideological idiom would have been familiar or comprehensible to the rural inhabitants of the country, who constituted a majority and to whom the idea of nation and national interest was totally alien" (Budeiri 1997, p. 196). Moreover, Islam is perceived as faith (*din*) and state (*dawla*), and even the modern concept of nationalism which emerged in the Arab world since the last quarter of the 19th century was infused with religion. The rise of Islamist movements exacerbated the attempts to Islamize the conflict and reinforced themes which have already existed.

Another contention is that the entanglement of religion in the conflict had a decisive impact on the rise of antisemitism in Arab and Muslim societies, and on its features. However, since the Islamization of the conflict was seen as derived from the surge of Islamist movements, it had also been assumed that the state-sponsored antisemitism of the 1950s and 1960s was inculcated from above (Harkabi 1974, pp. 263–70), whereas Islamist antisemitism emerged from below, and as such it appears to be more deeply rooted. It seems, however, that Islamist antisemitism was also inculcated from above with the efforts of the Palestinian leadership to construct the conflict as a religious conflict from the 1920s. Both nationalist and Islamist discourse on the Jews drew anti-Jewish themes from Islamic sources, albeit from different standpoints and different degrees, to describe the Jewish threat. Islamist ideology combined the historical religious aspects of its perception of the conflict with national and social aspects (El-Awaisi 1991, pp. 226, 234–44), and combined in its Judeophobic discourse imported Western themes.

Preliminary findings of this research clearly show that despite the intensified exploitation of Islam in the incitement against Israel, Zionism, and the Jews, the most popular recurring antisemitic themes were derived from classical Christian and Western vocabulary, especially conspiracy theories, the blood libel, Nazi imagery, and Holocaust denial. During the period between the two world wars, the Arab press was extensively preoccupied with the issue of the Jews, especially in view of the rising antisemitism in Europe and the immigration to Palestine, and exhibited a wide and diversified range of attitudes. Most reports were informative, and did not obsessively deal with the inherent corrupted character of the Jews. Although already then Islamic sources were used to provide justification for the delegitimization of Zionism, and were welded with Western antisemitic tropes, the Islamist discourse acknowledged Jewish history and the Jewish link to the land of Israel–Palestine. An abrupt change in attitude occurred with the establishment of the state of Israel, bringing to the fore a more monolithic discourse, which strives to deny Jewish historical roots in Palestine and challenge the nationhood of the Jews. This trend was exacerbated by the rise of political Islam.

Another finding is that there is continuity in the patterns of Islamic mobilization, which started with the first Arab riots of the 1920s—the terms, the symbols, and days of action. However, it seems that in the wake of the Arab revolutions of 2011, and the aversion in Arab societies to the Islamist ideology and practice, as well as a result of regional and global strategic changes there is a growing, albeit slow, trend, of revisiting the attitudes towards Israel and the Jews. A perusal through the content of Hamas mouthpiece *Filastin al-Muslima* in 2011–12, even shows that the religious themes, such as the early Muslim encounter with the Jews, which were extensively discussed in the 1990s, diminished significantly over the years. Moreover, despite the surge of religiosity at various levels of Arab societies, there is a gap between rhetoric and praxis. While the volume, virulence, and aggressiveness of the rhetoric against Jews continues unabated, especially in time of crises and confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians, the religiously based mobilization attempts failed to achieve their goals, and the Palestinians found themselves again and again alone in their war with Israel.

1. Islam's Attitude Towards the Jews and the Rise of Antisemitism

Two major points of the history of Muslim-Jewish relations from the early days of Islam to the contemporary era are relevant to the discussion in this paper: the Islamic scriptures portrayal of the Jews or the originating paradigms of the early Islamic era; and the Jews' legal status under Muslim rule or the *dhimmi regulations* of the medieval period. "The Qur'an has both positive and negative things to say about Jews. However, the positive statements come from the early part of Muhammad's career, while he was still in Pagan Mecca (610–22), and are mainly in the context of biblical history and lore" (Stillman 2010, p. 212). The Prophet's attitude underwent a radical change after his emigration to Medina, and the anti-Jewish verses were the result of his encounter with the Jews there and their rejection of his message. These verses attack not only the tenets of the Jewish faith but also the alleged characteristics of the Jewish community: Treachery, clannishness and divisiveness (Ben-Shammai 1988; Sivan 2012, p. 3). This early Islamic history preoccupied Muslim polemicists and shaped attitudes and behavior towards Christians and Jews in Arab lands. "In particular, Muslim polemicists have focused on the Jewish tribes of Medina, those who took up arms against the Prophet and sought to betray him to his enemies as the latter besieged the city" (Lassner and Troen 2007, p. 5). However, Islamic theology was for many centuries less preoccupied with the Jews because of their weakness and misery. As scholar Jeffrey Kenney notes, "the successful military and ideological expansion of Islam overshadowed the earlier challenges that Jews had posed to Muhammad" (Kenney 1994, p. 253).

Recognized as *ahl al-kitab* (the People of the Book), believers in monotheism, Jews and Christians were considered to be *ahl al-dhimma*—protected religious communities by the Islamic state under Islamic law. "Both the covenant of *dhimma* and the *millet* system [established in the Ottoman Empire] rested on institutionalized discrimination on the basis of religion" (Stillman 2019). They were allowed to exercise their religions and their communal life, but had to abide by the rules and duties dictated by "a social framework of discriminations and disabilities that constantly emphasized the superiority of Muslims", as Wistrich emphasized (Wistrich 2002, p. 6; see also ibid.). It should be noted, however, that until the modern era, Jews lacked demonic qualities attributed to them in medieval Christian literature, and the negative representation of the Jews in Islamic sources did not reflect obsessive emotional hatred (Stillman 2010, p. 214. See also Lewis 1997, pp. 117–39).

Historians of medieval Islam, such as Mark Cohen and the late Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, claim that "despite the theological intolerance that Islam shared with Christendom, the Jews of Islam experienced far greater security and integration with the majority society than their brethren in Europe" (Cohen 1986, p. 127). The Jews were indigenous inhabitants of the area, not as in Western Christendom, and they shared their *dhimmi* status with other non-Muslim groups. Moreover, pluralism and religious heterogeneity were engrained more deeply in Islamic than in European society, and Muslim religious discrimination was directed at the *dhimmi* class as a whole, rather than at the Jews in particular. Therefore, "the negative psychological impact of second-class status was substantially blunted for the Jews" (Ibid., p. 133). Moreover, there was a gap between theory and practice, which "made for a basically lenient, flexible attitude in many spheres, and for turning a blind eye to many practices which diverged from the desirable theory of holy law" (Lazarus-Yafeh 1999, p. 108. See also Nirenberg 2013, p. 177–78). Even in the later Middle Ages, when relations between Muslims and *dhimmis* deteriorated, "nobody ever connected Jews with Satan . . . or attributed to them any devilish intention" (Lazarus-Yafeh 1999, 111). Jew-hatred, as the renowned scholar Goitein concluded from the Geniza documents, was on the whole "local and sporadic, rather than general and endemic" (Goitein 1971, p. 283, as quoted by Stillman 2010, p. 215).

European antisemitism, in both its theological and racist versions, was essentially alien to Islamic traditions, culture, and modes of thought, asserted Bernard Lewis (Lewis 1998, p. 43). However, in the modern era "to an astonishing degree, the ideas, the literature, even the crudest inventions of the Nazis and their predecessors have been internalized and Islamized. The major themes—poisoning wells, the invented Talmud quotations, ritual murder, the hatred of mankind, the Masonic and

other conspiracy theories, taking over the world—remain; but with an Islamic twist" (Ibid. See also (Webman 2018)).

Manifestations of ideological hostility to Jews were the products of modernity appearing already in the 19th century, before the emergence of Zionism, as a result of the growing European political and cultural penetration of the Middle East. Coupled with the weakness of the Muslim world they created a sense of deep crisis among Muslims, causing a worsening in their attitude towards the Christian and Jewish minorities, identified as the main beneficiaries of the growing Western influence and of various reform efforts carried out by local rulers. The import of anti-Jewish ideas and antisemitic themes along with other ideas, mostly by missionaries and Christian Arab graduates of European schools, exacerbated the intolerance towards the Jews. The emergence of Arab nationalism and Zionism, Jewish immigration to Palestine, and the deep trauma of the 1948 Arab defeat by the nascent Jewish state exacerbated the anti-Jewish hostility and created a fertile ground for the entrenchment of imported antisemitic perceptions and for the reappearance of anti-Jewish Islamic traditions to rationalize the negation of Zionism, Israel, and the Jews. (For the rise of antisemitism in the Arab world, see Haim 1955; Harkabi 1974; Sivan 1989; Nettler 1989; Lewis 1997; Wistrich 2002; Krämer 2006; Webman 2017).

2. Patterns of Mobilization

"From 1918 onwards, the leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement drew on Islamic arguments and sentiment in mobilizing popular support around specific threats, in the struggle against the Jewish National Home and the British Mandate. The Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Supreme Muslim Council consistently highlighted the Islamic importance of Jerusalem, and the threat posed by Zionism to the Muslim holy sites there, particularly after the Wailing Wall disturbances of 1929" (Taji-Farouki 2004, pp. 321–22). Several methods of action were used:

- Organizing demonstrations, processions, and riots, especially on the occasion of religious festivities and in locations with religious significance, such as Jerusalem and Hebron;
- Issuing *fatwa*s (religious edicts) banning the sale of lands to Jews; forbidding concession of any part of Palestine; and justifying suicide attacks against Israeli targets;
- Calling for *jihad* and glorifying martyrdom;
- Convening conferences for the mobilization of the Muslim World;
- Constructing the myth of Palestine as a sacred Muslim land, and highlighting the importance of Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque in Islam;
- Spreading rumors and incitement by political and religious leaders.

The Wailing Wall crisis of 1929, considered by Israeli historian Hillel Cohen as the "year zero of the Jewish-Arab conflict" (Cohen 2013. See also Samuel 1929), is indeed the first most important case of the use of Islam by the Palestinian leadership at the time, as the result of a campaign to make the world, and Palestinians, aware of a threat to the Muslim Holy Places. Many of the mobilization tools, enumerated above, were used during these events. The Wailing Wall is the most sacred site in Judaism, but is also the Western boundary of the *Haram al-Sharif*, the Muslim sacred precinct which includes the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. It is also where the Prophet tied the *Buraq*, the riding animal upon which he rode during the Night of Ascension to Heaven (*Mi'raj*). The incidents started on a religious day—the Day of Atonement, 24 September 1928, when Jewish worshippers at the Wall set up screens to partition men from women. The screens were considered an aberration of the status quo by the Arabs and following their complaints to the British authorities, the screens were removed. The Supreme Muslim Council exacerbated the tension by harassing Jewish worshippers and by an active campaign to raise Palestinian consciousness of the perceived danger posed by the Jews to the al-Aqsa Mosque. Since its establishment in 1922, the Supreme Muslim Council challenged the Jews' right of access to the Wall with ritual paraphernalia (screens, benches, and so forth) arguing that "the Wall was part of a *waqf* endowment and therefore Muslim property" (Johnson 1982, p. 25).

The riots reached their peak in summer 1929 and spread to other locations, including Hebron and Jaffa (Porath 1977; Cohen 2013). The council turned sanctified places into political symbols, and infused politics in religious festivals in these events and in the 1936–39 Arab revolt (Kupferschmidt 1984).

In October 1928 the Committee for the Defense of Al-Buraq Al-Sharif, set up and inspired by Hajj Amin al-Husayni, issued a declaration addressed to all Muslims, stressing that it is incumbent on all Muslims to face the aggression against their Holy Places "and make their 400 million voices a single voice, raised in defense of Al-Buraq Al-Sharif, which is part of the blessed Mosque of Al-Aqsa" (Johnson 1982, p. 28; Kupferschmidt 1984, pp. 191–92). In a somewhat different interpretation, Ilan Pappe belittles the importance of Islam in this document, claiming that it was present "in the background and marginal", and it was not the insult of religion that was defended but the social and political rights of the Muslim believers (Pappe 1998, p. 94). Nevertheless, these events had a strong pan-Islamic impact, and Husayni exploited them to raise international Muslim interest in Palestine. In 1931, he managed to convene in Jerusalem the Islamic Congress in defense of Jerusalem, attended by eminent scholars from all over the Muslim world, including the renowned Islamic scholar Muhammad Rashid Rida (Kramer 1986, pp. 123–41). Following in the footsteps of this congress, the OIC, an international organization of over 50 Muslim states, was formed in 1969 after an arson attack on al-Aqsa mosque by a Christian Australian on 21 August. Although representing heads of states and not religious scholars, the OIC dedicated a permanent committee to the Jerusalem issue, and defined its goals as safeguarding the interests and securing the progress and well-being of their peoples and of all Muslims in the world (Milton-Edwards 2008, p. 78).

In 1934, with the increase in Jewish immigration due to the persecution of German Jews and in land purchases, Husayni issued a *fatwa*, which forbade any sale of land to Zionists or their agents. He defined the sale of land to Jews as apostasy (*kufr*), and treachery towards God and his Messenger. He also portrayed the Jews as seeking "'the extinction of the light of Islam and the Arabs from the holy land', which had been granted to the Palestinians as a divine trust (*amana*)" (Taji-Farouki 2004, p. 322; Kupferschmidt 1984, p. 195). Another fatwa reinforcing Husayni's ban on lands sales conveying the same urgency was issued in January 1935 at the first conference of Palestinian 'ulama' in Jerusalem (Kupferschmidt 1984, pp. 196–97; The Jordanian Awqaf Department 1990, pp. 65–69). Similar fatwas were repeatedly issued since then, prohibiting the sale of lands, calling for *jihad*, and forbidding peace or normalization with Israel.[6] Al-Azhar scholars issued a declaration in April 1948 on the duty to fight in Palestine and defined the war as *jihad* (Jankowski 1984, p. 320; Reiter 2011, pp. 79–80, 175–76), and a year after the 1967 War, al-Azhar Academy of Islamic Research held a conference whose rulings further consolidated the rejection of the Jewish state in religious terms (Green 1971. For a critical discussion of the impact of this conference, see Schroeter 2018). The rise of Islamist movements in the wake of the swift Israeli victory in the war and the blow dealt to the dominant pan-Arab political and ideological order gave another impetus to the exploitation of religion and the theologization of the conflict.

These patterns of mobilization, which had been traced already in the first violent confrontations between Arabs and Jews in the 1920s, continued to be employed by the Palestinians, in the first intifada in 1987–1992, the second intifada in 2000–2004, as well as in subsequent encroachments between the Palestinians and Israel. They were particularly evident in the activities of Hamas and Hizballah.

Both Hamas and Hizballah perceived the Arab–Israeli conflict as the epitome of an inherently irreconcilable struggle between Jews and Muslims, between Judaism and Islam. It is not a national or territorial conflict but a historical, religious, cultural, and existential conflict between truth and falsehood, maintained Hamas' Charter. The only way to confront this struggle is through Islam and by means of *jihad*, until victory or martyrdom (Maqdsi 1993; Nüsse 1993; Kramer 1987; Norton 1987, p. 169). Both movements used what Bernard Wasserstein called "the calendar of communal riot" (Wassertein 1996; Kupferschmidt 1984) for popular mobilization. This calendar included the occasions of:

6　　For a collection of fatwas from the mid-1930s to 1990, see (The Jordanian Awqaf Department 1990).

- Islamic holidays such as 'Id al-Adha (the feast of sacrifices concluding the Hajj); the month of Ramadan; the '*Ashura*, commemorating Imam Husayn's martyrdom, which became a symbol of shi'i oppression and later shi'i activism, for Hizballah;
- Historic events such as the Battle of Badr (symbolizing the victory of Muhammad's Muslim minority over the infidel majority in 624);
- Landmarks in the Arab–Israeli conflict—the Balfour Declaration; the Six-Day War of 1967; the Land Day of 30 March;[7] the first day of the first intifada;[8]
- Memorial Days of the martyrs (*shuhada*'), killed during military operations;
- Jerusalem Day, a commemorative holiday fixed on the last Friday of Ramadan, by Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini in 1980, a year after he seized power in Iran.

All these occasions served for demonstrations, processions, riots, and commercial strikes (Webman 1994).

Throughout the Mandate period, concedes Budeiri, Islam served to shape an ideology of resistance. "The slogans and rallying cries of the anti-occupation movement have shown an increasing tendency since the 1980s to couch themselves in an Islamic mode," he argues, adding that "the practice of holding demonstrations after Friday prayers when people are congregating at mosques, the use of mosques as social support networks, their use as relatively safe haves and to carry out teaching when schools are closed and later as centers for the distribution of food and money, all tended to reinforce the view that political commitment is an extension of religious belief." However, he added, "religion was the medium not the message . . . It is not that the Palestinians betrayed an early fundamentalist bias or possessed a doctrinal bent, but their struggle against Jewish colonization was perceived in religious terms and this was their only recognizable *Weltanschauung*" (Budeiri 1997, p. 201).

Another tool of indoctrination and mobilization, especially after the 1967 War, was the educational system. The curriculum and the schoolbooks underpinned the perception of the conflict, Israel, and the Jews in religious terms (e.g., Mueller 2012; Groiss 2018). During the first intifada leaflets served as a medium to convey general instructions to the population. They also served as a platform for Hamas and the Fatah United National Committee to voice their respective ideologies and political positions (Mishal and Aharoni 1989). While the first intifada witnessed the canonization of civic resistance, the second intifada (al-Aqsa) witnessed the sanctification of suicide acts. "The suicide phenomenon emerged in the heat of a struggle for independence by a society in which Islamic symbols of heroism and sacrifice were inherent national elements," explained Meir Hatina (Hatina 2008, p. 33). Palestinian suicide attacks became a religious ritual and their perpetrators were perceived as martyrs (*shuhada*').[9]

The second intifada known also as Al-Aqsa intifada, which broke out at the end of September 2000, after the visit of the then Israeli opposition leader, Ariel Sharon, to the Temple Mount, brought about an unprecedented wave of incitement and antisemitic manifestations in the Arab world and worldwide, including among Muslim communities in the West. It highlighted the religious dimension of the Arab–Israeli conflict, and blurred the lines between the nationalist and Islamist discourses. It was no surprise that a symbol such as the sacred Islamic site of al-Aqsa in Jerusalem had the capacity to spark off such an aggressive Muslim reaction.

Beside the popular demonstrations and the violence, the intifada brought in its wake a wave of radicalized anti-Israeli and antisemitic rhetoric. Friday sermons at mosques throughout the Arab world were dominated by angry denunciations of Israeli brutality and calls for *jihad*, which was presented as a religious duty incumbent on all Muslims. Hamas leaders described Jews as "enemies of humanity"

7　A day marking the confrontations between Israeli authorities and striking Israeli Arabs over land expropriation in 1976.
8　9 December 1987, was the first day of the uprisings in Gaza.
9　Recent studies on nationalism show that as a system for organizing groups, nationalism is a religion of blood sacrifice, since they revere martyrdom for the state and its symbols. See for example, (Marvin and Inge 1999).

and "monsters in the shape of human beings", and reiterated that "Israel is a foreign body, imposed by force and will be eliminated by force" (Webman 2003).

However, these calls to action remained unheeded. The Islamists who generally succeeded in inculcating their perception of the struggle against Israel and the Jews among more moderate and secularist Arab circles, failed in mobilizing them into an all-out war of *jihad*. A Lebanese journalist wondered to what extent these clerical calls, issued in the form of statements or sermons were made out of conviction, and to what extent they were merely designed to assuage public anger. Indeed, the public anger was mainly vented in demonstrations and a barrage of articles, caricatures, and TV programs invoking the blood libel, Nazi-era terminology and symbols, Holocaust denial, and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. References to the Islamic scriptures were more confined to Islamist media outlets and websites, with the depiction of al-Aqsa strangled by the Israeli occupation as one of the few religiously laden themes.

3. Constructing a New Islamic Antisemitic Discourse

The pseudo-theological polemics, which developed since the 1920s, served as a tool in the incitement to action against Zionism and the Jews. It created a language and a vocabulary and a reservoir of historical precedents to communicate messages, to interpret the present, and to draw encouragement from the historical Islamic heritage. Examples are abundant, and introduced in numerous works (e.g., Holtzman and Schlossberg 2008; Litvak 1998; Yadlin 1989, pp. 41–62). According to historian Boris Havel, the Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin Husayni was the first prominent Arab leader and cleric who based his anti-Jewish incitement on the early Islamic texts, but he also reportedly memorized the text of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and combined it in his speeches with other political and religious arguments, depending on the audience (Havel 2014. See also Achcar 2010, pp. 128–53; Küntzel 2007, pp. 31–34). Husayni interpreted Zionism as only the most recent of the supposed age-old Jewish hostility not only to the Palestinians or Arabs as modern national groups but also to the religion of Islam. His lasting accomplishment, according to historian Jeffrey Herf, was "to fuse secular Arab anti-Zionism with the Islamist and thus theologically inspired hatred of the Jews and Judaism" (Herf 2015). The propaganda he disseminated in Arabic through millions of leaflets and radio programs during World War II from Germany, where he found refuge in November 1941, was replete with Islamic anti-Jewish themes (Herf 2009; Küntzel 2007, pp. 34–43).

Aiming basically at undermining the Zionist claims over Palestine, and delegitimizing the state of Israel, historians, religious scholars, preachers, and journalists became obsessively preoccupied with the Jews, resulting in a vast body of scholarly and popular works on:

- Jewish history and its links to Palestine;
- The roots of contemporary Jews and their relation to Children of Israel;
- The alleged misconceptions and falsifications of the Torah by the Jews;
- The encounter between Muslims and Jews in the early days of Islam, according to the Qur'an and Islamic tradition;
- The age-old Jewish hostility towards Islam and Muslims;
- The Torah and the Talmud as the sources of Jewish mentality;
- The Jews' inherent evil traits and behavior.

This portrayal of the Jews led to the inevitable conclusion, which is part and parcel of the Islamists' ideology that the conflict between the Jews and Muslims is irreconcilable and the destruction of Israel is not only destined according to the Qur'an but also imperative in order to save humanity and civilization (Webman forthcoming). Jews were depicted as meek, coward and doomed to misery and humiliation,[10] on the one hand, and as warmongers and traitors, who betrayed their prophets and even killed

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[10] ʿAli Muhammad Hasan, Letter to the editor, *al-Risala*, 15 October 1945, p. 1132.

them,[11] on the other hand. They are stubborn, corrupt, and arrogant, as they consider themselves the "Chosen People", looking condescendingly and hatefully at other peoples (Al-Jayyar 1947, pp. 78–80). They were violators of agreements, blood-suckers, "descendants of apes and pigs" (based on several Qur'anic verses which state that some Jews were turned into apes and pigs by God, as a punishment for violating the Sabbath), disseminators of corruption on earth and "enemies of God and humanity" (Litvak 1998, pp. 150–52; Webman 1994, pp. 1–16; Milson 2004).

The polemics against the Jews and the Children of Israel in the Qur'an "serves as a basis for the negative reconstruction of the Jewish character", and provides "an explanation for the Zionist successes, the offence in Palestine, and the political and economic Jewish domination in other parts of the world" (Taji-Farouki 1998, p. 15). The Jews' characteristics have remained constant since they were described in the Qur'an. "The Jew is unrepentant in his war against Muhammad, and whether cooperating with infidels against the Prophet's mission, or whether clothed in the rags of a miser engaged in usury, or whether in an Israeli officer's uniform, he has not changed and will not change. He will always be a swindler, a miser, despicable, and arrogant, a person who subverts justice, morality and humanity" (Abraham 1974, p. 135).

The Islamic organs were a central platform for the polemics against the Jews. Hamas's mouthpiece *Filastin al-Muslima*, Hizballah's *al-'Ahd* (replaced by *al-'Ahd al-Intiqad*) Jordanian weekly *al-Sabil* and defunct Egyptian bi-weekly *al-Sha'b* during the 1990s dealt excessively with the so-called cultural-religious assault—the alleged endeavor of Jews to destroy religions and moral values. *Filastin al-Muslima* published, for example, a 10-parts article entitled "This is how the Prophet spoke of the Jews", dwelling on the Jews' hostility to Islam since Muhammad's days, their evil behavior, the wrath of God on them, the punishments inflicted on them, and the danger they pose.[12] In another series of articles analyzing the encounter of Muhammad with the Jews of Medina, the author Muhsin 'Abd al-Hamid, a Baghdad University professor, repeated the claims that they had betrayed him, rejected him, and plotted against him and against the new religion. The Prophet warned in the Qur'an that the "Jews are the most hostile to the believers", although he was lenient towards them since they were considered the People of the Book.[13]

The Islamist media outlets did not resort only to Islamic sources to portray Jewish evil intention and deeds. In many cases, they combined religious and national arguments or Islamic Judeophobia with imported Western antisemitic tropes. An example of such a combination was a two-part article on Jewish corruption, entitled "This is how the Jews Planned to Spread Corruption in the Muslim World; the Jews and Sexual Permissiveness".[14] 'Abd al-Hamid purported to prove that Jews exploited the femininity of women throughout their history as a means to gain dominance and serve their interests. As proof, he cited the case of Queen Esther, who was used as a ploy by her uncle to reach power and get rid of the Jews' enemies. In more modern times, he claimed, the Jews exploited the crucial historical moment of transformation from feudalism to capitalism to dominate the industrial movement and then carefully planned how to drive the Christians away from their religion and damage their moral values. Worship of gold substituted the worship of God. New non-religious social organizations based on man's bestiality were set up. This led to the final separation of religion from society and the complete domination of the Jews over modern civilization. Under the banner of equal rights and progress, Jewish conspiracies, aimed at demolishing man's civility, created the female revolution. The new state of permissibility and feminine challenge to man were manifested in various ways, brought about the dissemination of diseases and shattered family life in the West. The Jews were behind all the

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[11] 'Ali Muhammad Hasan, "The story of the Children of Israel in the venerable Qur'an," *al-Risala*, 19 November 1945, pp. 1265–66.

[12] Ibrahim al-'Ali, "This is how the Prophet spoke of the Jews: The Early Enmity of the Jews to Islam," *Filastin al-Muslima*, January–October 1996.

[13] Muhsin 'Abd al-Hamid, "The Position of Judaism towards Islam and the Muslims," *Filastin al-Muslima*, March–May 1996.

[14] Muhsin 'Abd al-Hamid, "This is how the Jews Planned to Spread Corruption in the Muslim World; the Jews and Sexual Permissiveness," *Filastin al-Muslima*, June–July 1995.

revolutions to achieve full political, economic, and social domination. Now the planning centers of international Judaism and the Masonic societies were targeting Muslim women in an attempt to shake the moral values of Muslim society, as they did in the West.

This kind of polemics found in scholarly works as well as in newspapers, television channels and other media outlets differs from the traditional Islamic polemics, as Holtzman and Schlossberg show in their study:

- It is a one-sided polemic. The author presents his arguments but those do not receive any serious response and they are not debated;
- It is found in the popular print media, whereas in the past it was a formal genre written in the form of chapters of books against various religions;
- It is conducted by politicians, publicists, and representatives of Islamic movements, whereas in the past the debaters were primarily members of the religious establishment, as well as philosophers and intellectuals;
- Contemporary debaters challenge, attack, cite, and quote the Talmud, whereas in the past Muslim polemicists attacked, cited and quoted the Old Testament scriptures;
- The modern polemic is not exclusively religious, but includes antisemitic themes adopted from the Western classical and racist vocabulary;
- Modern religious polemics generally serves political purposes and uses holy Muslim scriptures to negate the "Other" rather than proving the superiority of the Islamic religion. (Holtzman and Schlossberg 2008, pp. 14–15).

Moreover, it seems that the modern polemics does not shy from inventing tradition and defying Islamic scriptures. The designation of Palestine as a religious endowment, *waqf*, is a modern invention, aimed at preventing any concession of any part of the land in any future agreement with Israel. Similarly, *jihad* was traditionally perceived as an obligation upon Muslims (*fard kifaya*) from which the majority are relieved, but *jihad* in Palestine turned into a personal duty incumbent on every Muslim (*fard 'ayn*). The denial of Jewish roots also contradicts Islamic scriptures. It gradually developed in response to the establishment of the state of Israel. Early attempts to challenge Zionists' claims to Palestine by Muslim scholars as Gribetz shows, did not deny Jewish historical roots and link to Jerusalem. Rashid Rida opposed Zionism because it threatened to dislodge Muslims and Christians from Palestine and to replace the al-Aqsa Mosque with a new Jewish temple. He developed a strong antipathy towards Zionism which verged on antisemitism, but he could not dismiss revelation. Therefore, he drew from the Qur'anic texts the unfavorable references to portray them as hypocritical, treacherous, and hostile to Muslims. He also resorted to more contemporary themes, accusing them of responsibility for all subversive movements and ideologies which led to the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, adopting the spirit and the letter of the Protocols without explicitly naming them (Gribetz 2014, pp. 168–69; Haim 1984, p. 49).

Muslim scholars and intellectuals were aware of the discrepancy between the claim that today's Jews are not the descendants of the Children of Israel, and the insistence on the inherent negative traits of the Jews, and addressed it as Rivka Yadlin showed in her study. The way to support the notion of continuity in character and still deny the Jews' ancestral connection to the Bible's Israelites is to explain the continuity in behavioral terms. "One might legitimately view the character of the Jews as a fixed phenomenon since their behavior today fits their description in the Qur'an. Jewish behavior, although its methods and means may change, remains the same in contemporary and ancient history. Continuity, therefore, is not biological but rather ideational and moral" (Yadlin 1989, p. 47).

4. Conclusions

Just before finalizing this article, by the end of February 2019, another crisis developed around the Temple Mount. A new mosque opened for prayer in the Bab al-Rahma (the Gate of Mercy) building which had been closed for 16 years, in defiance of the delicate status quo, leading to clashes

between Israeli police and Palestinian leaders and activists, and threatening to fuel yet another bloody confrontation. The *waqf* leadership of the Haram al-Sharif issued calls to Palestinians to attend the Friday prayers en masse, ignoring Israeli warnings.[15] Concomitantly, a group of Palestinian Islamic scholars issued a *fatwa* on 3 March 2019, warning against any form of normalization with the 'Zionist entity.' This was done to thwart the prospective US American plan, known as the "Deal of the Century", and to prevent Arabs from establishing normal relations with Israel. "Normalization and reconciliation mean empowerment of Jews over the land of the Muslims, surrender to the infidels and loss of religion and Islamic lands", and contradict the Qur'an, they warned.[16] It seems that the same methods and tools persist since the first encounters between Jews and Arabs in the 1920s.

In their discussion of the role of religion in interstate or interethnic conflicts worldwide, Hillel Frisch and Shmuel Sandler argue that however infused those conflicts are with religious substance, they remain essentially national or state-centered. "While religion expresses prominent primordial values, the points of contention continue to be territorially centered and the dominant discourse, especially in the international arena, is usually more nationalist or statist than religious and theocratic." Referring to al-Aqsa intifada, Frisch and Sandler reinforce the findings of this work, showing "that even though religious claims and symbols were important on both sides, they were consistently eclipsed by nationalist or realist discourses, claims, and symbols" (Frisch and Sandler 2004, p. 77). Basically, this is true also as to the antisemitic themes. Despite the disseminated Judeophobic content, the Christian and Western antisemitic themes in Arab discourse are more prominent due to their universality, pervasiveness, and persistence. Even the antisemitic nature of many Islamic radical movements, asserted Olivier Roy, "has more to do with a Western and secular antisemitism than with the theological anti-Judaism of Islam ... Radical Muslims (and many moderate conservatives or even left-wing Arab secularists) quote the Protocols of the Elders of Zion or Holocaust-denial European authors such as Irving and Garaudy more than medieval Muslim theologians" (Roy 2004, p. 49).

An unpublished research on radical Islam held in the framework of a project on "Religious Actors in Conflict Areas", examined the British Muslim Brotherhood to establish to what extent radical Islam's animosity to Israel derived from classic Islam, an indigenous component, and what had been the role of other, modern and exogenous, components. Using the method of computerized text mining to survey 20,000 articles in the Muslim Brotherhood website *ikhwanweb.com*, the study discovered that Jews and Israel had been first and foremost associated with the Arab–Israeli conflict—42% of the occurrences; followed by modern European antisemitism—33%; and classical Islam comes only in the third place—less than 25%. An indigenous factor, namely the classic heritage contributes less than European antisemitism and that is in the discourse of an Islamist movement. The finding suggests that there is a wide gap, perhaps unconscious, between ideology and practice, and correlates with the conclusion that the most common antisemitic themes even among Islamists are not necessarily those based on Islamic sources (Sivan and Pardo 2012).

Very little has changed in the repertoire and content of Arab antisemitism since its early manifestations. However, in view of the growing aversion towards Islamism in Arab societies, and regional and global strategic changes, the monolithic discourse which typified the period from 1967 to the 21st century has been cracked, and perhaps it is returning to the more diversified attitudes towards the Jews in earlier periods.

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15   *Haaretz*, 19, 25, 27 February, 4–8, 13, 17 March 2019.
16   Khaled Abu Toameh, "Palestinians: No Peace or Reconciliation with the 'Infidels'," *Gatestone*, 4 March 2019, accessed 5 March 2019, at https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/13827/palestinians-peace-infidels.

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