
Interview: Hanna Siniora

'Israel wants Palestinians forced out of their homeland'

Hanna Siniora is the editor of the Jerusalem Arabic daily Al Fajr. The interview was conducted by telephone on Oct. 20 by Joseph Brewda.

EIR: Mr. Siniora, I believe you were an eyewitness to some of the events leading up to the massacre of at least 20 Palestinians near the grounds of the Al Aqsa Mosque on Oct. 8. Could you describe the situation that day in Jerusalem, and what really occurred?

Siniora: Oct. 8, 1990 began on a note of tension, as Israeli border police manned army roadblocks preventing access to East Jerusalem from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Since the dawn prayers, Palestinians from Arab East Jerusalem were converging toward al-Haram al-Sharif [the Noble Sanctuary] holding Islam's third holiest shrine, the Al Aqsa Mosque, as well as the Golden Dome of the Rock mosque. Forty-eight hours earlier, Gershom Solomon and his fanatic followers, the Temple Mount Faithful, had distributed notices that on Monday, Oct. 8, under the protection of the Israeli police, they were going to enter the Al Aqsa compound, and lay the foundation of the Third Temple. The Israeli authorities, who have both regular police and border police contingents, were aware of the heightened tension. Many high school children were detained and driven away from the mosque in buses. At 10:50 a.m., the border police squad present on the grounds of the Noble Sanctuary fired at Palestinian worshippers, and several people were wounded and killed. As the border policemen withdrew toward Moghrabi Gate near the Jewish Western wall [the Wailing Wall], inflamed young Palestinians, enraged with the indiscriminate shooting, began throwing a hail of stones at them. Some of these stones went over toward the Western wall. Fifteen minutes earlier, Israeli policemen were seen evacuating Succoth worshippers from the vicinity of the Western wall.

Within 15 minutes, with additional troops coming into the compound in a pincer movement from both sides, shooting started again, aided by helicopters firing tear gas canisters. This resulted in 20 Palestinians killed and several hundred wounded, on Black Monday.

EIR: Gershom Solomon, the leader of the Temple Mount Faithful that attempted to lay a cornerstone for a Third Temple at the mosque, appears to be an agent provocateur, judging by his actions. Our magazine has established that many of the other key leaders in the project to rebuild the temple are agents of the Israeli secret police and funded by the Israeli government. What is your view of this charge, and what do you believe the actual objectives of these Jewish fundamentalists are?

Siniora: Gershom Solomon, previously of the Likud, and since 1982 designated to lead this group of religious zealots, is working within the broad outlines of a plan backed by those who advocate a "Greater Israel." Solomon is being used to change the facts, the situation surrounding the 1,400-year-old religious shrine, the al-Haram al-Sharif. He is also being used by the Israeli government to dodge their responsibility for a sensitive issue that affects the whole Muslim world. The government of Israel, led by the Likud and the more extreme parties in the present coalition, has adopted a policy of demographic change both in East Jerusalem and the Occupied Territories. They have nixed all attempts at a political settlement, and their intentions are voiced in declarations by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Housing Minister Ariel Sharon, Deputy Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Foreign Minister David Levy: more settlements, more land confiscation, and no political settlement. Massacres, iron-fist policies, collective punishment, curfews, administrative detention, and religious fanaticism are all means to achieve the same goal: Uproot the Palestinians from their homeland.

EIR: Last spring, one week before Easter, a co-thinker group of the Temple Mount Faithful illegally occupied the Greek Orthodox hospice adjacent to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, precipitating a riot in which the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem was tear-gassed. There have been persistent efforts by such groups to illegally occupy or purchase land in the Christian Quarter of the city as well as in the Muslim Quarter. There are charges that certain Israeli circles would like to use such violence to force both Muslims and Christians out of Jerusalem, or otherwise have the Israeli

state take charge of all holy places in the city, regardless of denomination.

Siniora: Creating a new situation in the Muslim as well as the Christian Quarters of the old city of Jerusalem, as well as ringing Arab East Jerusalem with new settlements to suffocate it and prevent suburban expansion and development for Palestinian young couples, is synonymous with the policy of land confiscation in the Occupied Territories and ringing Palestinian populous centers with Israeli settlements such as Hebron and Bethlehem. Already over 52% of the West Bank and 40% of the Gaza Strip have been confiscated to create a new situation, fresh obstacles to peace, and, in Likud terminology, an irreversible process of demographic change that will prevent any political settlement.

The case of the Al Aqsa massacre, and the takeover of the Greek Orthodox St. John's hospice are recent vivid examples of a policy in implementation. Since the first Likud government in 1977, this policy is obvious. Recent developments confirm the intention to use all means, including variations on the "Der Yassin" massacre of 1948 carried out by the Stern and Lehi gangs of Shamir and Begin, to acquire the land without the people.

EIR: There continue to be reports that various armed sects, such as the West Bank "settlers movements," the Temple Mount fanatics, and the Kach movement run by Rabbi Meir Kahane, are planning new atrocities, with government backing, in the near future.

Siniora: The Lifta gang, the Jewish terrorist underground, and the Kach movement of Rabbi Kahane used killings, shootings, and all sorts of intimidation in order to realize their objective to force people from their homes. I wouldn't be surprised if fresh massacres, large and small, would occur in the immediate future by these vigilante groups, with the tacit undeclared support of the people in power. If we examine closely the party platforms of the various parties in the present government, we can immediately identify at least three, besides the Likud, which call for mass deportation and transfer of Palestinians from their homeland: Tehiya, the party of Minister of Science and Technology Yuval Ne'eman; Tsomet, the party of Rafael Eytan, the present agriculture minister; and the Moledet party, headed by the advocate of wholesale transfer of Palestinians, retired Gen. Rahavam Zeevi. A government of such composition is not going to put obstacles in front of settler vigilante groups, if its own police is allowed to commit massacres, and if the Israeli government is ready to defy the U.N. Security Council to prevent the truth from surfacing.

EIR: The Israeli government has claimed that the massacre was provoked by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's alleged influence over Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. There are those who have a different evaluation. They believe that Israel would like to create the conditions favorable for a

strike into Jordan, in the case that the U.S. does go to war with Iraq. There have been reports of a longstanding Israeli plan to overthrow King Hussein of Jordan. Under this Israeli plan, the "Palestinian problem" would finally be "solved" by claiming that "Jordan is Palestine," and that there is no longer any need of discussion of creating a Palestinian state. The West Bank would be "free" of Palestinians, and formally annexed to Israel. It would be settled by Soviet Jewish immigrants. How do you think that the events of last week may relate to the Gulf crisis?

Siniora: Various theories are being bandied around by various conflicting parties. Shamir, to whitewash and make profit off the massacre, tried to imply that the Palestinians intentionally attacked Israeli worshippers at the Wailing Wall, exactly like he and Begin had used the communist threat in the past to prevent the U.S. and Western governments from playing an unbiased role. In 23 years of occupation, Palestinians always respected Jewish holy places, and will always do so. On the contrary, Palestinian holy places, both Christian and Muslim, were frequently desecrated under Israeli occupation, the Koran torn, mosques' and churches' sanctity defiled, churches in Israel proper burned down, and Muslim cemeteries bulldozed.

Shamir, using the old communist analogy, is trying to use Saddam Hussein to drive a wedge against the legitimate Palestinian aspirations of freedom, democracy, and independence by accusing Palestinians of the Monday incident. The true causes are simple: Israel, while the world is focused on the Gulf crisis, wants to force Palestinians out of their homeland. Other Israeli reasons include the destruction of Iraqi military potential by provoking a war. The massacre might have forced America to jump the gun, before its alliance were to fall apart, and fire the first shot. It might have forced the hand of Iraqi leaders to go to war, and fire the first shot at Israel, which would have led to all hell breaking loose. Iraq and the United States refused to be prodded, but other incidents might eventually bring a war that the present Israeli government leaders believe to be in their advantage in implementing a "Greater Israel" and preventing the emergence of the Palestinian state.

EIR: What is your view of the U.N. resolution that condemned Israel, while failing to provide for protection of West Bank Palestinians, as the Palestine Liberation Organization had demanded?

Siniora: Palestinians are not satisfied with condemnations of massacres and violations of human rights. They look to the Security Council to adopt measures that will protect their lives, which are in constant danger and under constant threat. Today, the West stands guilty of the accusation that it has double standards, and favors oil interests over the Palestinian blood that is being spilled continuously. Sanctions have to be taken against those who stand in the way of international legitimacy and legality.