



THE MYTH OF THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

Extravagance in Brazil and
the race for Jerusalem

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Title: The myth of the Temple of Solomon,
extravagance in Brazil and the race for Jerusalem

Cover photo: The Temple of Solomon at the 40th anniversary
of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, in São Paulo,
Brazil, 7 July, 2017 [Alexandre Carvalho/A2img]

Published: December 2022.

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THE MYTH OF THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

Extravagance in Brazil and the race for Jerusalem

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Al-Aqsa Mosque stands at the heart of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and has done for over 1,300 years. Today it has world heritage landmark status. Despite this, Israeli excavations, raids and military incursions have threatened the very foundations and preservation of such a potent symbol of Jerusalem.

What has Al-Aqsa to do with the colonial aggression by the illegal occupiers of Palestinian land? Why do they want to recreate the Biblical Temple of Solomon? And how did such ideas reach Brazil, with praise for the oppressive symbols of the Zionist State of Israel at the expense of the age-old Islamic monuments?



Israeli flag in front of the Dome of the Rock, within the Noble Sanctuary of Al-Aqsa in the Old City of Jerusalem, 24 August, 2020
[Ahmad Gharabli/AFP via Getty Images]

Political and religious power in Brazil

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God inaugurated São Paulo's "Temple of Solomon" in 2014 with gospel singing and the national anthems of Brazil and Israel. Since its very first service, expressions of faith and Zionist political affinities have merged into one. Meanwhile, the much-praised State of Israel occupies more and more land in Palestine, kills its people, and tries to ethnically cleanse the indigenous people from their homes in the Holy Land.



Temple of Solomon, in São Paulo, Brazil [IURD/Handout]

The building of São Paulo's Temple of Solomon was an initiative by Bishop Edir Macedo, a televangelist and founder of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. In charge of the massive wealth spent on the venture, Macedo decided to establish a new headquarters for his cult, mirroring the Biblical description of the ancient temple in the Kingdom of Solomon between 970 and 930 BC.

Despite there being no archaeological trace of its existence at that time in history, the fundamentalist observance of the religious text about the first Jewish temple relies mainly on faith, both Jewish and Christian, as the place that sheltered the equally mythological Ark of the Covenant.



Scale model of the “Temple of Herod”, or the “Second Temple of Solomon”
(c. 1st century AD) in Jerusalem, at the Israel Museum
[Wikimedia/ Commons]

However, the rebuilding of the temple is not a mere religious matter. In Brazil, evangelical preachers have an increasing degree of political and economic power, with millions of followers in a traditionally Roman Catholic country. In Palestine, the myth has acquired a political purpose in the name of Israel’s occupation and Judaisation schemes in Jerusalem, to the detriment of Christians and Muslims alike.

Has there ever been a Temple of Solomon?



Speculum Humanae Salvationis, engraving [Bible Historiale/Public Domain]

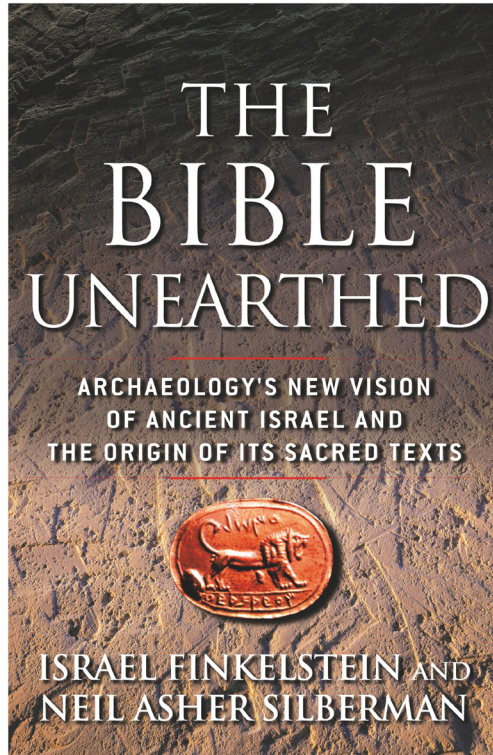
According to the Bible, the temple built three millennia ago lasted over four centuries until Babylonian conquerors destroyed the structure in 587 BC. It would be difficult for it not to have left archaeological traces in the area, especially given the monumental opulence that the religious scripture describes.



Mythological depiction of the Temple of Solomon
[Behance/Reproduction/Facebook]

The structure is alleged to have been 29 metres long and 10 metres wide. According to myth, Solomon used pure gold to cover the inner sanctuary, where a pair of nine-metre high cherubim guarded the Ark of the Covenant. According to Chronicles 3:7, “He overlaid the ceiling beams, door-frames walls, and doors of the temple with gold, and carved cherubim on the walls.”

In 2001, Israel Finkelstein, the head of the Archaeological Institute at Tel Aviv University, told Bible scholars that he contested the sacred accounts with scientific findings. His book *The Bible Unearthed* confirmed that sweeping excavations did not find any trace of the sizeable building in the area or even of the Kingdom of Solomon itself in Jerusalem. The ground-breaking work also declared that the mythical descriptions of the temple are inconsistent with the material findings.



In *Deconstructing the Walls of Jericho*, Israeli archaeologist Ziv Herzog talks about the temple as a religious legend intending to convey Jewish glory, with no connection whatsoever to the conditions of the era.

In 70 AD, the Romans destroyed a second Jewish temple, which had apparently been appropriated and expanded by Herod, and from which Jesus expelled the money changers. Of this structure there only remains a wall, usually called the Western or Wailing Wall, revered as sacred by most Jews.

In almost two thousand years – from the fall of the second temple to the 19th century – there was never any serious effort or intention to find proof of the existence of the mythical Temple of Solomon.

The political obsession to destroy Al-Aqsa Mosque

According to Shlomo Sand, an Israeli scholar at Tel Aviv University and author of *The Invention of the Jewish People*, religion can never be a source of historical rights.

However, that changed in the early 20th century.

The Zionist movement was founded by the Hungarian journalist Theodor Herzl in 1896 with the objective of creating an exclusively Jewish state somewhere. Palestine became the target for the movement later. To that end, the political movement relied on faith, claiming religio-ethnic rights over Palestine and Jerusalem. The Zionist motto was: “A land without a people for a people without a land” which was demonstrably untruthful given the presence of the Palestinians in Palestine. At that time, Palestine had 25 people per square kilometre. In comparison, Brazil, for example, had a population density of no more than four people per square kilometre according to 1922 data gathered by the British and Brazilian censuses.



Model of the Temple of Solomon at the History Museum of Hamburg, Germany [CC BY-SA 3.0]

In the early 1900s, under the influence of the European Zionist movement, a few Western newspapers began to push the idea of “rebuilding” the Temple of Solomon. In 1917, the Balfour Declaration – a letter from the British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour pledging support for a Jewish “national home” in Palestine – paved the political way forward to impose a colonial-settler entity in Palestine: the Zionist state of Israel.

In 1948, Zionist militias expelled over 800,000 Palestinians from their homes in the ethnic cleansing known as the Nakba, the catastrophe. The occupation, expropriation and expulsion process is ongoing; the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people continues to this day. The temple reconstruction campaign has, over time, gained momentum, media prominence, models and visitor centres, and political support.



Mythological depiction of the Temple of Solomon
[Wikimedia Commons]

Zionist supporters envisaged the project in the Noble Sanctuary of Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, claiming that the temple remains are under the foundations of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the rest of the Islamic complex. The proposal to remove the mosque is an obsession for radical Zionists, colonial settlers and their supporters.



Aerial view of Al-Aqsa Mosque [Wikimedia Commons]

Attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem

Ever since the Nakba, Al-Aqsa Mosque and its sanctuary – the third most sacred place in the Islamic faith and the spiritual heart of Palestinian life – has suffered from incursions (often armed), assaults and threats. In 1967, after the war started by Israel to take control of what remained of historic Palestine, the Zionist military regime took over the entire city of Jerusalem.



The fire at Al-Aqsa Mosque caused by an arsonist attack
by Denis Michael Rohan, 21 August, 1969 [Wikipedia]

In 1969, an Australian Christian Zionist started a fire in Al-Aqsa Mosque. The flames spread unchallenged, with evident negligence from the occupation authorities in terms of firefighting; reports emerged of collusion with the arsonist. Desperate citizens fighting the fire found ineffectual extinguishers and no water supply to the mosque. Israeli soldiers also blocked help forthcoming from neighbouring villages and towns, as well as further afield from Nablus, Ramallah, Al-Bireh, Bethlehem, Hebron (Al-Khalil), Jenin and Tulkarem. Residents fought the fire with water buckets, carried by hand until the late arrival of the firefighters.

Most countries denounced the arson attack. The UN Security Council approved Resolution 271 on 15 September, 1969, describing the fire as a criminal act committed under the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem. Ac-

According to the document, the arson was an “act of sacrilege in one of the most venerated shrines of mankind”. The UN body asked Israel to end immediately every “measure and action affecting the status of Jerusalem.”

Al-Aqsa survived that and further aggression. Nevertheless, the Palestinian people still report daily violations against Muslim and Christian symbols in what is seen as a deliberate attempt to erase the Arab identity of Jerusalem and Judaise the city. This is an inherent part of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

The illegal push over Jerusalem

In 2016, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee adopted a resolution about the legal status of Jerusalem’s Old City. The emphasis on its Islamic roots angered Israeli politicians. The Zionist entity took control of Jerusalem in 1967. In 1980, it drafted a law claiming sovereignty and officially annexing East Jerusalem. The UN and many countries consider the measure illegal, as indeed it is under international law.

In 2018, Tel Aviv proclaimed another “Basic Law” declaring the Zionist State to be exclusively Jewish, in blatant discrimination against non-Jews who make up at least 20 per cent of the population. The siege, the persecution and the crimes committed against the Palestinian people have resulted in leading human rights organisations — B’Tselem, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International — accusing Israel of the crime of apartheid — akin to a crime against humanity — and reporting the violations to an ongoing inquiry at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Time is running for Israel and its crimes, but the occupation authorities keep pushing the Judaisation of Jerusalem, intending to create a fait accompli to present to the world. A handful of states have moved their embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, signalling support for the

Judaisation agenda. More than a few — including Brazil — suffer from increasing pressure and lobbying to transfer their embassies. Foreign visitors and pilgrims sign their support for the temple “reconstruction” project almost daily.

In Brazil, the replica Temple of Solomon – a la Macedo – presents the likely visage of a new place of worship in occupied Jerusalem. Yet, a real building would deliberately destroy and bury the historical structure of Islamic Al-Aqsa.

Extravagance in Brazil

The new Universal Church’s headquarters in São Paulo invokes the Biblical description of the ancient shrine of King Solomon. The project tries to bring the Zionist narrative to Brazil, pushing to replace a world heritage site with Jewish symbols. In occupied Palestine, the project faces unrelenting resistance. The Brazilian enterprise is a flashy and costly tribute: Macedo’s temple.

The imposing complex is comprised of buildings and gardens in a massive area; it showboats 56-metre high columns towering over the roofs of the historic district of Bras in São Paulo. According to a 2014 report by *Veja Magazine*, the government was supposed to reserve the four-block area for 744 houses. The housing project remained on paper; state officials preferred to sell the property to the wealthy evangelical empire.

The unorthodox architecture explores Jewish elements adapted for Macedo’s neo-charismatic aesthetic and its “prosperity theology”, a set of fundamentalist ideas increasingly influential in Brazilian life and the political landscape. At the opening ceremony, Macedo dressed as a rabbi, appropriating symbols used exclusively by Jewish preachers after intensive study of the Torah.

Celebration, allegories, and symbols



Opening ceremony of São Paulo's Temple of Solomon [IURD/Handout]

Macedo also dressed local heralds in garments allegedly reminiscent of Solomon's time, which was almost a thousand years before Christ. The religious leader ordered the builders to use massive amounts of gold paint to mimic the stone, intending to recreate the temple's wealth according to scripture. Such components gave São Paulo's evangelical sanctuary a simulacrum role, aiming to provide visitors and customers with a bonding experience with Biblical times.

The televangelist requested twelve centenary olive trees – a symbol of rural life in Palestine – imported from Uruguay. Macedo intended to simulate Jerusalem's Mount of Olives, a preaching spot for Jesus Christ and his disciples, where the Roman soldiers captured the Prophet after his betrayal by Judas.

With such a spiritual varnish and glorious scenography, the evangelical leader addressed invited figures, including the then-president of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, and her Vice President and successor, Michel Temer. The building's impact in the Brazilian landscape represents a bold venture by the Christian Zionists.

Pilgrimage to Israel and legal “miracles”

The building took four years of planning, according to *Record TV*, the national network belonging to televangelist Macedo. The preacher himself visited Israel to establish the project.

Macedo's biographical film, *Nothing to Lose*, premiered in March 2018. It tells the story of his pilgrimage to Mount Sinai in Egypt. At that time, several legal issues were hot on his heels, including accusations of charlatanism and money laundering. According to Macedo, he travelled to Israel in search of spiritual support. Immediately thereafter, the judicial system shelved successive cases against the preacher – it was a miracle! – because of an alleged lack of evidence. The system then targeted Macedo's enemies as the evangelical leader continued to complain of persecution, including some at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church.

Four years of construction followed the planning stage. The project mobilised 1,500 workers daily at a plot 126 metres wide and 104 metres long; the ostentatious structure covered 13,000 square metres and was 56 metres high. The nave has an impressive seating capacity of 10,000 in chairs imported from Spain.

The complex accommodates a museum for the Twelve Tribes of Israel, giant TV screens and parking space for 2,000 cars, 240 motorcycles and 200 buses. Preachers may rest in 60 apartments within the complex and worshippers may enjoy the comfort of 335 luxurious washrooms. There are 36 rooms for Bible classes accommodating 1,300 children. Television

and radio studios, plus an auditorium for 500 people, complete the scene. The total cost was declared to be R\$685 million, money allegedly harvested from worshippers' donations. The amount would and should have been higher if the state had levied taxes on the religious empire.



Then vice-president of Brazil Michel Temer, at the opening ceremony of São Paulo's Temple of Solomon, 1 August, 2014 [Ascom]

Palestinian stones and a forgiving tax regime

According to a timely report by *Veja São Paulo*, the church bought 40 properties in Bras to provide the land for the project. These plots used to generate real estate taxes for City Hall of R\$3m per annum. The Universal Church, however, remains exempt from paying tax. According to Wikipedia, 24 properties were acquired for the project. The Federal Senate of Brazil ratified the tax-free status on 17 February, 2022, approving a constitutional amendment.

The construction required 17,000 truck trips to remove rubble and flatten the land. However, the responsible parties registered the project at São Paulo City Hall as a “renovation”, intending to cut the cost of the venture. After approving the registry, the mayor had to discharge the signing of official pending corruption investigations. Furthermore, the elaborate temple never paid taxes to import Israeli decorative stones for the intricate façade. To build the sanctuary in São Paulo in the image and likeness of a pre-Christian Jerusalem, the constructors commissioned 39,000 metres of rocks extracted from Hebron (Al-Khalil) in the occupied West Bank. The stonework is typically Arab.

According to Hilmi Salem, a researcher at Bethlehem’s Institute of Sustainable Development, the geological grouping of these rocks is the backbone of the Palestinian mountains, known widely as “Jerusalem Stone”, “Holy Land Stone” or “Palestinian Stone”. Brazilian customs authorities imposed a surcharge of R\$85,000, but the Universal Church appealed, claiming that the stones would be sacred; the surcharge was not paid.

Eight years after the temple’s inauguration in São Paulo, suspicions emerged over money donated for the project. Gilberto Nascimento – journalist and author of *The Kingdom: Edir Macedo’s Story and X-Ray of the Universal Church* – mentions a legal case in Angola against the evangelical church. According to the Angolan government, massive amounts of money left the country for Israel and Brazil, hidden in travellers’ bags and intended for the Brazilian Temple of Solomon.

The Universal Church also accused a preacher responsible for the construction work of stealing R\$30m from religious endowments. According to *Istoe Magazine* on 21 October, 2021, the suspect was charged with building another temple in Taguatinga, an administrative region in the Federal District of Brazil.

Ties with the occupation of Jerusalem

Neo-charismatic evangelical churches have grown in Brazil over the past few decades, gaining political muscle and representation in the central arena and promoting ties between Brazil and Israel.

Jair Bolsonaro won the presidential election in 2018 with support from evangelical communities, especially neo-charismatic congregations. Bolsonaro visited Israel the following year, signing the book next to the scale model of the reconstruction project of a new temple in Jerusalem. Bolsonaro's signature proved his support for the Zionist Judaisation scheme of Al-Aqsa Mosque, despite the violations of international law.



Flags of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God next to the Brazilian and Israeli flags on the perimeter of São Paulo's Temple of Solomon [Ana Clara Giovani/CC By 2.0]

Bolsonaro tried to move the Brazilian Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, following in the footsteps of his idol, the now former US President Donald Trump. However, the impact on agribusiness exports to the Arab world deterred Bolsonaro from going through with the plan.

Now, the Bras sanctuary is part and parcel of the São Paulo tourist landscape. Over 20 million worshippers have visited the temple as of 2021. The structure also intends to display the Universal Church's power and luxury as a reflection of "prosperity theology", a neo-charismatic doctrine according to which showing wealth – as some divine gift – is a duty for worshippers and preachers. From the beginning, the media fed the public with impressive imagery.

The Temple of Solomon challenges in size and visitor numbers the Roman Catholic landmarks in Brazil, including the Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida in São Paulo and the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro.

Regardless of building controversies or the issue of the existence or non-existence of the ancient Temple of Solomon, Macedo's project bonds with Israel, a colonial state still occupying the Holy City of Jerusalem through ethnic cleansing and apartheid against its indigenous people.

The Judaisation policies against Jerusalem

In 1948, the Zionist-inspired UN Partition Plan divided Jerusalem into two parts: an Israeli-usurped West and Jordanian-guarded East. The area houses several sacred sites for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Israel's 1960 Land Administration Law enforced the seizure by force of Palestinian land, especially that belonging to refugees and internally-displaced people. The Zionist state built illegal settlements on Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights. After the 1967

Arab-Israeli War, the Zionist regime took control of the entire city of Jerusalem, along with the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. In 1980, Israel annexed East Jerusalem. The international community and the UN condemned the annexations and expropriation steps, which remain illegal under international law.

Israel proclaims that Jerusalem is its “unified capital”. The UN Security Council, however, nullified the decision and the ensuing offensive over Al-Aqsa in Resolution 478.

Israel disregards the terms of the 1993 Oslo Accords, under which Jerusalem’s status depends on the peace process. The Zionist regime has enforced military raids, brutal persecution, home demolitions and the expulsion of the indigenous community with unwavering support from the United States.

In late September 2000, the then-spokesman for the right-wing opposition Ariel Sharon raided Al-Aqsa under the protection of heavily armed soldiers, pledging that the sanctuary would “remain under Israeli sovereignty”. The Palestinian people responded with the Second Intifada – the first uprising was between 1987 and 1993 – which lasted five long years.

Between 2005 and 2016, almost 6,000 illegal Jewish settlers raided Al-Aqsa. In 2016, the number jumped to more than 14,500; by 2018 it was 28,800.

The weaponisation of faith in the US, Brazil and Israel

Every national embassy or diplomatic mission to Israel should be in Tel Aviv. In 1995, however, the US Congress approved a proposal to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem; successive presidents stalled the idea. In 2017, the US and Israel announced that they were leaving the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), accusing the

respected body of being “anti-Israel”. Washington had already blocked US financial support for the organisation. In December 2017, Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Six months later, in May 2018, his administration moved the US Embassy to Jerusalem. The move was Trump’s election campaign promise to the evangelical lobby, which wanted the embassy to be moved to fulfil an alleged Biblical prophecy. “We changed the Israeli capital to Jerusalem,” said Trump during a rally in Wisconsin. “This is for the evangelicals.”

Trump intended the move to inspire other governments to do the same and transfer their embassies to Jerusalem. Only Guatemala followed suit. In September 2018, the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the closure of the Israeli mission in Asuncion, Paraguay, after the elected government announced the return of its embassy from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv.

As part of a systematic offensive to try to change the status of Palestinians refugees, the White House stopped US donations to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The Israeli mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat, took the opportunity to attack the international body, calling it “unnecessary” and threatening to expel it from the occupied city. The “logic” was that if there is no longer a UN agency for Palestine refugees, then there must be no more Palestine refugees left.

Bolsonaro’s cooperation

During the 2018 electoral campaign for president of Brazil, the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro pledged to follow Trump and move the Brazilian Embassy to Jerusalem. “Israel is a sovereign state, entitled to decide its capital,” said Bolsonaro. “We will follow their lead.” The occupation and illegal annexation of Jerusalem was overlooked when making what, on the face of it, looked like a reasonable statement. It was anything but.



Jair Bolsonaro and Edir Macedo during a visit to São Paulo's Temple of Solomon, 1 September, 2019 [Alan Santos/Handout]

Despite the everyday use of the word “sovereignty” regarding other countries, Bolsonaro developed a habit of saluting the US flag and including the Israeli flag in many of his rallies. His wife Michele wore a T-shirt emblazoned with an Israeli flag when voting in her husband's 2022 re-election bid on 30 October. Popular left-wing candidate Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva defeated the incumbent Bolsonaro to become the President-elect of Brazil.

Bolsonaro made his 2018 embassy move promise in order to mobilise support among evangelicals. The US and Brazil weaponised faith to promote far-right policies and politicians, a method adopted in Israel for many years. As president, Bolsonaro subverted Brazil's diplomatic approach, favouring Israeli interests over Palestinian rights. Officially, Brazil has always supported pro-Palestine international resolutions, even while keeping ties with Israel.



First lady Michele Bolsonaro casts her vote in the Brazilian elections with a T-shirt emblazoned with an Israeli flag, Rio de Janeiro, 30 October, 2022
[Reproduction/Facebook]

Bolsonaro had to backtrack from his campaign embassy vow under pressure from the Arab League and the Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce. They reminded him that Brazil is a major meat exporter to the Middle East and had a lot to lose if tensions arose with the Arab world over the embassy move. Instead, the Bolsonaro administration announced a new representative office in Jerusalem, but this still contradicted traditional Brazilian diplomacy.

In 2019, Said Abu Ali, assistant general secretary of the Arab League, issued a memorandum on the 50th anniversary of the arson attack against Al-Aqsa Mosque. "The occupying authorities still enforce plans to replace the Islamic identity of Jerusalem with a Jewish identity," warned Abu Ali, "systematically assaulting the Holy City and the sacred values of Muslims and Christians." According to the Arab League official, the Israeli schemes intend to "change the historical and legal status to divide Masjid Al-Haram [Al-Aqsa], with widespread support from the United States."



Israeli soldiers assault Palestinian worshippers in Al-Aqsa Mosque sanctuary, 11 August, 2019 [Faiz Abu Rmeleh/Anadolu Agency]

In January 2020, Trump revealed his “deal of the century”, focused on Israeli security and territory. The US president did not consult the Palestinian people or their nominal representatives when drafting his “deal”. Instead, he promoted a series of normalisation agreements between Arab countries and the Zionist entity, alienating the indigenous Palestinians from traditional allies. Trump and his acolytes named the normalisation push the “Abraham Accords” — another Biblical reference — and signed deals with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.



(Left to right): Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, US President Donald Trump, Foreign Minister of Bahrain Abdullatif Bin Rashid Al-Zayani, and Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates Abdullah Bin Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan during the signing ceremony of the Abraham Accords in the White House, Washington DC, 15 September, 2020 [Alex Wong/Getty Images]

Despite extensive and frequent reports about Israel's colonial aggression against the Palestinian people, including apartheid and ethnic cleansing, the normalisation deals fuelled the Zionist offensive against Jerusalem.

In 2020, *BBC News Arabic* revealed that Roman Abramovich, a Russian oligarch and then the owner of Britain's Chelsea Football Club, donated almost \$100 million to settler organisations, seeking to enforce a Judaisation scheme in Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa by expelling the Palestinians.

Israel's tactics to take over Jerusalem vary from bureaucratic, political and judicial measures to law enforcement, military action and the use of settler militias. The result is Arab-Palestinian anger and relentless resistance. In May 2021, Israel was trying to expel Palestinian citizens from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah, a neighbourhood in occupied Jerusalem. The Palestinian people took to the streets from Gaza to the West Bank to so-called Israeli territory, the Palestinian land captured through the ethnic cleansing process known as the Nakba in 1948.



Jewish settlers and soldiers raid Al-Aqsa sanctuary in Jerusalem, 26 September, 2022 [Islamic Waqf of Jerusalem/Anadolu Agency]

On 21 April, 2022, the Israeli police once again raided Al-Aqsa and its sanctuary, assaulting worshippers, including children, with typical brutality. The Palestinians protested; the Zionist assault resulted in some 50 people being wounded. In June, the Justice Ministry in Israel launched a procedural protocol on “title deeds” concerning areas surrounding the southern wall of Al-Aqsa, intending to seize the properties. Israel claimed to “reduce socioeconomic gaps”, an excuse to register the plots in the names of illegal settlers and evict the Palestinian residents.

Settler-colonial raids and assaults are ongoing. On 14 November this year, Israeli soldiers escorted a group of illegal settlers to Al-Aqsa through the Maghrebi Gate, reported the news website Arab48. Such incursions are frequent occurrences.



Palestinian women on the roof of Al-Aqsa Mosque defending the sanctuary from illegal settlers under military protection from the Israeli armed forces, Jerusalem, 2 July, 2019 [Faiz Abu Rmeleh/Anadolu Agency]

The Jordanian Department of Awqaf (Islamic Endowments), responsible for monitoring Jerusalem's sacred places, published a report warning that illegal settlers were performing provocative rites and excursions inside the Islamic complex and at the gates of Al-Aqsa Mosque. Eyewitness accounts noted racist anti-Arab chants and physical assaults against Palestinian worshippers.

The defence of Jerusalem inevitably mobilises unarmed Palestinian citizens against the military might of the Israeli occupation armed forces and the bigotry and zealotry of state-backed and protected Jewish settlers.

This is an asymmetric struggle, although you would never think so if you rely solely on the mainstream media for international news. It is a struggle between largely unarmed civilian Palestinians and one of the world's best equipped armies; indeed, a nuclear-armed force.

For Israel, the promise of the absolute eradication of Palestinians and the complete takeover of their land is a sure-fire way to win votes at election time. The more aggressive and extreme the right-wing agenda, the more chance it has to attract votes and legislative support to govern the occupation state. The November 2022 general election confirmed this hypothesis when former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned to power and put together a coalition with extreme far-right settler parties, including Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) and the Religious Zionism bloc.

The hate in Israeli eyes is evident in every pledge to suffocate the Palestinian presence in occupied Palestine with more and expanding illegal settlements. Within its unique structure or under its foundations, Al-Aqsa Mosque is at risk. Israel will, nonetheless, try to justify its demolition by the futile search for the ruins of the mythical Temple of Solomon.



Temple of Solomon in São Paulo, Brazil, 2 September, 2015 [Tainá Freitas]

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