

1 Khaled Mesh'al, one of the few long-time Hamas leaders still alive after Israel's successful targeted strikes of the past two years, delivered a video speech at a conference in Istanbul, Turkey's largest city, under the heading, "The Commitment to Jerusalem." Mesh'al said that the Al-Aqsa Flood War – the Islamic name for the war that began with the Oct. 7th massacre, signifying its goal of liberating Jerusalem from Israel – said that in fact, Jerusalem was a critical objective of the war. "Jerusalem was, and is," Mesh'al said, "the central arena for the awakening of the Muslim nation, the Ummah. The time has come to make a collective decision for the liberation of Jerusalem, for it is the gate to the liberation of all of Palestine."

2 With the onset of the Christian holidays, a modest growth in foreign tourism to eastern Jerusalem is being noted. Hotel occupancy rates are higher than at this time last year and the year before. Muslim hoteliers are making special "exceptions" to Quranic law and are serving alcohol and pig meat to their guests; "business is business." In Beit Jala - a Christian town in the Bethlehem Governorate of the Palestinian Authority – a small pig slaughterhouse supplies meat to hotels, not only locally but also in Jerusalem.

3 In Wadi Kadum, in Kfar Shilo'ach (Silwan), two kiosks not far from each other do a good business selling drugs. Reports say that Jews, too, frequent them for their drug needs.

This is essentially another expression of the "business first" approach in Arab Jerusalem; with some limitations and to a certain extent, both religion and nationhood make way, for the need to make a living. It doesn't seem to matter from which side of the law the living comes.

4 In the Jewish neighborhood of East Talpiot, also known as Armon HaNetziv (the Commissioner's Palace), extensive groundworks are taking place. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) is headquartered in the vicinity, with Israeli permission. However, the UN does not recognize Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem at all, and certainly not there. It is not clear who is carrying out the groundworks.



The works in Armon HaNetziv, as photographed from inside a car at the site.

5 The French Consulate in Jerusalem has begun a local PR campaign, purporting to show its importance to Jerusalem's Jewish citizens. This is clearly in response to increasing calls within Israel for the closure of the consulate, given that France does not recognize Israeli sovereignty in any part of Jerusalem. A video circulated by the consulate shows various activities taking place there, clearly directed at the Jewish population. MK Ohad Tal, of the Religious Zionism party, has accused the consulate of supporting terrorism and illegal Arab construction in the city.

WINDS OF CHANGE: WHICH WAY WILL ARAB JERUSALEM'S IDENTITY SAIL

Now that the war in Gaza has ended, at least temporarily, the entity known as "Arab Jerusalem" faces a major choice. On the one hand, it can continue to try to strengthen its Israeli identity (alongside the unique Jerusalem identity of the city's Arabs). Alternatively, it can cave to the authority of the PA or of Hamas, supported by Qatari and Turkish backwinds, and detach itself from its Israeli connections. Many Arabs fear that this would lead to deterioration and stagnation that characterize their Arab brethren in Judea and Samaria and in the areas around Jerusalem.

The following diagram shows the two options, where green depicts growth and progress, and red indicates violence and reversal. These are not Israeli evaluations, but rather issues of dispute and discussion very much on the table in the Arab public:

