

SOCIAL MEDIA REPORTS: POLICE ARE PREVENTING THE OBSERVANCE OF THE ITIKAF RITUAL AT THE TEMPLE MOUNT

1 The annual Islamic custom of Itikaf continues to be in the news this week. The custom requires Muslims to remain in a mosque, particularly atop the Temple Mount, for a full night or more during Ramadan. Social media in eastern Jerusalem claim that the police are preventing the fulfillment of the custom, by not enabling worshipers to remain on the Mount during the night hours. These accusations are groundless, however, in light of the agreements that were reached this year, as in previous years, that the Itikaf would be allowed only during the last ten days of the month; these ten days begin this coming Friday, March 21.

2 In any event, it is known that, despite the agreements, some worshipers have, in fact, remained overnight on the Mount this year. They stayed at the Al-Marwani mosque (Solomon's Stables), an underground vaulted prayer hall in the Al-Aqsa mosque compound. **This is another indication of the increasing erosion of the status of Jordan and the PA on the Temple Mount; it was these two entities that reached the agreement with Israel regarding Itikaf. It is increasingly evident that the agreement is not greatly respected and is ignored wherever possible.**

3 An unknown entity is apparently subsidizing hotel stays in eastern Jerusalem during Ramadan. A night in a hotel for a couple, including dinner and breakfast, costs only 250 NIS during this month.

4 Another possible subsidy, of as yet unknown extent, is for the Aftar meals on the Mount. (Devout Muslims fast during the days of Ramadan, and then break their fasts with this festive meal.) In the past, various Turkish associations and bodies openly distributed food on the Mount for the Aftar. This year, however, this phenomenon has not been observed, though there are still signs of subsidized meals - possibly via Israeli associations. The Turkish subsidy in the past was apparently also financed by Qatar, in accordance with cooperation agreements between the two countries regarding their activities in Jerusalem.



5 Latifa Abdel Latif, a social media personality of the extremist Burj Al-Lukluk association – an Islamist organization active in the Old City - has been arrested on the Temple Mount, on charges of incitement. She is also employed as a journalist by the Turkish media network TFT, and news of her arrest was reported widely in Turkey. Another reporter, Mahmad Doueck, was handed a restraining order preventing him from visiting the Temple Mount for two months.

It is not clear whether Latif's work in Burj Al-Lukluk, which receives Turkish funding, is directly connected with her work at TRT. In any event, this is further evidence of ties between an extremist Islamist group in Jerusalem and official Turkish bodies.



Latifa Abdel Latif during a court hearing on charges of incitement

6 On the backdrop of the renewal of the war in Gaza, the Hamas General Command has called on the residents of Jerusalem

to, finally, rise up against Israel. At the same time, Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lyon met with the man who fires the traditional Ramadan cannon (marking the beginning of the Aftar meal every evening) – and this meeting also aroused resentment. Accordingly, some calls have been heard in eastern Jerusalem for a general strike and shop-closings. However, these calls were negated by others because of Ramadan. Tik-Tok clips have been circulated, alluding to a need for disturbances in the city.

It appears that once again, the desire for routine day-to-day lives and normalization has overcome, at least temporarily, the calls for violence. In general, Arab Jerusalemites have shown that they want business and jobs more than active anti-Israeli politics. It should be noted that the calls for a strike came this time not on the backdrop of Temple Mount clashes – which are generally a catalyst for strike calls and disturbances – but rather because of the war in Gaza, which has generally not moved the Arab Jerusalemites very much.

7 Another indication that Jerusalemites want to integrate more with Israel than with the PA, and take full advantage of their Israeli ties, is the fact that police are being increasingly called upon to intervene in cases of inter-Arab violence. This week, a fracas on Salah a-Din St. escalated to damage caused to stores, and the police were called in. However, rocks were thrown at the police when they arrived. **Only in recent years has it become somewhat acceptable to call the police in cases of this nature.**

