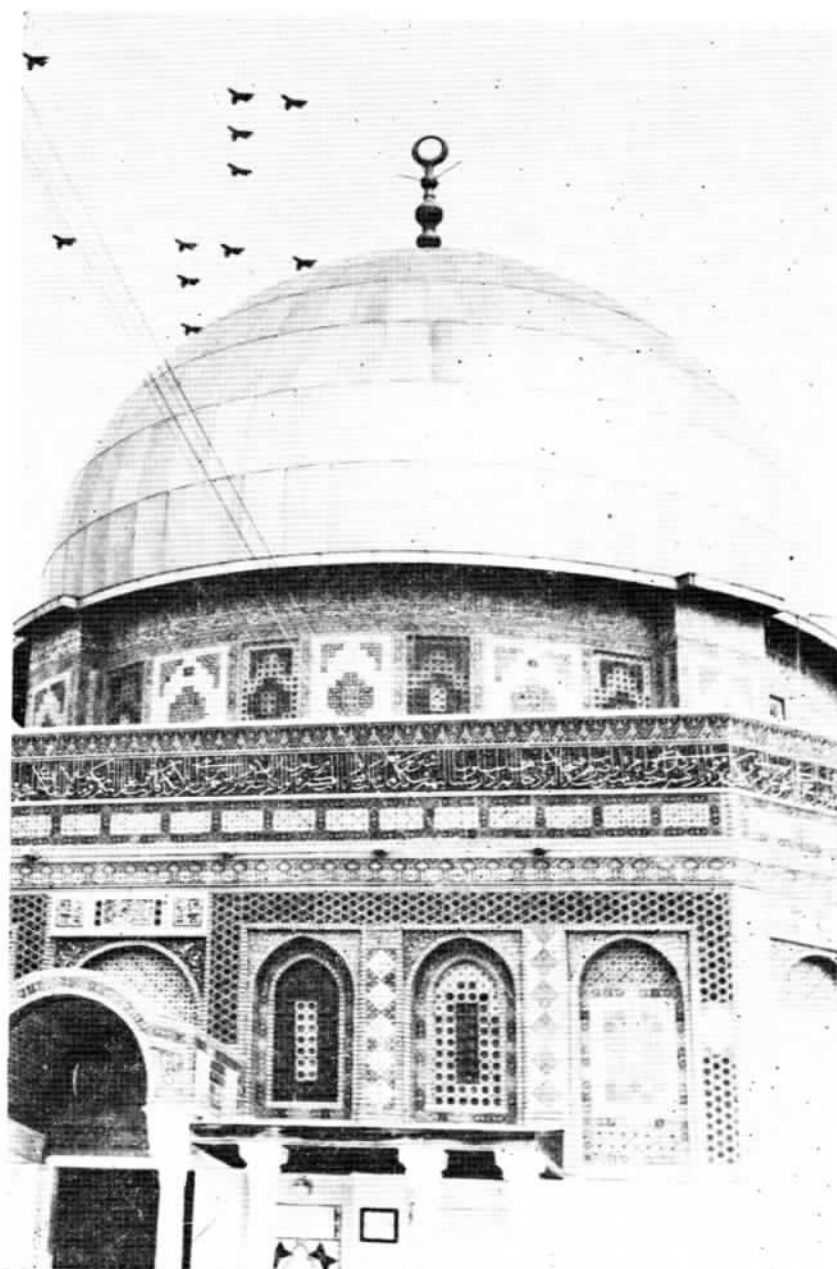


the facts

ABOUT THE PALESTINE PROBLEM

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THE OCCUPATION



On the eve of the June War the Holy City was calm and expectant. The prospect of war had produced no panic but rather a sense of exhilaration, unrealistic perhaps, but felt nonetheless. There was no hoarding of foodstuffs or exodus of fearful Jerusalem inhabitants in those exceedingly tense weeks before the war. The people stoically awaited whatever was to come. In Jerusalem most people refused to believe that there would be fighting in the Old City, the expectation being that the attack on the city would come on the flanks, in the new Arab city and its environs.

Monday, 5 June 1967

The fighting broke out on the morning of June 5th. The streets of Jerusalem were filled with excited young men clamouring for guns with which to defend their city, and with cars and buses filled with children being sent home from school. The fighting around and in Jerusalem began with sporadic gunfire and the stutter of machine guns. The water and electricity were soon cut.

The real Israeli offensive against Jerusalem began in the evening. From the vantage point of the old Hebrew University and the Hadassa Hospital within the demilitarized zone on Mount Scopus, Israeli mortar positions commanded a strategic view of Jerusalem from which they bombarded the city at will with mortars and incendiary bombs. After dark, flares were used to light up targets in and around the Old City.

Israeli aircraft also bombed the Old City heavily and flew sorties along the Jericho road, in order to cut off Jordanian positions and to block any advance along the road. The Herod's Gate area was under heavy Israeli fire, as was the new YMCA building.

Ali Said closed his shop where he sold canaries and toys in the Moroccan quarter.

About 11 p.m. the first mortar bomb fell outside the main entrance of the Augusta Victoria Hospital, an old German hospice which in 1910 was converted into a hospital. That first mortar bomb shattered windows near the entrance and was thought by the staff of the hospital to have been a mistake. But there was no mistake, for soon after bombs began to fall on the hospital at the rate of one every few seconds. This concentrated bombardment would last for ten to fifteen minutes at a time, there would be a lull for about the same time, and then the bombing would begin again. This bombardment went on throughout Monday night, hundreds of mortar bombs falling in the hospital grounds and on the upper stories. The Israelis also attacked with aircraft, rocketing the hospital and dropping incendiary and napalm bombs.

Tuesday, 6 June 1967

Early on Tuesday morning, June 6th, the following people took refuge in the Belgian Consulate in Jerusalem : the Consul-General of the United Arab Republic, Abdel Kader al-Mounla; the Consul-General of Iraq, Abdel Rahman Khoja; the Director-General of the Arab League Office, Touriq Hassan Wassfi; the Vice-Consul of the U.A.R., Nasrat Ali Naim; the Vice-Consul of Iraq, Mustafa Salah Ajami; the Vice-Consul of Syria, Mamduh Zarur; the Director-General of the Iraqi Consulate, Abdel Karim; two messengers from the Iraqi Consulate, two priests and two theology students from the Latin monastery at Kusabeh.

In the Augusta Victoria Hospital, the unit stationed in the blood bank moved down to the basement of the hospital where the rest of the hospital staff and their patients had taken refuge. The patients had been laid up on mattresses on the floor in two large rooms without windows. The operation theatre was moved into the laundry room.

Because the hospital had been taken by surprise, not expecting such an attack, its food arrangements were not elaborate : there was a thin rice soup for both lunch and dinner, and there was bread and cheese. Fortunately there was a water storage tank in the basement but it had to be used very sparingly.

The talk in the hospital among patients and staff revolved around why the Israelis should want to make the Augusta Victoria the target of a massive bombardment. The hospital and the surrounding area presented no military objectives. The army barracks across the road from the hospital had lain empty for a very long while, and there was only a platoon of 12 soldiers of the Jordan Army stationed outside the hospital compound. These soldiers had been posted there many years before as a nominal guard for the hospital as the Israelis maintained a police force on Mount Scopus in the buildings of the Hebrew University and the Hadassa Hospital.

The streets of the new Arab quarters of Jerusalem were relatively quiet, for the firing had moved towards the Old Walled City. Long files of Israeli soldiers threaded their way across the no man's land that had separated the Arab and Jewish sectors of the city and marched down the wide, neat streets of the Arab sector.

In the middle of the morning a group of Israeli soldiers drove up to the Jerusalem YMCA building. They entered the building and took the General Secretary, Labib Nasér, along with nine of his employees, put them in an open truck, and for two hours paraded them through the streets of the Jewish side of the city. A motorcycle escort which went ahead of them invited people to spit on them and they were spat upon. They were cursed at, and imprecations were cast upon Christ and Mohammed. Later that morning a second truck load of YMCA people was taken for another spitting session. When they were brought back to the YMCA building,

they were lined up on the pavement and ordered to lie face down. An argument developed and a soldier with one volley from his machine gun shot three young men on the steps of the YMCA.

The Warden of the Garden Tomb of Christ, an old man, was shot to death on his doorstep by Israeli soldiers; the soldiers then fired repeatedly into the tomb itself where the Warden's wife was sheltering.

On Tuesday afternoon the Old City still stubbornly resisted although the residential quarters surrounding it were fully occupied. Groups of Israeli soldiers were still firing at the walls of the Old City. The radio broadcast announcements in the late afternoon that the population of Jerusalem should hang out white cloths in front of their doors and windows. The people of the city knew then that Jerusalem had fallen.

About 3:30 that afternoon an Israeli force of about 45 soldiers broke into the Belgian Consulate. The Arab consuls and their staff and the people from the monastery, along with the Belgian Consul himself and the wife of one of the Consulate's employees with her six months old baby, were marched outside and lined up against the wall with their hands above their heads and their faces towards the wall. One party of Israeli soldiers entered the Consulate in order to search it. The rest of the Israeli force remained outside with the consular officials and terrorized them by shooting bursts of sub-machine gun fire over their heads.

At about 6:00 in the evening the staff of the Augusta Victoria put a light in the main entrance of the hospital to illuminate the sign saying that it was indeed a hospital. They also gathered the patients further into the depths of the hospital basement to avoid any risks with « trigger-happy liberators ».

In the Moroccan Quarter Ali Said and his family draped a table cloth from the window of their house and his neighbours did likewise.

Outside the Belgian Consulate, the Israeli soldiers continued their game with their prisoners for about an hour and a quarter. Then they marched the group, hands over their heads, to the Ambassador Hotel. It was then about 7:30 in the evening. The prisoners were made to sit at a long table with the director of the hotel and his employees. The Israeli officer in charge ordered them to place their hands on the table, to look straight ahead and to keep silent. They remained like this for more than 15 hours during which they were given nothing to eat or drink and were not allowed to carry out their natural functions. Sometimes their heads drooped from fatigue and sometimes they tried to shift a bit in their chairs, but the Israeli soldiers on guard prodded them with their rifle butts. Also sitting at the table were several members of the Khatib family, including three women, four young children and a 14 year-old boy, all of whom had been sitting at the table for some time before the diplomats arrived.

The guests at the hotel were also confined, but after dark, about 20 of them were taken out of the hotel in closed cars.

The bombs began to fall again about 9:30 p.m. The air was grey with dust and fires broke out here and there in the Holy City. The Israelis bombed the area of the Mount of Olives, the planes flying low and dropping their bombs, swooping up high again and returning for more passes over their targets. The Israeli soldiers were advancing. The people of Jerusalem clung to their radio sets : they heard that the Israelis had encircled the Old City, that they were at Latrun, that they were at Ramallah.

At 10:30 the people in the Augusta Victoria smelled fire, even from the basement. Incendiary and mortar bombs had set fire to the wooden rafters of the roof of the hospital. Through one small window the doctors and patients could see huge flames leaping out into the night sky. There was the roar of the fire and the crackling of the wooden beams, some pieces of which fell into the entrance to the basement. And the bombing continued. They were afraid that the fire above them would cause a blanket of carbon dioxide to sink down on them causing asphyxiation. They tried to count their respirations but because they were afraid, it was impossible. Finally they counted the breathing of a sleeping baby and saw that, perhaps due to the wind that always blows around the Mount of Olives, they would not be in such danger.

In the Convent of the Sisters of Zion on the Via Dolorosa inside the Old City the sisters kept an all-night vigil, waiting for the wounded to come to them for aid.

Wednesday, 7 June 1967

Dawn had come quietly. Mass was celebrated as usual at 6 o'clock, and the worshippers prayed for peace. An old man with white hair lay wounded in the streets. . The sisters found him and brought him in.

The Arab diplomats were marched out into the street and lined up against the wall of the French Hospital, their faces to the wall and their hands above their heads.

A second wave of Israeli soldiers had come into the new Arab sector of Jerusalem. One Israeli soldier was tying a rope to the shutter of a tobacco shop. The other end of the rope was attached to an Israeli army truck.

An Arab doctor walking in the streets asked him in English what he was doing, and he replied, « I am trying to get some matches ». The doctor said, « You don't get matches by breaking open a shop. If you don't stop I will call your officer ». The Israeli untied his rope and drove away.

Further down the road a group of 20 Israeli soldiers and their officer were looting the Dajani Store of its radios, television sets,

and other electrical appliances. The owner estimated that he had been looted on that occasion of £8,000 worth of goods, and he was looted twice more in later days.

Looting was in progress all over Jerusalem. The Misr-Air office was stripped of its office equipment. The new YMCA building was broken into and its furnishings carted away in Israeli army vehicles.

The Israeli soldiers forced the gates of the Old City and the battle raged in the streets. Sister Maria Thérèse opened the door of the Convent and found a man, himself wounded, carrying a little girl whose knee was cut open. The sister, who had gone out to hang a flag bearing a red cross over the door, did not put up the flag. Late in the morning the people in the Augusta Victoria heard the footsteps of the Israeli occupiers crunching on the broken glass in the courtyard and on the floors above them. The soldiers searched the building. The doctors and patients sat silently in the basement for about half an hour before the Israelis found them. A doctor told the soldiers, « This is a hospital ».

The soldiers ordered them to put their hands above their heads and to sit on the ground outside the hospital. They then searched the basement, the men's pockets and the handbags of the ladies. The soldiers kept their guns trained on their prisoners all the time, and reported to their headquarters their progress every now and then by radio-phone.

At 11 a.m. Israeli soldiers brought an old man of about 70, Sheikh Antoun Atallah, and stood him up against the wall beside the Arab diplomats. Soldiers on their way to Ramallah cursed and spat at them. The consuls were kicked and beaten several times. By that time there were about 60 people standing facing the wall of the French Hospital.

On the other side of the road, near the Brooklyn Hotel, there was a small clearing of sand and gravel where a group of 25 young men was brought, their hands, feet and mouths bound « like sheep before the slaughter ». These young men were forced to lie face down in the blazing sun and scalding sand; several died from suffocation.

At about 1:30 the French Consul came out of his house on his way to get a license for his car. The Arab diplomats who knew him called out to him and asked him to help them. They told him that he should report that they were all alive so that if any of them were killed, he would know that they had been killed as prisoners of war, not during the fighting. The French Consul immediately went to the Israeli Commander and told him that he held him personally responsible for the life of the Arab diplomats and all the people standing at the wall of the French Hospital.

In the courtyard of the Augusta Victoria Israeli soldiers went from car to car, a large bunch of keys jangling, and tried each car, driving as many away as possible. One doctor, who was sitting

cross-legged on the ground with the staff and patients in front of the hospital, shouted out that he was a doctor and his car was « not for looting ».

Later in the afternoon the Arab diplomats were taken to the Jerusalem prison where they were to remain for four days.

Cars were the object of the Israeli Army looters from that time on. They drove them until they had no more petrol and then abandoned them. There was a jam of several smashed cars and a tank in front of the Garden of Gethsemane.

That evening the looting of houses and shops became general : it was a free-for-all.

Thursday, 8 June 1967

On Thursday morning curfew was imposed, but this brought no relief to the people of Jerusalem because looting continued during the curfew hours when there were no local witnesses and when each household was isolated.

In the narrow street next to the Wailing Wall, a group of Israeli Army personnel and civilians began to direct a survey of the area and to measure distances as if they were planning to build something. Ali Said and his neighbours were told not to worry and that nothing would happen to them as long as they hung a white cloth in front of their door. And they were told to stay inside their houses because of the curfew.

At about 2 a.m. Friday morning Ali Said and his family and their neighbours living in the row of houses adjacent to the Wailing Wall heard the noise of bulldozers grinding down the narrow street and they saw the large yellow beam of headlights on the front of the bulldozer. The bulldozers pushed down that row of houses on Friday morning and when dawn came Ali Said had heard tell of the death of a child and of an old woman in the operation.

Late Friday night and early Saturday morning the bulldozers levelled the second row of houses and the people living in the Moroccan Quarter moved further in with friends and relatives, thinking that the Israelis would not take the whole quarter. But the Israelis did destroy the whole quarter in order to clear a large square of some 12,000 meters square in front of the Wailing Wall, a large levelled area littered with the debris of peoples homes and lives, with scraps of cloth and bread and with lengths of pipe protruding among the stones and broken bits of children's toys.

At mid-day on Friday the doctors and staff members of the Augusta Victoria were permitted to leave the hospital, but on foot. Men, women and children from the Moroccan Quarter were turned out of their homes into the streets where they wandered lost and dazed until they finally boarded the buses provided by the Israelis

for them to go to the Jordan River and leave their country for ever.

In the Old City there was no bread and no one could go out of his house without authorisation.

The body of the Warden of the Garden Tomb still lay on the doorstep. On Thursday, they took him into his house.

Once the daily curfew had been lifted the people of Jerusalem cautiously came out into the streets. Children found loose in the streets were told by the occupying authorities that their parents had gone on buses to the East Bank and that they had better follow suit. When they frantically sought their children at police stations their parents were later told that the children had gone to Amman and that they would have to follow them there if they ever wanted to see them again.

A car-load of tourists who were found driving on the Sabbath were stoned by Israeli youths, a new phenomenon in the Old City where Moslems and Christians mutually respected each other's holiday, but did not try to force their beliefs on one another. The Sisters of St. Joseph were spat upon in the streets; Armenian priests were bullied and their graveyard was desecrated.

There were no calls to prayer for the Moslems and there was no ringing of church bells for the Christians in the Old City. On the Feast of the Passover rabbis and theological students, in small groups, performed their devotions at the Wailing Wall. But very few Jewish laymen performed any devotions at the Wall: they stood and gaped and laughed and had their pictures taken. They were not pilgrims; they were tourists and sightseers. This was the first indication of what the occupation of Jerusalem would be like. The conqueror was not only arrogant, he was also insensitive and unappreciative of the character of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

But it was not only the Arab whose dignity had been affronted and not only Arab property had been «liberated»: Israeli Army personnel forcibly removed the American flag from American-owned property, and maltreated and looted American property; they violated the diplomatic immunity of various diplomatic representatives; they wantonly destroyed equipment in a school flying the Red Cross flag; they looted the U.N. warehouses and destroyed many of the files and records in the U.N. office on Mount Scopus; they attempted to shoot open a U.N. safe, and the U.N. flag flying from U.N. headquarters on Mount Scopus was removed and defiled.

Looting continued long after the cease-fire. In one night early in July, six shops in one area of the Old City were looted and on another night eleven shops were ransacked. The owner of an electronics store complained to the police that his store had been looted for the second time on July 4th and was told to «report it to his now inoperatival insurance company». The major part of the looting was done by soldiers, purportedly searching homes for

firearms. Though they never seemed to uncover hidden caches of weapons, they almost always found jewelry, money and other attractive « souvenirs ». On August 2nd, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was broken into and a statue of the Virgin Mary was robbed of its 17th century diamond tiara and a golden heart. On August 14th, two Israeli youths were arrested near Tel-Aviv with the setting of the tiara in their possession.

The picture for Arab Jerusalem and its people is a grim one indeed. Out of a total population of about 75,000 comprising the municipality of Jerusalem, it is estimated by former officials that a large percentage of the inhabitants have neither work nor money. The rest of the population, with the exception of a few groups of people whose salaries are paid by international organizations, are living on resources still in hand. Family after family say that they «can perhaps manage somehow,» for a short time. A large number of these people are professional or semi-professional people who were in the habit of putting their cash reserves in banks, all of which were closed by the Israelis. The cash that was in the banks on June 5th has been removed to Israel by the occupying authorities. Lawyers, judges, doctors, dentists, engineers, bank personnel, insurance agents, clerical workers, government employees, restaurant and hotel personnel form part of the long list of people with now useless bank accounts. Just about the only independent businessmen still working are some of the barbers, grocers, pharmacists and merchants.

This account was based on material provided by Mrs. Julia Kissam, Mrs. K. A. Mannion, Sister Marie Therese of the Companions of Jesus, Mr. Ali Said Zarour, Dr. and Mrs. Usamah Khalidi, Dr. and Mrs. Najib Abu Haydar, Arab consular officials, Dr. and Mrs. Gaspar, an American U.N. Observer stationed in Jerusalem, Christian clergymen and the people of Arab Jerusalem.



