

Jerusalem

Peace Between Two Approaches: Functionalism and the Dismantling of Settler Colonialism

By the Editorial Board of Al-Maqdisiyah



Introduction

Peace in Palestine cannot be achieved without resolving the issue of Jerusalem through the recognition of national rights. Equally, peace for the three Abrahamic faiths and their global followers remains elusive without this resolution. Throughout history, Jerusalem has stood as the key to both war and peace. Yet in modern times, true peace has been absent due to the Zionist occupation and the exclusive claim that the city belongs solely to Jews, marginalizing others. Against this backdrop, we explore the path to securing peace in Jerusalem, and

by extension, Palestine and the wider world. We critically examine the prevailing approach on the ground—a functional civil solution offered as an alternative to political and national rights in the city. This approach suggests that “Israeli peace” can be achieved by granting superficial civil rights, while sidestepping deeper issues.

In contrast, we consider the reality of settler colonialism in Palestine, including Jerusalem, which underscores that lasting peace is impossible without dismantling the occupation. We then analyze the outcome of the conflict between these two opposing viewpoints.

We contend that the functionalist approach cannot deliver peace to Jerusalem or Palestine. It fails to address the core issue: the colonial settlement and the Zionist claim, backed by Israel, that the city’s rights belong exclusively to Jews. This framework inherently excludes the Palestinians—Muslims and Christians alike—from their rightful claims to the city.

Input No. (1):

The Approach of Civil and Functional Rights as a Substitute for Sovereignty and National Rights

In Jerusalem, a profound contradiction exists between the national rights of the Palestinian people—who live, breathe, and resist there every day—and the Zionist-Western perspective that governs the city. While Zionism asserts exclusive Jewish rights over Jerusalem, there are those, particularly in the West, who still view the city as an international entity, adhering to the 1947 partition resolution. This resolution proposed an internationalization of Jerusalem, based on its status as a sacred city for the three monotheistic religions.

Consequently, many Western voices focus solely on ensuring freedom of worship for the followers of these three religions, as well as protecting the civil rights of the city’s residents. This approach is shared by Western churches and organizations, which often regard Jerusalem as “the City of God,” prioritizing its religious significance over the rights of its Palestinian Arab population. This perspective is particularly rejected by Palestinians, including Palestinian Christians, who have long advocated for the Arabization of the Orthodox Church—a struggle that

dates back to Khalil Sakakini's 1913 booklet "The Orthodox Renaissance" and continues to this day. (Sakakini, 1913).

Diplomatic missions in Jerusalem reflect a similar view. As long as their freedom of movement and ability to operate in the city remain intact, they tend to sidestep the question of sovereignty. Many of these missions, alongside certain churches, are willing to function under any regime, provided it doesn't interfere with their religious practices or diplomatic activities. In return, they issue statements condemning the actions of the occupation authorities, but rarely take meaningful action beyond these declarations. They continue to enjoy their religious freedoms and unimpeded movement, seemingly indifferent to the deeper, more urgent issues of sovereignty and the rights of the city's indigenous people—whose freedoms and rights are eroding before their very eyes.

This approach, which accommodates Zionist control over Jerusalem, aligns with European proposals encouraging Palestinian Jerusalemites to participate in Israeli municipal elections as a means of securing civil rights and services. Similarly, some advocate for naturalization and integration into Israeli society. In this context, it's no surprise that international support for strengthening the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem rarely exceeds a few million dollars. Such funding is directed toward «neutral» projects, which do not challenge Israel's control over the city.

This apparent neutrality, often masking an implicit bias toward Israeli dominance, has paved the way for some parties to fully endorse Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem. This shift became starkly evident in 2017, when the United States moved its embassy to the city, symbolizing full support for Israel's control over both Jerusalem and all of Palestine.

The earlier view of securing merely civil and religious rights, while accommodating Israeli rule, exploited the deferral of Jerusalem's status in the 1993 Oslo Accords to the so-called «permanent status negotiations.» Although the Accords initially postponed discussions only temporarily until a final agreement was due in 1999, the failure to reach such a solution, coupled with today's political deadlock, has allowed this functionalist approach to persist under Israeli occupation.

In this prolonged scenario, Jordan has continued its stewardship of Islamic and Christian holy sites, as stipulated in the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement and reinforced by the 2013 agreement between King Abdullah II and President

Mahmoud Abbas. Initially, Jordan believed this guardianship would last only until Palestine gained independence. However, since no progress has been made since Oslo, this Hashemite stewardship has become increasingly threatened. Israeli efforts to divide Al-Aqsa Mosque—both spatially and temporally—along with the actions of Temple Mount organizations seeking to construct a temple on its ruins, have eroded Jordan’s influence.

Furthermore, Israel has pushed to involve Saudi Arabia in managing Al-Aqsa, either alongside or as a replacement for Jordan. This reflects Israel’s intent to reduce the issue of Jerusalem to a matter of functional arrangements, while sidelining any political solution that recognizes Palestinian sovereignty and rights over the city.

With the postponement of discussions on Jerusalem’s status in negotiations, the pursuit of civil and functional solutions in the city has intensified. Every aspect of life for Jerusalemites—whether professionals, workers, or residents—has become deeply entangled with Israel and its institutions, leaving them with no real choice. Meanwhile, international bodies continue to operate under Israeli sovereignty, awaiting a reversal that has yet to materialize through fruitless negotiations. The Western world has tied the creation of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital to Israel’s approval, which, more than thirty years after the Oslo Accords, has not come.

The push for functional solutions under Israeli rule neglects the rights of Palestinians, particularly those in Jerusalem. It even disregards their civil and functional rights, which include their internationally recognized right to access religious sites that are open to the world but closed to them. Palestinian Jerusalemites are also denied their democratic right to have a municipality that truly represents and serves them; Israel dissolved the city’s municipal council (the Jerusalem Secretariat) in 1967. Furthermore, Palestinians are prevented from accessing Jerusalem for medical care, shopping, or even domestic tourism.

Beyond civil rights, political rights are also suppressed. Palestinian institutions in the city are systematically shut down to stifle any expression of Palestinian identity—a process termed «quarantined Palestineization.» This coincides with the Israelization of Jerusalem’s institutions, although full Israelization remains an impossible option for most Jerusalemites. As Israeli analyst Shaul Arieli noted,

only 20,000 Jerusalemites have obtained Israeli citizenship since 1967. Even for them, adopting Israeli identity remains out of reach, much like the Palestinians within Israel who, despite holding Israeli identification, retain their Palestinian identity.

A similar dynamic is at play in Jerusalem, where some residents view acquiring Israeli citizenship as the only way to safeguard their presence in the city and prevent deportation, all while clinging to their national identity. Aware of this, Israel has tightened the conditions for granting citizenship to Jerusalemites, further complicating an already tenuous existence (Arieli, 2020).

The functional approach assumes that peace in Jerusalem can be achieved by granting limited civil rights to Palestinian Jerusalemites. According to this logic, such concessions would lead to their acceptance of Zionist control and the cessation of activities that threaten Israel's security. However, this assumption has proven false in the face of continued colonial settlement expansion, encroachments on Palestinian sites, control over the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque and church properties, and widespread abuse, arrests, and oppression in the city.

These actions have fueled Palestinian resistance, both within and beyond Jerusalem, in the past and present, with no sign of abating if the status quo persists. The reality is that the functional civil solutions, designed to adapt to Israeli dominance, have reached an impasse. These solutions are eroding, and even the civil and religious rights they purport to offer are systematically violated.

This calls for a critical reassessment by those in the U.S., Europe, and the Arab world who continue to advocate for such approaches. An alternative vision must be presented—one that truly addresses the needs and rights of the people, rather than perpetuating the existing imbalance of power.

Input No. (2): The Colonial Settlement Approach and Jerusalem's Status Within Its Framework

By ignoring the colonial settlement framework, the first approach separates Jerusalem from its Palestinian roots and its people. It centers the city on Zionist identity and the Western world, effectively denying Palestinians their rights and severing their ties to the larger Palestinian nation. This viewpoint implies that

the global aspirations for Jerusalem can only be achieved by erasing the rights of its indigenous people. Such an orientalist perspective still dominates Western discourse and policy regarding the city, aligning more closely with biblical and Zionist narratives. In this context, it is unsurprising that in European academic circles, Al-Aqsa Mosque is often referred to as «Temple Mount.»

With the 2018 Israeli Nationality Law and the so-called «Deal of the Century,» it might appear that the civil functionalist discourse has prevailed, while the discourse surrounding Palestinian national rights has been sidelined. However, this surface impression masks several enduring facts, resistant to all efforts to reverse them:

First: Israeli control over Jerusalem remains unrecognized by international law. A long series of international resolutions have rejected Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, affirming it as part of the territories occupied in 1967. These include key Security Council resolutions like 252 (1968), 267 (1969), 298 (1971), 452 (1979), 478 (1980), and 678 (1990), as well as General Assembly resolutions such as 2253 (1967) and many others that followed. None of these resolutions recognized Israel's claim over the city (Shaaban, 2011).

The internationalization of Jerusalem, first mentioned in the 1947 Partition Plan, took a more focused form two years later with the Trusteeship Council's recommendation to internationalize the holy places. This was enshrined in General Assembly Resolution 303 (1949), which set out a mechanism for the internationalization of the sacred sites, while leaving open the possibility of internationalizing the entire city—though no mechanism for this was ever established.

After the Oslo Accords, international positions shifted from advocating for internationalization to promoting a negotiated solution between Israel and Palestine. The Camp David talks in 2000 further cemented the end of internationalization as a viable political solution, except for the Vatican, which continued to call for a special international status for Jerusalem's holy sites. The Vatican views Jerusalem as a city sacred to millions of believers worldwide—a place that belongs not to any single nation or faith, but where the three Abrahamic religions must find a way to coexist under mutually agreed-upon arrangements (Vatican News, 2019).

Second: Since 1967, Jerusalem has been subjected to an illegal and internationally rejected colonial settlement, akin to the rest of the Palestinian territories occupied that same year. However, unlike those territories, Israeli law was imposed on Jerusalem in 1967, and in 1980, a Basic Law declared the city as the unified and eternal capital of Israel. In recent years, this distinction has blurred as Israel pushes to annex settlements in the West Bank, particularly in Area C.

Israeli plans aim to expand «Greater Jerusalem,» extending its reach deep into the Palestinian West Bank. In the coming years, Jerusalem's borders are projected to stretch to the Dead Sea in the east, the outskirts of Hebron in the south, and the Shiloh settlement halfway to Nablus in the north. This expansion would forge a direct connection between Jerusalem and the Ariel settlement, built on Salfit's land. Such a move would encircle Palestinian cities and governorates like Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jericho, and Salfit, restricting their growth and severing any chance for a geographically contiguous Palestinian state.

By 2050, Israeli plans envision industrial zones, tourist resorts, high-tech facilities, hotel networks, railways, and a vast airport within Greater Jerusalem. These developments seek to shift Israel's urban center from Tel Aviv to this expanded Jerusalem (Arafah, 2016).

This aggressive expansion threatens to render a viable Palestinian state geographically impossible.

Third: The colonial settlement project employs various strategies to tighten its grip on Jerusalem, with demographics being the foremost tool. Jerusalemites are systematically denied Israeli citizenship in large numbers and are often categorized as «Jordanian citizens residing in Israel,» or, more recently, as «unclassified residents» according to updated travel documents (Salem, 2018). In addition, their residency rights are frequently revoked, and plans are underway to expel 120,000 to 140,000 Palestinians from Jerusalem by redrawing the city's municipal boundaries, excluding areas like Shuafat and Kafr Aqab, as outlined in the Deal of the Century.

This demographic manipulation, combined with the expansion of settlements and the displacement of Palestinian communities, serves to alter the city's population balance. Alongside this, other tactics are employed—such as the Judaization of the land, the region, and its cultural landscape (Margalit, 2011). Israeli institutions

replace Palestinian ones, and the city is increasingly closed off to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, severing social and cultural ties and imposing forced isolation.

Settlements are strategically placed between holy sites and within Palestinian neighborhoods, fragmenting local communities and preventing geographic continuity. These areas now resemble isolated pockets surrounded by colonies, tightening the noose around Palestinian villages and neighborhoods. Nadera Kevorkian aptly described these suffocated spaces as «prisons crowded with bodies» (Kevorkian, 2015).

This web of control dismantles the social fabric of Jerusalem, transforming the city's Palestinian neighborhoods into isolated enclaves amidst the encroaching settlements.

Fourth: The colonial settlement project in Jerusalem has not expanded without encountering both resistance and resilience. On the one hand, negative resistance is evident in the widespread refusal to engage with Israeli authority. Participation in Israeli municipal elections, for instance, remains minuscule, hovering at just 1-2% of eligible Jerusalemites in each cycle. Similarly, there is little interest in obtaining Israeli citizenship—only 20,000 of the 350,000 Jerusalemites have accepted it.

On the other hand, positive resistance manifests in efforts to quietly solidify the Palestinian presence in the city. Local communities engage in silent forms of steadfastness, building their resilience without attracting media attention. Despite the risk of home demolitions—where up to 150 houses are destroyed annually—Jerusalemites continue to construct homes without permits, knowing that this is essential to maintain their foothold in the city. Many have also returned to Jerusalem from outside areas, seeking to safeguard their residency rights and secure their presence within its borders.

Open resistance takes on a more visible and active form. The defense of Al-Aqsa, for example, has sparked notable uprisings, such as the 2017 victory over the installation of electronic gates, which ended with their removal. Other significant moments include the 2014 uprising after the murder of the child Muhammad Abu Khudair and protests following the execution of Iyad Al-Hallaq, an autistic student.



Most recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Jerusalemites demonstrated remarkable solidarity. The city's hospitals worked together to develop a unified response plan, while more than 80 local institutions formed the Jerusalemite Gathering to Confront Corona. The Saint George Hotel was repurposed to serve as a quarantine facility, food parcels were distributed, and both Islamic and Christian endowments exempted tenants from rent in 2020. These acts of collective resilience underscore the enduring spirit of resistance, woven into the fabric of life in Jerusalem.

This resistance has not been without hardship, nor has it led to significant strides toward liberation and independence. Its primary achievement has been the preservation of the Jerusalemites' presence in their city. Meanwhile, the occupation has made several inroads. Anyone wishing to work in law or any other profession must do so under Israeli regulations and through Israeli institutions. Workers, in turn, must join the Histadrut to secure their rights. Health care is provided through Israeli health funds, with even Palestinian hospitals tied to these same systems.

The education sector has also faced a significant shift. Israeli municipal schools now dominate much of Jerusalem's education landscape, especially after the closure of the Palestinian Education Directorate in 2019. Earlier, in 2001, the shuttering of the Orient House marked the end of the official political presence of the Palestine Liberation Organization in the city, diminishing Jerusalem's role in Palestinian political affairs and shifting the center of power to Ramallah.

Efforts to seize control of Al-Aqsa Mosque have intensified in recent years, with ongoing attempts to divide it both spatially and temporally. Moreover, there have been moves to curtail the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and to close its schools in the city. These actions represent the broader strategy of eroding Palestinian presence and influence in Jerusalem, step by calculated step.

The conclusion of this second input is clear: since 1967, a colonial settlement has systematically worked to erase Palestinian presence in Jerusalem. This effort extends beyond simply removing people—it seeks to dismantle all political, economic, social, and cultural expressions of Palestinian identity. Through a gradual process, this plan has now reached a point where Israel openly intends



to expel 120,000 to 140,000 Palestinians from the city. Those who remain will face a grim choice: accept Israeli citizenship, relocate to Palestinian territories, or retain residency without any acknowledgment of their Palestinian identity, as outlined in the 2020 Deal of the Century (Peace for Prosperity Plan, 2020).

All three options erode the Palestinian identity of Jerusalemites: whether through naturalization with Israeli citizenship or remaining in the city as residents without citizenship. The third option conditions Palestinianness on relocating to Palestinian Authority areas, effectively deeming Jerusalem non-Palestinian and suggesting that to preserve their identity, Palestinians must live outside the city. Of these choices, retaining residency in Jerusalem appears the least harmful. While it denies their Palestinian identity, it allows them to remain in their city. However, emerging Israeli policies may eventually close off even this option, as efforts to eliminate the Palestinian presence intensify. This underscores the urgency for a Palestinian strategy that cements the presence of Jerusalemites in their city, preserving their identity even if Israel refuses to acknowledge it.

Ultimately, without an end to the colonial settlement in Jerusalem, lasting peace for the city and Palestine will remain unattainable. The failure of the functional approach to integrating Palestinians into the Israeli system has become clear, despite some Western and Arab adaptation to this vision, notably through the «Abraham Accords» of 2020.

Input No. (3):

The Outcome of the Thesis and Its Antithesis: Input (1) and (2)

The West's interpretation of the Oslo Accords was shaped by two key elements. First, the issue of Jerusalem was deferred to the final stage of negotiations, with the transition to a permanent status dependent on a "negotiated agreement" concerning the city. This effectively granted Israel the authority to dictate the terms of this agreement, especially given the West's reluctance to apply any pressure. Second, the matter of colonial settlements in Jerusalem and throughout the territories occupied in 1967 was similarly postponed. This deferral was accompanied by an Israeli commitment to allow the continued existence and functioning of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem, as outlined in a 1994 letter

from Shimon Peres, then Israeli Foreign Minister, to Johan Holst, the Norwegian Foreign Minister (Peres's letter to Holst, *Journal of Palestine Studies*).

This led to replacing the civil-functional approach with the second approach: the elimination of colonial settlement. However, the implementation of this second approach was deferred to final status negotiations. Within this framework, the West endorsed negotiations as the sole path to liberate Jerusalem from colonial control—an unlikely solution for a deeply rooted settlement project. This approach replaced resistance with a reliance on diplomacy, with hopes pinned on negotiations that were meant to conclude by May 1999, as outlined in the accords. Yet that deadline passed without resolution. Subsequent final-status talks, including Camp David in 2000 and Taba in early 2001, also ended in failure, as did those that followed.

In these negotiations, no proposal truly addressed Palestinian sovereignty over the Old City of Jerusalem, while Israel sought control over the areas beneath the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Israel made no moves to dismantle settlements in East Jerusalem, instead proposing to divide the city, leaving West Jerusalem entirely under Israeli control. Moreover, the issue of Palestinian rights to property seized and destroyed in West Jerusalem was never discussed, despite calls from figures like Faisal al-Husseini, who insisted that negotiations must include all of Jerusalem—both East and West—not just the eastern part (see: *Clinton Parameters*; al-Husseini, 1994). After the failure of the Camp David and Taba negotiations (summarized by the European envoy Moratinos in the references below), Israel recognized that its attempts to coerce the Palestinian side into accepting its colonial settlement ambitions—especially in Jerusalem—were futile. In response, as early as 2001, Israel began to implement measures that directly contradicted its previous civil and functional commitments regarding Jerusalem. That year, it closed the Orient House, and in the years that followed, it systematically shut down all Palestinian institutions in the city, even criminalizing any form of Palestinian expression, including raising the Palestinian flag—a punishable offense.

In essence, since 2001, Israel has completely reversed its stance on the Oslo approach, abandoning even the civil and functional framework it once upheld. This shift represents an effort to impose a zero-sum reality in Jerusalem, aiming to eliminate all traces of Palestinian presence in the city.

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