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SUITORS WITH DISHONORABLE INTENTIONS

IT has been widely reported that the government has agreed to Faisal Husseini's taking over the leadership of the Palestinian Arab delegation to the Washington talks.

Mr Husseini himself - a resident of Jerusalem - has already reacted with enthusiasm. He sees this decision as the first breach in Israel's hitherto ironclad policy toward Jerusalem, the first sign of Israeli "recognition" of Arab rights in Jerusalem. His reaction is logical and understandable.

Unless it is discredited swiftly, unreservedly and convincingly by the government, his analysis will be shared by every neutral observer. Such a decision, if allowed to stand, signals a betrayal of Israeli sovereignty and of Jerusalem's Jewish patrimony. It is a negation of Jewish history and of the history of this country.

Let it be said once more. The persistent, repeated reference in Arab propaganda to "Arab national rights" in or to Jerusalem reflects a lie and a hoax. Like the fables disseminated about Arab patrimony in Palestine as a whole, it is one of the major hoaxes of our century.

The claim was born simply to bring about the dismemberment of the Jewish State. Even the claim the Arabs make of Moslem religious rights to Jerusalem is transparently false. The sanctity of the two Moslem mosques on the Jewish Temple Mount in the Old City is not in dispute, just as the sanctity of every mosque and of every Christian church has been honored punctiliously by Israel (something of which the Arabs, who destroyed every Jewish synagogue in the Old City during the Jordanian Moslem occupation, should be reminded).

But it is a crass fiction that Jerusalem as a city is "holy to three faiths." Its sanctity to Christianity is historic. It springs naturally from the final act in the drama of the life of Jesus, and its early annals are woven into the fabric, into the very stones of the city. But indescribable is the measure of sanctity of Jerusalem, and its integral identity with the Jewish religion and with the Jewish people.

You will find Jerusalem mentioned, in a broad spectrum of contexts, over 600 times in the Bible, throughout Jewish literature, and as a recurring theme in all Jewish prayers, and on every family occasion. Declared the capital of the Jewish State 3,000 years ago, it remained the central focus of Jewish dreams and longing throughout the long centuries of exile. In the foundations of the Moslem religion, Jerusalem plays no role.

It is not mentioned once in the Koran. To the Moslem, as Christopher Sykes pithily sums it up: "it is not Jerusalem but a certain site in Jerusalem, which is venerated contrary, it was the existing sanctity of the place - it had been holy to the Jews for nearly 2,000 years before Mohammed - that inspired the weavers of legend to choose it as a fittingly awesome station for Mohammed's ascent. The Buraq, as the Moslems call the site, is thus in fact a permanent memorial to Islam's recognition of the Jewishness of the Holy Place.

Nor politically did Jerusalem ever acquire importance during the century of Arab Moslem rule in Palestine, or the subsequent centuries of rule by other Moslems. Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo all in their turn served as the imperial capital - never

Jerusalem, which remained a backwater in spite of the two magnificent mosques. The only administrative center set up in Palestine by any of the Moslem dynasties was at the small town of Ramle.

Nor when the Emir Abdallah of Transjordan invaded Western Palestine in 1948 and, inter alia, captured east Jerusalem, that is, the Old, the Holy, City, did he make any move or gesture to accord it even "local" political status. Nor did the Arab inhabitants manifest any discomfort at his neglect. Indeed, only when Israel regained the city did the Arabs begin to disseminate the claim to (no less) the ownership of the city.

Particularly active in this propaganda were the pious members of the royal family of Saudi Arabia. From their reported passion one might have concluded that they were not sleeping at nights for grieving over the fact that Jerusalem was in infidel Jewish hands, and over their own inability to visit its mosques. Research, at the time, of the Saudi royal movements revealed that in the 19 years of Jordanian Moslem rule, not a single member of the Saudi royal family ever paid a visit to Jerusalem.

They were, it has been said, probably too preoccupied visiting the holy places of Monte Carlo and Las Vegas. One of the salient and least pleasant features of US policy toward Israel - a feature disliked by many, perhaps even most, Americans, has been its adamant refusal to recognize Jewish patrimony in Jerusalem (and its recurring attempts to pretend that the Holy City is an Arab city). This policy is a reminder that the campaign against Jewish control of Jerusalem has been fueled throughout by Christian sources.

To the Catholic Church, which has never recognized Israel as a state, Jewish rule in the city is evidently anathema. Other mainstream Christian establishments have contributed their share. Inescapable then is the realization that it is not only the Arab attitude, or "oil interests," that are influencing US policy on Jerusalem, but also a modern manifestation of ancient antisemitism.

The government should realize, or should be made aware of, the fact that the establishment of Faisal Husseini's new status carries with it implications far beyond its immediate impact.