

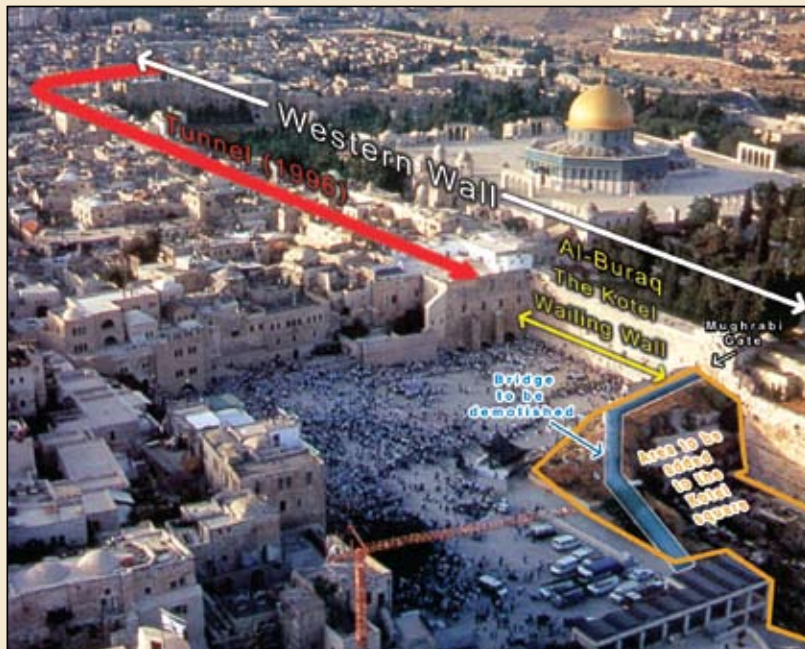
No. 4090 (“Prioritize: Bolstering the City of Jerusalem”), which was endorsed by the Sharon cabinet in August 2005 to change the geopolitical *status quo* in East Jerusalem, and allocated an overall investment of NIS 480 million (from 2006-2013) for the development of the Old City Basin and the Mount of Olives.

In addition, **excavations** are carried out in the existing **Western Wall tunnel** underneath the Haram Ash-Sharif compound, which have caused damage to several adjacent properties - including the Waqf office, Ribat Al-Kurd, the historic Uthmani and Al-Tankazi Schools - and led in February 2009 to the collapse of a UN-affiliated school, injuring 17 school-children. Work also continues on a 100-m **tunnel** from the **Hamam Al-Ein** area (Muslim Quarter) towards the Al-Aqsa compound. In Oct. 2008, the “Ohel Yitzhak” **synagogue** was opened in the same area; it will be connected to the network of tunnels.

◆ Al-Haram Ash-Sharif and the Moroccan Quarter

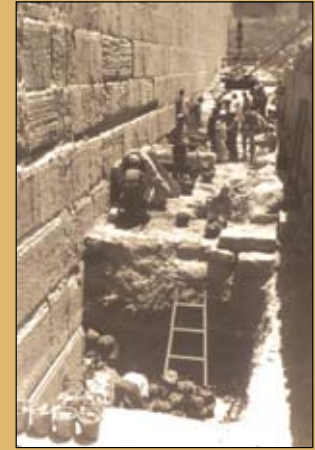
A particular problematic spot is Al-Haram Ash-Sharif which has provoked great religious passion throughout the history of Jerusalem. The 36-acre **Haram Ash-Sharif** (‘Noble Sanctuary’) is the third holiest site in Islam. The compound, which for 16 months acted as the first *qiblah* (prayer direction), comprises the walls and minarets that mark the parameters of Al-Aqsa Mosque, the aesthetically magnificent Dome of the Rock (As-Sakhra Mosque), historical Islamic schools, the western corridors, subterranean prayer halls, fountains, gardens, the southern most building (erroneously referred to as Al-Aqsa Mosque), and numerous other domes and structures, such as the Dome of the Grammarians, which today hosts the offices of the Chief Qadi. For Jews, the area is the ‘Temple Mount,’ i.e., the site of the first (destroyed around 587 BCE) and second (destroyed in 70 CE) temples in Jerusalem as well as the site of the third and final temple, to be rebuilt with the coming of the Messiah.

Jewish and Muslim confrontations over the site, began in the 19th Century and continue to today. Tensions, have escalated



AL-BURAQ WALL forms part of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

The site is holy to Muslims as they believe that Prophet Mohammed was taken in a night journey from the Noble Sanctuary in Mecca to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem (*Isra' wa Miraj*, Qur'an 17:1). Jews, meanwhile, refer to the wall as the **Kotel** or **Wailing Wall** (*Mabka* in Arabic), a direct reference to the Jewish mourning of the destruction of the Temple. They also like to refer to it as the **Western Wall** - even though it forms only a *part* of the entire western wall of Al-Aqsa compound - whilst claiming that the entire area was once a part of the destroyed Second Temple.



Israeli excavations at Al-Buraq Wall, 1968.

A mid-18th Century Ottoman ‘*Status Quo*’ arrangement forbade any construction at or changes to (initially Christian) holy places. It was later extended by the British Mandate authorities (1922-47) to include Al-Buraq Wall in Jerusalem and Rachel’s Tomb on the outskirts of Bethlehem. Disputes between Muslims and Jews over access to Al-Buraq Wall were bound to occur and escalated in August 1929. The conclusions of the subsequent British Inquiry Commission, presented in December 1930, determined that although Jews would have free access to the Wall for the purpose of performing their devotions at all times, ownership of the Wall, as well as the pavement in front of the adjacent Moroccan Quarter, belonged to the Muslims, as did the sole proprietary right to the Wall.

in the past decades and resulted in numerous political crises and violent clashes. These included, *inter alia*, the riots of 1929, caused by a dispute over prayer arrangements at Al-Buraq Wall, the destruction of the entire Moroccan (Mughrabi) Quarter in the wake of the War of 1967, the unrest of 1969 that followed the attempt by an Australian tourist to burn down Al-Aqsa Mosque, the 1990 Al-Aqsa Massacre resulting from attempts by Jewish extremists to lay the cornerstone for the Temple, the unrest that followed the opening of the Hasmonean Tunnel by the Israeli government in 1996, and the eruption of the second (Al-Aqsa) *Intifada* in September 2000, sparked by the provocative visit of Ariel Sharon to Al-Haram Ash-Sharif.

Most recently, the excavation work that Israel began in February 2007 near Al-Buraq Wall (see box), adjacent to Al-Haram Ash-Sharif, has come to represent yet another ominous move on the part of Israel to ‘Judaize’ Jerusalem. The work - destruction/reconstruction of a historic pedestrian bridge, some 75 m long, connecting the Mughrabi Quarter (see box) to the **Mughrabi Gate** - sparked outrage among Muslims around the world. At least part of the reason for this was because the gate has been used in the past by Israeli forces and various Jewish groups as their main point of entry into the Al-Aqsa compound.