

Palestinians pull claim to Western Wall after U.S. State Department objects

by [Michele Chabin](#) in the [December 28, 2010](#) issue

Following condemnation from the U.S. State Department and others, the Palestinian government has pulled a report stating that Jews have no historic connection to the Western Wall.

The study, which was prepared by Al-Mutawakel Taha, a well-known writer and official with the Palestinian Ministry of Information, stated that the Western Wall—the holiest site in Judaism—is actually part of the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex, Islam's third holiest site.

On November 30, the U.S. State Department called the report "factually incorrect, insensitive and highly provocative." A State Department spokesman said his agency had "repeatedly" told the Palestinian Authority to "consistently combat all forms of delegitimization of Israel, including denying historic Jewish connections to the land."

For years, Palestinian officials have attempted to claim sole rights over traditionally Jewish holy sites in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, both of which Israel captured during the 1967 Middle East War.

To the consternation of Jews around the world, Palestinian leaders recently persuaded UNESCO to declare two sites that Jews revere as the burial places of biblical patriarchs and matriarchs in Hebron and Bethlehem as protected Palestinian sites.

Israeli

prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas on December 1 to recognize Jewish religious and historical ties to the Holy Land. "Turn to your people and tell them: 'There is a Jewish people here. They have been living here for close to 4,000 years. We recognize this people. We recognize their historic connection to this land and this city.'"

Although unnamed sources in the Palestinian Information Ministry told the *Jerusalem Post* that hackers had removed the study from an official website, an unnamed Palestinian official told the *Washington Post* that the ministry decided to pull it "because it does not reflect our position."

Taha

told the Associated Press on December 1 that "facts" back his study. "I'm not against the Jews," Taha said. "The research says it's for Muslims, not for Jews." —RNS