



Is Jerusalem Divided?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Conflicts and clashes are not unique to Jerusalem. In Paris, too, there are neighborhoods one would do well to avoid, but no-one is claiming that Paris needs to be divided as a result. Indeed, Jerusalem is the DNA that holds the key to the future of Israel. Those incapable of dividing Jerusalem are also incapable of dividing the land into two states. Israel needs to know why Jerusalem should be a priority; because it is seeking the return to Zion in all regions of the homeland! And if Israel does not insist on this, it will steadily withdraw inward, toward the coastal plain, and edge towards decline.

A significant portion of the media has told us in recent days that the time has come to realize that Jerusalem has been divided for quite a while already. Some of the newspaper headlines were: "The capital is becoming a ghost town," (Ben Caspit, Maariv), and "Netanyahu is dividing Jerusalem" (Sima Kadmon, Yediot Ahronot).

In my view, however, even if Jerusalem appears, at the present time in light of recent events, to be splintering into different parts for Arabs and Jews, this does not necessarily reflect the overall picture and certainly does not indicate future trends. In short: What is happening now is not what will necessarily be, and it is hard to precisely foresee how matters will unfold in Jerusalem.

During a meeting of American and Vietnamese generals after the Vietnam War, both sides agreed that even though the U.S. military had won all the battles, America had lost the war. This is the fundamental distinction between war as a complex phenomenon and say, sports – where the final score and final result always coincide. In

sports there is no option of losing the game while still winning the championship title. War and national struggles are something different. They have a "day after," which is open to developing in a number of ways.

Indeed, the situation has changed. In Jerusalem roadblocks have been erected and checkpoints have been placed at the entrance to some of the neighborhoods. But does this qualify as an irreversible process?

A city the size of a metropolis is characterized by a dynamic of ongoing change. During processes of urban transformation, which develops with no conflict to speak of, poor neighborhoods suddenly become in demand as their appearance changes along with their population; sometimes the opposite takes place. A city as a fluctuating entity can tolerate space-altering struggles, which are inherently susceptible to counter processes.

Despite the special attention it receives, conflicts and clashes are not unique to Jerusalem. In Paris, too, there are neighborhoods one would do well to avoid, where the Paris police department also fails to administer full sovereignty. Is anyone claiming that Paris needs to be divided as a result? Only in recent years did the New York police department manage to gain complete control of the entire city, but does that mean that when Harlem was deemed unsafe for some people, others were arguing that the city must be divided?

It is interesting to point to the nature of the debate surrounding Jerusalem. I have not found even a single person who has changed his opinion about the future of Jerusalem because of recent events. Both sides are in conflict over the city's future, and regarding the questions over its division, each side has found support for its beliefs in recent weeks.

There are those who wish to be rid of the problematic neighborhoods. They ask me: "What is Jerusalem for you? Is the village of Akeb also Jerusalem?" My answer is clear: In my view of Jerusalem as a metropolis, Jericho is also Jerusalem, and what will determine Jerusalem's status is not just what happens within its municipal boundaries but what happens and will happen in the future in its environs.

What will determine its future is also Jerusalem's bond with the fabric of the communities encircling it, near and far. This is the essence of the strength of a city that has never been defined by its trends, rather by how it defines itself. It exists amid a reality which changes inside the city and outside it on a daily basis.

The fate of Jerusalem as a capital will be determined, therefore, by the comprehensive system of bonds it maintains with the city's satellite communities, Jewish and Arab. Strengthening the fabric of the metropolitan area outside the city proper could also influence conflict flashpoints in neighborhoods inside the city.

The fundamental question at the moment is what we want to see happen. Indeed, Jerusalem is the DNA that holds the key to the future of the entire country. Those incapable of dividing Jerusalem are also incapable of dividing the land into two states.

Here is where the debate begins about any course of action on the table. Israel is at a fork in the road, and anything is still possible. We need to know what we are really focusing on by making Jerusalem our priority. We are seeking the return to Zion in all regions of our homeland! And if Israel does not insist on this, it will steadily withdraw inward, toward the coastal plain, and edge towards decline.

(An abridged version of this article appeared in Israel Hayom on 22.10.2015).

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