

BESA CENTER ASSOCIATES IN ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

On Securing Jerusalem

BESA Center associates debate Israel's policy options in responding to Palestinian terrorism and reinforcing Israel's sovereignty in its capital city.

Can and how should Israel act to keep Jerusalem united?

Prof. Efraim Inbar: Israel should signal ferocious determination in opposing any division of the city, and not only because of religious and historic reasons. Jerusalem has strategic importance for the defense of Israel.

Greater Jerusalem is the only place along the ridge of the Judea Mountains that has a Jewish majority and where the road from the coast to the area along the Jordan River that can be travelled without Arab interference. Jerusalem is the linchpin for any defense plan from the East.



Prof. Efraim Inbar

Israel has a clear interest in the stability of the Hashemite Kingdom that signed a peace treaty with Israel, but Israel's national security cannot be based on the assumption that this kingdom cannot be destabilized like other Arab states.

Col. (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman: The bottom line is simple: Carving up Jerusalem – a living city, "still seven times safer than (say) Seattle" – is impossible to implement, no matter how ardently some may wish for this to be done. It would constitute a disastrous retreat from basic Zionist verities and Jewish imperatives. It would tear apart Israeli society. It would reverse the remarkable achievements of nearly fifty years of Israel's custodianship of the unified city; a custodianship not free of failures and blemishes and yet impressive in its outcome.

Jerusalem today is a city of nearly a million residents, a joy to behold, alive with active social and cultural life. And it would ultimately do nothing but harm to the lives of most of the *Maqdisiyyun* (Arab Jerusalemites) – who know already how much better they are doing in comparison with their brothers across the PA line (or else there would not have been so many who make the



Col. (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman

effort to come and live in sovereign Israeli territory).

Therefore, Israeli policy must be directed quietly and confidently at perpetuating Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem; even if a proper delimitation of where does the city end, and some unnecessary accretions begin, may be open to discussion.

What strategies (not just tactics) should the government adopt to ensure exclusive diplomatic control of the city? Should Israel maintain a low profile or move to significantly build new neighborhoods in and around the city?

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Inbar: Israel should continue to build in every part of the city. Moreover, it should encourage Jews settling in the area near and within the so-called Holy Basin. Creating facts on the ground signals determination and makes division of the city more difficult. Generally, Israel should make every effort to separate the issue of Jerusalem from the issue of settlements in the West Bank even if this requires a partial freeze in the settlement activity in Judea and Samaria. Jerusalem is much more important than isolated Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Dr. Max Singer: Firstly, Israel should expand its programs to connect all Israelis to Jerusalem. It is important to act so that ordinary Israelis do not associate the cause of united Jerusalem with the advocates of building a Third Temple, or those who believe that Israel is not Israel if it doesn't have sovereignty over everything west of the Jordan.

Note that "United Jerusalem" does not necessarily mean the current borders of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was smaller before June 1967. It was larger in the UN partition resolution. "United Jerusalem" means, I believe, that the parts of Jerusalem that interact with each other, that one might need to



Dr. Max Singer

travel through to get from one part of Jewish Jerusalem to another, all have a common government that is part of Israel. Outlying Arab villages added in 1967 may be necessary in some situations for security or political reasons, but there can be a united Jerusalem without them.

But Israel should not be negotiating with itself about concessions to the Palestinians in Jerusalem. The Arabs are not now willing to make peace with Israel on any terms. When they change it will be time enough to consider what concessions might be consistent with "united Jerusalem."

Secondly, Israel's public stance should be more positive and defiant than appeasing. This should include emphasis on how the Arab interest in Jerusalem has been almost exclusively in opposition to Jews and Christians, with little attention when in Muslim hands. Israel should also call attention to the terrible Arab record in preserving Jerusalem, in allowing access to other religions, and in keeping commitments.

Nevertheless, Israel's fundamental claim is not that it does a better job of protecting access by all religions. Its fundamental claim is that Jerusalem has long been the capital of the Jewish state in this area and is an essential part of Israel, the Jewish homeland. We will not give it up.

Thirdly, Israel should be building in Jerusalem, especially in the E-1 corridor connecting Jerusalem to Maale Adumim.

Prof. Joshua Teitelbaum: The best way to keep Jerusalem united is to treat all the citizens equally. Anyone who goes to the eastern part of the city can see how much it suffers from neglect. But it is not wise to build new neighborhoods for Jews neither in the



Prof. Joshua Teitelbaum

eastern part of the city nor in the parts of "Jerusalem" beyond the 1967 municipal boundaries. This does not serve any purpose beyond placating the right-wing part of Netanyahu's coalition.

Inbar: Yes, Israel has a clear interest in providing better municipal services to the Arab neighborhoods. According to all polls, a large majority of the Arabs in the city prefer to live under Israeli sovereignty and the idea of transferring them to Palestinian rule is frightening to them. They are not stupid! In fact, any attempt to transfer them to Palestinian rule without asking their opinion is undemocratic. Every effort should be made to strengthen the Arabs' preference to live under Israeli rule. This is also a clear answer to the absurd claim that Israel is racist. Arab-Jewish coexistence in Jerusalem is a prerequisite for peace.

Prof. Eytan Gilboa: For a long time, successive Israeli governments have failed to adopt and implement policies required to keep Jerusalem united. Existing policies have to fundamentally change: Investing much more resources in the Arab sections coupled with the establishment of law and order, full and aggressive enforcement of municipal laws and regulations and conditions of

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basic services, severe punishment of violators, intensive supervision of the educational system, and aggressive preventive actions against cells of Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations.

Beyond that, Israel should start a worldwide communications campaign in favor of United Jerusalem. We should explain the Jewish historical and religious connection to the city, the Israeli excellent record of keeping free access to the holy places vs. the Arab abysmal record of protecting them. In the meantime, Israel should maintain a low profile and only moderately expand existing neighborhoods.



Prof. Hillel Frisch

Prof. Hillel Frisch: It must act to keep Jerusalem united not only for strategic and spiritual reasons. In fact, the spiritual is strategic in the long term since without the spirit any political entity withers.

To keep Jerusalem united, Israel must act more forcibly in eastern Jerusalem and abandon the Dayan legacy of non-interference in Arab political affairs along as they are not violent. Israel has to make sure that the Israeli flag is flown in every public institution, including schools; compel the schools to drop the Palestinian curriculum for the Israeli

one; and take disciplinary measures against school principals and teachers who promote anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish activities in defiance of the law.

The same applies to mosque preachers. These people have to know that the State of Israel has the right to monitor their behavior in public institutions and that they will meet legal sanctions should they flaunt them. We're losing eastern Jerusalem because officialdom is more frightened of the PA and Hamas than it is of Israel. This has to change. The State has to regain its control; in Arabic, *haibat al-sulta*.

Israel should also limit the activities of the foreign consulates in eastern Jerusalem or at least protest some of their activities if these involve mobilizing Arab residents to causes that harm us.

Israel should clearly build new neighborhoods in the city too, not only for its own sake, but to prod the PA to return to negotiations. In effect, not building new neighborhoods means that the PA is winning, especially given the massive highly-subsidized Palestinian building along a continuous north-south axis that is cutting off Maale Adumim and its satellites from Jerusalem. Israel should be building in E-1!

To assuage international concerns, Israel should then be more lenient in allowing Palestinian building in the central areas of Arab Jerusalem, especially in neighborhoods that have not been violent.

Lerman: We live in a world which does not even recognize Israeli sovereignty in western Jerusalem, where the EU is labeling eastern Jerusalem products, and where every construction project, even in neighborhoods that any sensible person knows would always

remain in Israel, gives rise to a political firestorm.

Therefore, the diplomatic challenge is threefold: We need to reunite the Jewish people (and particularly American Jewry) around Jerusalem as a rallying cry. In 1989 this was enough to bring about a 100:0 (!) vote in the Senate acknowledging united Jerusalem as Israel's eternal capital.

At the same time, it is important to impart the verities listed above – namely, that a push for partition would be bad for peace and bad for the real needs of the Palestinian residents themselves – in a systemic and persistent manner. Among other things, Israel should find ways to better engage with the local diplomatic community, who are now almost a captive audience for incessant Palestinian propaganda.

This strategy should be attuned to the political realities which flow from the Israel's own position, and the strong – almost obsessive – international commitment to the two-state solution. It would therefore be necessary, gradually and patiently, to prove that the unity of Jerusalem is not incompatible with future Palestinian statehood. This is a difficult, but not impossible task, which may require creative solutions on the ground.

Clearly, dramatic and demonstrative actions such as major new construction plans would be highly counter-productive in terms of the firm but patient strategy suggested here. They may even endanger the first cornerstone. We already have learned that whether we like it or not, American Jewry will not necessarily stand up to an angry Democratic President, and it is not in our interest to drive them into such corners unless we have to.

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Singer: Israel should act in all ways consistent with the idea that Israel is here by right (without having to rely on Biblical authority); that Israel will stay and defend itself regardless of attacks and difficulties; that united Jerusalem is an inherent and essential part of Israel; and that no one has as good claims to Jerusalem as Israel does.

It is critical to demolish the claim that Israel stole Palestinian land (including Tel Aviv). The first part of Israel's discussion of almost anything should be the statement that there has never been any Palestinian land and therefore Israel never took any Palestinian land; although the Palestinians have claims that might justify giving them some land west of the Jordan even though it was never Palestinian land beforehand. Israel is justly on its territory because of its ancient historical presence; because the decision of the world to create a Jewish homeland in this area; and because Israel defeated its enemies in defensive wars to hold the territory.



Maj. Gen. (res.) Gershon Hacohen

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The struggle for a united and “greater” Jerusalem (from Jericho to Jaffa) is the DNA that holds the key to the future of Israel. 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.

At the height of the War of Independence, in 1948, Ben-Gurion explained why he set the capture of Jerusalem as a primary objective in the war. Speaking before the Zionist General Council, he said, “I don't need to tell you what value Jerusalem has had in the history of the Jewish people and the land of Israel and world. ... If a land has a soul, then Jerusalem is the soul of the land of Israel, and the battle for Jerusalem is paramount, not just in a military sense. ... We are duty bound to stand by Jerusalem, and it deserves it. The pledge we took on the rivers of Babylon is binding now as it was binding then, otherwise we would no longer be able to call ourselves the people of Israel.”

What should be done about the Arab neighborhoods in the no-man's-land on the other side of the security barrier? Act aggressively to reassert Israeli control, or formally cut them out of the city?

Lerman: The trans-barrier neighborhoods – long lost to policing and the provision of basic services, let alone urban planning – present a unique challenge. The absurdities abound, including the inability under the law to provide water to illegally built Palestinian housing. Only a major program of well-planned construction, and/or retroactive recognition (where possible) of much of what has already been done, can change the situation – backed by a much larger security presence.

At the end of the day, Israel's sovereignty in Jerusalem will not be diminished – and may perhaps be enhanced – if some of these places

would ultimately remain outside the unified city. But until such decisions are taken – and they must not be taken under the shadow of Palestinian knives – it would still be necessary both to reassert Israeli sovereignty and to invest in better living conditions for the residents there. At the same time, Israel must stem the tide of illegal entrants.

Singer: There definitely are ways to give Arab east Jerusalemites partial control of the areas where they live without threatening security. Negotiations should be held with local Arab Jerusalemites – probably by neighborhood – not via the Palestinian Authority. There will probably be resistance by Arabs against “normalization.” This can be overcome by providing incentives, neighborhood by neighborhood.

What about the Temple Mount? Is reinforcement of the status quo the right approach to regaining calm, or should Israel be articulating an aspiration/demand for Jewish prayer and other rights on Har HaBayit?

Inbar: Obviously, Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount is a sensitive issue, but Israel should uphold the right of the Jews to pray at their holiest place. An opportune time should be found to implement this right. There will be no peace as long as Jewish presence at the Temple Mount is viewed by Arabs as a provocation.

Singer: Israel will probably have to keep the status quo until things quiet down. And efforts to improve the status quo must be kept rigidly separated from Third Temple groups. In the meantime, Israel should resist the Waqf program to turn the whole Mount into a mosque, and stop Muslim destruction of ancient sites and artifacts on the Mount. Over time, perhaps there may be some chance of using the current overlap

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of interests between Israel and Saudi Arabia to give the Saudis a useful role on the Mount, including allowing fair Jewish presence on Mount including individual prayer.

Teitelbaum: Eventually, the time may be ripe for discussing some kind of heavenly sovereignty over the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, but this is a very long way off. In the meantime, for the Muslims, both the Palestinians and the Jordanians, the very control of the Haram is a religious imperative. Visits by Jews and others are possible, but only at the pleasure of the Muslims. There is thus very little room for compromise. The problem is further exacerbated by outlandish and deadly Palestinian incitement.

While on the face of it the demands for Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount may seem solely an issue of religious freedom, those Jews who support prayer on the Temple Mount are mostly of a religious stream that also wishes to supplant the Dome of the Rock with a Third Temple. This adds to Palestinian wariness of any change in the status quo.

Frisch: In the struggle between any state and a violent national movement, defensiveness, i.e., maintaining the status quo, is a losing proposition in most situations. It's our job to explain the strong relationship between the connection to Judaism's most important site – the Temple Mount – and Israel's collective survival. It's unfortunate that the Arabs are united over the Temple Mount and we aren't. We have to rectify this situation.

How will the current wave of terrorism and violence in the city affect Israeli public opinion for the long-term? Might it undermine the "consensus" on maintaining Jerusalem united?

Inbar: Generally, terrorism, particularly Palestinian terrorism, has limited value in attaining political goals.

Singer: Perhaps the Palestinian violence will make Israelis more determined to keep Jerusalem! We shouldn't panic, nor escalate the situation. Patience and perseverance is required. If it turns out that most of the trouble comes from areas beyond the security barrier, there might be political support for excluding those areas from Jerusalem. As I mentioned earlier, I don't regard that as "dividing Jerusalem."



Prof. Eytan Gilboa

Gilboa: Agreed. Based on historical events and trends, Palestinian violence usually reinforces Israeli determination to defy the demands and intimidations of the Palestinians. The public will remain united in seeking to protect the city's unity. However, there could be calls for the cutting of certain areas around Jerusalem, which aren't critical for the security and integrity of the Israeli capital.

Teitelbaum: The "consensus" about a united Jerusalem is a bit of a mirage, since most Israelis are unfamiliar with the situation on the ground. While they would support Israeli sovereignty over the Old City and certain Jewish neighborhoods built after 1967, it

is unlikely that they would support efforts to install Jews in heavily Arab neighborhoods.

During the first Intifada, the Palestinians let the Israelis know is no uncertain terms that they were no longer welcome in the West Bank and Gaza. Most Israelis internalized this and stopped frequenting these places, as they had often done since 1967. Eventually, the Israeli public supported some kind of withdrawal from the territories. If the current wave of terrorism continues, and particularly if it escalates to gunfire, there is the possibility that Israelis once again might feel they have been given notice, and support some kind of division of Jerusalem.

Frisch: This recent wave of violence indeed provide ammunition to the political Left, especially since most of the perpetrators have come from Jerusalem and Hebron, the two places where there are no good fences that make for good neighbors.

Lerman: It will be long years in the making before we know if our Palestinian neighbors have settled into a pattern of co-existence which would allow for imaginative solutions offering shared sovereignty in a united city, without degrading security and governance. It is precisely because of this, that the question of Jerusalem is best left to later stages of any negotiated agreement, whereupon such mutually beneficial arrangements can be discussed against the background of accumulated experience. Right now the psychological impact of the wave of terror – albeit limited in effect and probably already waning – is very much the wrong moment for any such decisions to be taken.