



## **Jerusalem is More Important than Amona**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Israel must at long last acknowledge Jerusalem's unique strategic significance as well as address the city's demographic challenges in a way that manifests determination to keep it united under Israeli sovereignty. Jerusalem is the place where the future of the Jewish state will be determined.**

The Israeli government is investing considerable energy in preventing the destruction of homes in Amona, Ofra and elsewhere in Judea and Samaria. While the desire to solve the humanitarian problem caused by the inflexibility of the High Court of Justice is understandable, the struggle for Jerusalem is much more important. It is in Jerusalem that the government's best efforts should be invested.

It behooves Israel's government to make Jerusalem its top priority. The incalculable strategic significance of Jerusalem eclipses that of any other hill in the Land of Israel. The government must act on the strong attachment Israelis feel toward the eternal city. Jerusalem is where the country's future will be determined.

The main danger to Israel's securing of a united capital is demographic. The problem is not only the proportion of Arab vs. Jewish residents in the city. The city is inhabited by an increasing number of Ultra Orthodox Jewish residents and a diminishing number of secular Jews. In other words, the modern Zionist majority among the capital's Jewish residents is being challenged.

Secular Jews are leaving partially because they do not feel comfortable with the increasing Ultra Orthodox presence. While Ultra Orthodox residents contribute significantly to keeping a Jewish majority in the city and have other merits as well, they are not perceived as fully sharing the modern Zionist vision and do not seem to participate sufficiently in carrying the defense burden of securing the State of Israel.

Moreover, in the long run, their demographic preeminence might erode the current significant consensus among Israeli Jews (which stands at over 70 percent) to keep the city united and hold onto the Temple Mount. If Jerusalem is seen primarily as a city of Ultra Orthodox Jews (and Arabs), it is less likely to elicit support from the wider Israeli population for the difficult struggles ahead.

With this problem in mind, the government should use economic incentives to encourage young people who have completed their military service to move to Jerusalem. Massive building in all parts of the city should accompany such an effort to restore a clear modern Zionist majority.

The National Religious sector (probably the most idealistic segment of Israeli society and the easiest to mobilize for national endeavors) also needs to change its priorities and award Jerusalem precedence over other parts of the Land of Israel.

Jerusalem's religious and historic importance is self-evident to all Jews (if not, alas, to UNESCO). But the city is also strategically vital. Control of Jerusalem secures dominance of the only highway from the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan Valley, a route along which military forces can move with little interference from Arab communities.

Again, if Israel wants to maintain a defensible border in the east, it must secure the east-west axis from the coast to the Jordan Valley via an undivided Jerusalem. The military importance of Jerusalem and Jerusalem's central role in Israel's eastern line of defense cannot be overestimated, especially given the immense potential for political upheaval east of the Jordan River.

Designing stable, defensible borders in accordance with current, but transient, state-of-the-art technological and political circumstances is strategically foolish. The turmoil of the past few years in the Arab world suggests the need for great caution.

Another source of danger to Jerusalem is the international community. Some parties are still toying with the idea of the city's internationalization, while

others have accepted the notion of a two-state “solution” with eastern Jerusalem as the capital of a putative Palestinian state. Unfortunately, Israeli leaders such as Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert contributed to the erosion of the taboo against dividing Jerusalem (without getting anything in return).

Only a clear Zionist message backed by a significant influx of Jews into Jerusalem can reverse these negative trends.

Jerusalem is a better issue on which to argue with the US and the international community than settlements in other parts of the Land of Israel. Israel’s Jewish population is largely in agreement on Jerusalem; not on Amona. Many Christians worldwide, particularly Evangelicals, understand and sympathize with the Jewish struggle to hold onto Jerusalem. World Jewry, with a few unimportant exceptions, will display support.

Following the deplorable UNESCO vote, Israel should make clear to all that any attempt to deny Jewish links to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is totally unacceptable. It should not hesitate to take to task countries such as France that shamefully abstained on the UNESCO vote. The French and others should be reminded that when the Jewish People prayed at the Temple in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, their nations were no more than a collection of barbarian tribes.

No negotiations with the Palestinians can be conducted as long as the campaign to rewrite history continues. No-one who condones such a rewriting can be a partner for peace. The denial of Jewish roots in Jerusalem is a recipe for continuous conflict.

It is imperative that Jerusalem be placed at the top of Israeli priorities. Failing to do so weakens Israel and amounts to strategic blindness.

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