



## On the Future of Jerusalem

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** A close look at the situation in eastern Jerusalem reveals contradictory movements: radical Islamicization vs. closer integration with Jewish Jerusalem. Both trends are on the rise simultaneously. Despite the complicated circumstances, united Jerusalem under exclusive Israeli sovereignty is the key, not an obstacle, to peace and security in the city.

### 1. Islamicization in Jerusalem

The fireworks and fanfare of the Jerusalem liberation jubilee have shoved under the radar the realities of an unruly situation in eastern Jerusalem. Alarm bells should be ringing about the nefarious intensifying involvement of Erdoğan's Turkey and other radical Islamist groups in eastern Jerusalem political and social affairs.

Details of these dark developments can be found in a recent expose published by Dr. David Koren and Ben Avrahami, the advisors on eastern Jerusalem affairs for the Municipality of Jerusalem. Their article, "Eastern Jerusalem Arabs Between Erdogan and Israel," published in the new Hebrew intellectual journal [\*Hashiloach\*](#) (Vol. 4, May 2017), comes from intimate familiarity with the thicket of contradictory interests, tensions, and disagreements that inform daily life in Jerusalem.

According to Koren and Avrahami, there has been significant erosion in the status of the veteran eastern Jerusalem *mukhtars* and the influence of Fatah political infrastructures and Palestinian Authority leaders. Into the vacuum have stepped elements identified with Hamas, with the northern faction of the Islamic Movement in Israel, and with the Muslim Brotherhood in its wider context.

Through a series of civic associations, nonprofits, and grassroots organizations, sometimes at the neighborhood level and sometimes more extensive, they are investing tens of millions of dollars per year in *dawa* (missionary) activities, mainly charitable enterprises and educational programs to attract the young to Islamic values.

There is a direct line, say the article authors, from civic *dawa* to radicalization and active enlistment in the armed struggle against Israel. This includes active social networking which glorifies terrorists, martyrs, and prisoners, and explicitly calls for violent resistance to Israel. These networks were also the source for the libel that al-Aqsa is endangered by the Jews/Zionists, and for dissemination of an incredible volume of disinformation related to Israeli actions on the Temple Mount.

The authors ask for particular attention to the mounting involvement of Erdoğan's Turkey, which is the worldwide Brotherhood's main patron. Turkey now enjoys unprecedented popularity among the residents of East Jerusalem, the authors write. The Turks' public support of the Palestinian cause and adoption of the al-Aqsa issue, and their decision to inject millions of dollars into East Jerusalem, have won them great sympathy and support.

The Turks fund a great part of the *dawa* activities in the city, with Sheikh Ekrima Sa'id Sabri as the lead Turkish agent. (He is a former grand mufti of Jerusalem appointed by the PA and today the most prominent representative of the Muslim Brotherhood in the city). The Turkish consulate in Jerusalem, the Turkish government assistance agency, and a string of Turkish organizations that have local branches in Israel or the West Bank, are directly implicated in this subversive activity too. As a result, Turkish flags today fly everywhere in eastern Jerusalem and prominently on the Temple Mount as well.

The Turks also have injected significant sums to those who do their bidding on the Temple Mount, for various activities such as Quran-recitation groups, transportation of worshipers to and from the mosque, *iftar* feasts in Ramadan, renovation and cleaning campaigns, and the like. In general, the Islamist forces on the Temple Mount operate, intentionally or not, to Turkey's benefit and the detriment of Jordan. They may believe that the replacement of the Jordanian presence by a Turkish presence would be a positive and welcome development.

The main loser here is Jordan, which long enjoyed the status of Guardian of the Holy Places and protector of the Arabs of Jerusalem. This also is the context of the PA's intensive activity in the international arena, and especially at UNESCO, ostensibly intended to protect the Islamic holy places against an Israeli takeover. This tactic allows the PA to convey to its critics that it is the true defender of al-Aqsa and Jerusalem against the threat of "Judaization," while at the same time gnawing at

Jordan's historic role as guardian of the Mount and seeking to counteract the emerging Turkish dominance in Temple Mount affairs.

Attention should be devoted also to another mounting force in Jerusalem, the Islamic Liberation Party, or *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, which has several thousand supporters in the city. This Salafist group, like ISIS, seeks to proclaim a global Islamic caliphate from al-Aqsa. It has acquired growing influence on college campuses throughout the West Bank, including al-Quds University near Jerusalem. Sheikh Issam Amira of the al-Rahman Mosque in Beit Safafa is the group's most conspicuous preacher, and he enjoys freedom of activity and speech on the Temple Mount.

While the Liberation Party does not advocate violent jihad, some party members could "advance" from a Salafi mindset to a Salafi-jihadist outlook and join the ranks of ISIS. This may explain, say Koren and Avrahami, the presence of ISIS cells and ISIS operatives in Jerusalem, such as Fadi al-Qunbar, who carried out the terrorist truck-ramming attack in East Talpote in early 2017, and the ISIS cell that was apprehended in the Shuafat refugee camp several months earlier.

In short, the disintegration of Palestinian secular nationalist organizations and institutions in eastern Jerusalem, alongside Israeli torpor, has facilitated the rise of Islamist factions and hostile foreign actors.

The enlarged foreign presence in the heart of Israel's capital touches the deepest chords of the issue of Israeli sovereignty in the eastern part of the city; and this presence cannot be easily eliminated.

My conclusion from this is that Israel must move vigorously to "recapture" eastern Jerusalem. While significant security action and determined diplomatic maneuver are clearly mandated, Israel also will have to assume full responsibility for the services that eastern Jerusalem Arab residents need, with major budgetary repercussions.

## **2. Encouraging Integration in Jerusalem**

Koren and Avrahami also present a more optimistic side of the situation. As opposed to the Islamicization described above, they describe a countervailing trend that is gaining steam among eastern Jerusalemite Arabs. Many Arabs, they say, are moving towards greater integration with Israeli society.

To understand this, one must know the numbers and the legal situation.

There are some 320,000 Arab residents in Jerusalem (plus 50,000 residents of Judea and Samaria who reside in the city illegally or by virtue of family reunification). They constitute about 37% of the Jerusalem population and 20% of the Arabs within Israel's

overall borders. About 100,000 of Jerusalem's Arabs live in chaotic neighborhoods that lie within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem but are on the other side of the security fence.

The Arabs of Jerusalem are relatively young and impoverished. According to the National Insurance Institute, 83% of the children in East Jerusalem are below the poverty line, as against 56% of Israeli Arab children and 39% of Israeli Jewish children in western Jerusalem.

Residents of eastern Jerusalem have the legal status of permanent residents, which in practice is the same as that of foreign nationals who want to live in Israel for a protracted period. This status grants them the right to live and work in Israel without the need for special permits (unlike Palestinians in Judea and Samaria). It also entitles them to benefits under the National Insurance Law and the National Health Insurance Law. As permanent residents, they are eligible to vote in municipal but not in national elections.

Obviously, these social and health benefits rank high among the reasons for which Palestinians prefer to live within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, even though they could obtain cheaper and better housing elsewhere.

Eastern Jerusalem Arabs "are entangled in a thicket of contradictions," write Koren and Avrahami. "They assert their Palestinian national identity alongside an unprecedented demand for Israeli citizenship; throw stones at the light rail while using it; harass visitors to Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus but value the care that Arabs receive in its clinics and wards; protest the enforcement of planning and building laws in Arab neighborhoods while calling for an increased police presence there to maintain public order; campaign against any manifestation of normalization with Israel in tandem with a tremendous interest in learning Hebrew and an increasing preference for the Israeli rather than the Palestinian matriculation certificate..."

Koren and Avrahami believe that more and more residents of eastern Jerusalem understand that there is no alternative to Israeli control of the city on the horizon, and that they will always be better off under Israeli administration. In fact, the last Washington Institute survey in eastern Jerusalem, conducted in June 2015, found that 52% of Arab residents would prefer to become citizens of Israel, whereas only 42% would want to be citizens of the Palestinian state, even after a peace accord.

As mentioned, there is a vast increase in the numbers of eastern Jerusalemites filing applications for Israeli citizenship; more than 1,000 in 2016. Other indicators of belonging are the many programs to learn Hebrew that have been established in eastern Jerusalem in recent years; the mounting preference to send children to schools that lead to Israeli high school matriculation; and the soaring demand in eastern Jerusalem for pre-university preparatory programs subsidized by the Israeli government.

Arab Jerusalemites also have responded enthusiastically to the municipality's opening in eastern Jerusalem of employment centers, community councils at the neighborhood level, and a high-tech incubator.

In addition, notice has been taken of the Jerusalem municipality's major effort to reduce the disparities and improve the level of services and infrastructure in Arab neighborhoods, with an emphasis on roads (more than NIS 50 million a year) and classrooms (NIS 500 million over the coming decade).

"In our eyes," write the municipality Arab affairs advisors, "even the protest demonstrations by eastern Jerusalemites in Safra Square, in front of City Hall, are not nuisances, but rather a welcome phenomenon that expresses a de facto recognition that the municipality is the appropriate address for solving their problems. This is the fruit of normalization."

"We believe that, despite their Palestinian national identity, broad sectors of the eastern Jerusalem Arab population have come around to a pragmatic attitude about Israeli authorities. Increasingly, they see Israel not only as a culprit to be blamed for their difficulties but as the only possible source for solving their problems and turning their lives around."

"There are many Palestinians in eastern Jerusalem who have reached the instrumental level of exploiting the advantages offered by the western half of the city and would now like to participate in Israeli society at a deeper level – learning from it, mingling with it, and even joining it. An expression of this is the growing number of eastern Jerusalem teenagers who are doing civil service after high school."

Koren and Avrahami argue that Israel must invest in these propitious trends, for they have strategic implications both for the unity of the city and its security situation. "In another decade or two, the teenagers who today engage more deeply with Israeli society will be the pragmatists who moderate Palestinian society."

During recent rounds of violence, they note, teachers and principals went out into the streets to get their pupils to curb their emotions and avoid attacking innocent persons, both Arabs and Jews. "In another decade, perhaps these teachers will be joined by businesspeople, community activists and cultural figures who endeavor to introduce mutual respect and sensitivity to the turbulent reality of Jerusalem."

### **3. Why Jerusalem Can't Be Divided**

Proposals for political division of the Jerusalem are legion and bandied-about internationally with little connection to reality. These plans were developed with an eye towards allowing slices of the city to become the capital of a Palestinian state; and

for some Israelis, such plans also are meant to rid Israel of problematic parts of the eastern sector.

A thorough consideration of these proposals leads to the conclusion that they are unworkable, unwise, and most of all – unjustified.

The worst plan is that of former MK Haim Ramon (of the Labor and Kadima parties) for unilateral Israeli withdrawal from 28 predominantly Arab neighborhoods in eastern Jerusalem. Ramon would have Israel callously cut 200,000 Arabs out of Israeli Jerusalem and build a very big and impermeable wall between the two parts of the city.

This will save Israel some three billion Israeli shekels (\$850 million) in services to the cut-off Arabs, Ramon argues, and reduce the percentage of Arabs in Jewish Jerusalem from 40% to 20%.

Ramon's proposal for unilateral, brutal division of the city is jarringly reminiscent of the disastrous Gaza disengagement, with the addition perhaps of alligators in a Jerusalem moat and Berlin-style kill zones on either side of the border.

The ugly idea undoubtedly would lead to a worst-possible security situation. The belligerent cleaving of Jerusalem into Arab and Jewish sovereignties would plunge the city into battle. Jerusalem would become the bull's eye of radical Islamic fantasies; a city that would make Belfast at its worst look like paradise.

The main reason for this is that any section of Jerusalem under Arab rule without an Israeli security presence will immediately become Ground Zero for the fierce wars being waged within the Arab world over Islamic lifestyle, ideology and legitimacy.

Each of these forces will seek to prove its supremacy and bolster its legitimacy by gaining control and then attacking western Jerusalem. What better way to prove loyalty to the Islamic cause than to attack the rump Israeli presence in the city (including the Old City) from a base of operations flush up against Ramon's brilliant barrier?

Ramon's plan also ignores the strategic argument that full Israeli control over greater Jerusalem envelope is the linchpin for the country's grand security posture.

As Major General (res.) Gershon Hachohen and Professor Efraim Inbar of the BESA center have written, Jerusalem anchors the critical west-east axis that runs from the coastal plain to the Jordan River.

Israel's long-term hold of the strategic arc from Jaffa to Jericho, they assert, necessitates Israeli dominance in and around Jerusalem. This should be buttressed by settlement in E-1, the expansion of Maale Adumim eastwards, and the reinforcement of Israel's military and civilian presence maintaining a defensible border in the Jordan Valley.

Another plan, which enjoys the support of various Palestinian political elements, would redistrict the city into independent boroughs with separate Palestinian and Israeli municipalities.

No physical barrier would divide the two parts of the city, and a joint agency would coordinate between the two city halls. Somehow, overall security would remain in Israeli hands.

Koren and Avrahami believe that the strongest opposition to this proposal will be voiced by Jerusalemite Arabs themselves – who see the Palestinian Authority as a corrupt and failed regime that has no commitment to provide services to citizens.

They suspect that Jerusalemite Arabs would flee from the eastern to the western half of the city in such a situation, in order to maintain their Israeli health, education and social security benefits, and to enjoy Israeli cultural and political freedoms.

They argue that the “two municipalities” plan also won’t work because it ignores the shared routine of daily life has developed in united Jerusalem in domains such as transportation, employment, healthcare and shopping. This makes municipal division unwieldy and unfair, if not impossible.

“A look at the map of the city makes plain that Arab and Jewish neighborhoods are interlocked and sometimes only a few meters apart, and they live off the same municipal infrastructure. The Jerusalem light rail system, which occasionally has been subjected to a hail of stones by Palestinian rioters precisely because it is a symbol of the utility of a united city, is a good example of this reality.”

Taking all this into account, it is astonishing that many international observers still assume that splitting Jerusalem will lead to prosperity for the city and to peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

More likely, the opposite is true: A partitioned Jerusalem will die, and lead to violence that will suck the lifeblood from the city in every way – culturally, religiously, economically and more.

Consequently, Israel unabashedly should be reminding everybody that for past 50 years it has managed the complicated city with sophistication and sensitivity. It has sagaciously developed the city from a backwater town to a truly radiant international capital city sparkling with energy and creativity – open to all.

Israel should, perhaps, be even blunter, and state core truths such as this: Israel has developed Jerusalem as an attractive city because it *cares*; because Jerusalem is the historic centerpiece of Jewish peoplehood and of the modern State of Israel.

The Arabs and Palestinians, however, don't really care about Jerusalem; they never have. In fact, they would consider it a triumph if Jerusalem were so wracked by conflict and poverty that it was ruined for 1,000 years – just as long as it would be lost to the Jews.

In short, a united Jerusalem under exclusive Israeli sovereignty is the key, not an obstacle, to peace and security in the city. The violent bisection of Jerusalem would be patently unwise, exceedingly unfair to Jewish history, and an undue insult to Israel's fine stewardship of the city.

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