

Jerusalem Master Plan 2000 -- General Analysis and Comments

On May 5, 2009, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat submitted his comments on the Jerusalem Master Plan 2000 to the District Planning and Building Committee, ahead of its deposit for public review. The purpose of the plan, according to the municipality statement, is "to guide and outline the city's development in the next decades." A team of planners, including 25 architects and engineers, put together the plan during the terms of the previous mayors, Ehud Olmert and Uri Lupolianski. Once the master plan is deposited for public review, residents will have three months to submit their objections to it.

The last master plan for Jerusalem was deposited in 1959, and with the exception of neighborhood plans, this is the most comprehensive master plan for the city in the last 50 years. As far as East Jerusalem is concerned, it is the first time that a comprehensive master plan addresses the questions of building and development in the city's Palestinian neighborhoods. The absence of such plans in East Jerusalem during the last 43 years has created a complex and problematic urban situation, as reflected by the extensive construction without permits which, in turn, have led the municipality to demolish many houses in those areas.

Given the great importance of the master plan, which reflects the vision of the municipal and planning authorities in Israel for Jerusalem's future in the next decade, we wish to examine the main references to East Jerusalem in the master plan, the indicative trends, the extent of their feasibility, and their predicted municipal and political consequences.

Amount of building and demographic goals

Jerusalem has more than 260,000 Palestinian residents living in 46,000 housing units, of which 20,000 were built without building permits. The master plan, which cites among its goals maintaining the demographic balance between the city's Jewish and Palestinian residents, provides an additional 13,550 new housing units for the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem, only 10,000 of which will be available for construction by 2030.

Initially, the plan's target date was 2020; but it seems as if postponing the target date by a decade did not take into consideration demographic projections: by the year 2030, Jerusalem's Palestinian population is expected to reach between 400,000 and 500,000, while its housing needs will be 70,000-90,000 housing units.

So that even if the city fully realizes the construction plans mentioned in the outline plan for East Jerusalem, there is already going to be a tremendous shortfall of 15,000-30,000 housing units by 2030. In other words, the Jerusalem Municipality and planning authorities are *a priori* shirking their responsibility for the housing needs of more than 150,000 Palestinian residents of the city in another 20 years.

In other words, the Jerusalem Municipality is going to continue to offer tens of thousands of Palestinian residents the same three problematic options they have today: continued and unbearable crowding within existing buildings; migrating outside the city limits, which threatens Palestinians with a loss of their residency

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rights; and building without a permit, which places them under constant threat of demolition.

Mapping future construction

The master plan concentrates most of the housing units and development plans for East Jerusalem in the outlying northern and southern Palestinian neighborhoods: 2,000 housing units in Jabel Mukabbar, 2,000 in Tel Adasa, and 2,500 in Beit Hanina-Shuafat. In what the Jerusalem Municipality refers to as "central East Jerusalem," it plans to build only 750 housing units.

There is reason to believe that not only urban-professional considerations guided the master plan's delineation of future Palestinian construction and development in East Jerusalem. In fact, the new master plan continues a consistent Israeli municipal (urban building plan 11555) and government (government decision 4090) policy of restricting Palestinian development in the boundaries of historic Jerusalem and routing it to the northern and southern Palestinian neighborhoods, while at the same time encouraging accelerated Israeli development of the area of the historic basin of the Old City. This trend has significant political implications that go beyond municipal issues. Restricting Palestinian construction in East Jerusalem to outlying neighborhoods and limiting it in historic Jerusalem are indicative of Israeli intentions for the future boundaries of the city: "excluding" (in the words of Ehud Olmert) the peripheral neighborhoods in the north and south from Israeli sovereignty, and deepening the Israeli presence in historic Jerusalem while squeezing the Palestinians out of the area.

The feasibility of realizing the master plan in East Jerusalem

Beyond the fundamental issues that the plan raises about East Jerusalem regarding the extent and location of the planned construction, the very possibility of bringing the master plan to fruition is doubtful, due to a number of administrative obstacles. They include:

- In order to realize the building plans according to the new master plan, three conditions must be met:
 1. The existence of an adequate sewage infrastructure.
 2. The existence of an adequate road infrastructure.
 3. The existence of an adequate infrastructure of public buildings.

As a result of continuous neglect and the failure to invest resources, East Jerusalem's infrastructure is in very bad shape and far from meeting the necessary conditions for building according to the master plan. East Jerusalem suffers from a shortage of 70 km of main sewage lines and mostly uses cesspools; the road infrastructure is decrepit and outdated (since 1967 not a single new road was paved in East Jerusalem for the Palestinian population); and the few public institutions that exist are inadequate for meeting the needs of the population (and it will suffice to mention the severe shortage of 1,500 classrooms as an example).

- The master plan stipulates that all new construction must present a permit from the Land Registry attesting to land ownership. This demand makes *de facto* construction in East Jerusalem almost impossible, because since the Ottoman period until now, registration of land ownership in East Jerusalem has not been

systematic.. In the past a letter from the village mukhtar was sufficient to confirm land ownership ; in the absence of that possibility, a Palestinian resident wishing to realize the building options offered to him by the new master plan can expect to face an obstacle course with very low chances of success.

- Palestinian residents also require a permit from the municipality's legal advisor, confirming that no construction violations have been committed on the land in question. This requirement poses an almost insurmountable obstacle, as it involves a complex bureaucratic procedure requiring manpower resources the city itself will be unlikely to marshal, and because, as aforementioned, the absence of an overall master plan for East Jerusalem has led to extensive construction without permits. This requirement actually punishes the Palestinian residents for the authorities' impotence.

The master plan in the political context

Like many other issues in Jerusalem, the issue of planning and construction in the city in particular goes beyond the municipal boundaries and has clear political significance and implications. The absence of an official and comprehensive master plan for East Jerusalem since its annexation in 1967 has had a severe effect on the building in and development of the Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem. When examining the proposed master plan, however, we must remember that it is essentially a political plan drawn by Israeli authorities for an area whose residents are neither Israeli citizens nor do they recognize the legality and legitimacy of Israeli rule in the area.

A closer examination of the plan, from the declaration of its intention "to establish the status of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the center of the Jewish people," to the deployment of the construction plans, attests to the plan's political agenda. The concentration of the prospective Palestinian construction in the peripheral neighborhoods in the northern and southern parts of East Jerusalem, the restriction of Palestinian construction in historic Jerusalem, and the almost insurmountable obstacles in realizing the plan in East Jerusalem all reinforce the hypothesis that the master plan is not driven by honest concern for the urban needs of one third of the city's population, but rather by Israeli interests to control strategic areas while squeezing Palestinian residents out of them. The realization of this master plan will have far-reaching consequences for the feasibility of a political settlement over the future boundaries of Jerusalem accepted by both Israelis and Palestinians, because the plan seeks to sway the results of any future negotiations by establishing facts on the ground and by limiting the possibilities of territorial compromise to those outlying neighborhoods. Advancing this plan as it is, while ignoring the points mentioned above, could exacerbate the already complicated situation in Jerusalem, aggravate the planning chaos and status of construction and public spaces, lead to the collapse of what little infrastructure does exist, and endanger the stability of the city and the region, in addition to drawing criticism from the international community, which is closely following every development in Jerusalem.