

# JERUSALEM: PRESENT HOME AND FUTURE CAPITAL OF TWO PEOPLES



**WRITTEN BY: YUDITH OPPENHEIMER AND ATTY OSHRAT MAIMON | FEBRUARY 2016**

## BACKGROUND

This document was written out of concern for Jerusalem and the communities that constitute the city's fabric of life. Since its founding, Ir Amim has examined the complexity of life in Jerusalem in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, acquiring deep knowledge and expertise regarding the social, economic and political factors contributing to the overall political reality in the city. Against the backdrop of growing tensions in Jerusalem, the objective of this paper is to present an outline for how to de-escalate the violence and implement a policy for managing the city that is informed by hope rather than anxiety.

The successive waves of violence in the city and the absence of prospects for diplomatic progress heighten the acute challenges of resolving the conflict in Jerusalem. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, debilitating to Palestinians in East Jerusalem, also penetrates daily life in West Jerusalem. It disrupts normal routines in both parts of the city, exacerbating mutual alienation and fear among its communities. Government policymaking has contributed to the political stalemate and to the tension surrounding key flashpoints of the conflict: The Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, the Historic Basin of the Old City, and the seam lines between Palestinian neighborhoods and Jewish neighborhoods/settlements. This gridlock, together with other factors, has fueled the recent wave of violence spreading beyond these areas to other parts of the city. As during previous periods of tension, the violence is exacerbated by marked socioeconomic disparities and by the profound discrimination between East and West Jerusalem – in all areas of life – that contributes to a sense of despair and irrevocable impasse.

In the absence of any foreseeable political solution, the city maintains an anomalous status. Its two parts are connected, and in some areas of life they are becoming increasingly mutually dependent. At the same time, the city functions according to profound asymmetries – politically, symbolically and in the allocation of space and resources. This situation undermines the foundation of life in the city now and militates against any possible agreement in the future. Accordingly, there is an urgent need to rethink the management of the city.

## BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

- › **Jerusalem is the present home and future capital of two peoples:** Secure and stable conditions in Jerusalem are possible only on the basis of the recognition that both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples have a political claim to the city, and that both communities in the city will be able to pursue their daily lives and their public and political life in an independent and sovereign manner. Any arrangement in Jerusalem will be reached only through negotiations between the national leadership of both sides, and will be based on this recognition and on solutions that are acceptable to both sides.
- › **A future diplomatic agreement is currently remote:** Those who oppose an agreement exploit this state of uncertainty to create additional facts on the ground, with the goal of preventing any future agreement and sustaining a state of conflict between the two peoples.
- › **Unilateral steps, whether in practice or proposal, play into the hands of those who oppose an agreed upon solution** by creating significant facts on the ground that radically change the opening conditions for future negotiations. Unilateral steps exacerbate inequalities in power, control, and living conditions between the two sides, inevitably leading to further deterioration of living conditions and escalation of violence.
- › **In the current reality, policies must be adopted to improve the quality of life and personal security of all residents of the city;** nurture positive prospects for dialogue between the two halves of the city; strengthen a political climate and practical conditions conducive to a solution; and create infrastructures that can serve as the foundation for greater stability in the city in the present and a sustainable solution in the future.

## GUIDELINES FOR ACTION IN THE CURRENT SITUATION

The management of Jerusalem in the absence of and toward a political agreement must be based on the understanding that the city is the home of two peoples. Both peoples have profound attachments to the city and both will continue to live side by side under any future political constellation. This complicated relationship provides the background to ongoing tensions in the city and to the outbreak of serious violence when national tensions rise. This situation also constitutes the foundation for delicate balances that have enabled and continue to support the city's ability to function up to this point. It is vital to reinforce these balances in order to improve conditions of daily life and to elevate hope for all the residents of the city and the residents of East Jerusalem in particular. Improvements must allow Palestinians to develop their community within their urban space in order to foster daily life in the city and promote the sustainability of any future agreement.

With this in mind, the following steps should be taken:

- › **The existence of East Jerusalem as an organic territorial, demographic, and communal entity connected to the Historic Basin must be ensured.** East Jerusalem is not a random collection of neighborhoods and villages that have been artificially attached to the city and can be arbitrarily disconnected. Just as West Jerusalem includes extensive areas that were not part of the city in the past, East Jerusalem now constitutes a distinct urban domain with a clear functional and historical identity, focused around the Historic Basin. The permanent boundaries of East Jerusalem must be determined through negotiations. Until then, no unilateral territorial or demographic changes should be made in the city, whether temporary or permanent, and whether officially or by means of closures, fences, or construction. Any actions that limit or damage the areas of East Jerusalem must be halted immediately.
- › **The civil status of the residents of East Jerusalem must be determined through negotiations. Until then, it must be established that the permanent residency status of Palestinians living in Jerusalem cannot be revoked.** The residents of East Jerusalem have lived without citizenship for some 50 years. The status of "permanent residency", which requires constant verification, is the only official status under Israeli law available to Palestinians in East Jerusalem. As a result, the collective life of the Palestinian people in their own city – as well as individuals' right to remain in the city – is under perpetual threat. Eliminating the danger that living outside the city limits will result in revocation of Palestinians' residency rights will extend the range of potential housing solutions to the suburbs of Jerusalem outside the boundaries of the city. Such a policy change will reduce pressure on the neighborhoods of East Jerusalem inside and outside the Separation Barrier, and will enhance existential security and life options for the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem by diversifying their access to education and employment opportunities.

- › **An emergency plan comparable to a local Marshall Plan should be introduced for comprehensive systemic and remedial improvements in every aspect of life in East Jerusalem,** including investment in infrastructures, services, housing solutions, education, employment opportunities, and community development. Restrictions on building in the Palestinian neighborhoods should be lifted and house demolitions brought to a full stop. Community planning should be promoted and the community allowed to build institutions to which they will gradually be handed civil management authority.
- › The quality of life in West Jerusalem must also be strengthened by means of municipal and governmental investments and the advancement of commercial and social entrepreneurship. This point should be considered as part of a broad effort to reinforce positive prospects for all residents of the city, reduce tensions, and nurture an atmosphere conducive to dialogue.
- › **It is recommended that commercial and employment initiatives, including knowledge intensive enterprises as well as religious and cultural projects, be established along the seam lines in Jerusalem, in cooperation with Palestinian and international bodies.** These projects would be shared by both sides of the city, contributing to its economy and enhancing its status as a religious and cultural center; and will serve as bridges between the communities, helping to reduce tension, promote a public climate favorable to a political resolution, and provide zones of cooperation and soft boundaries that will enhance the sustainability of a future agreement.
- › **The status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and in the holy places must be observed in both letter and spirit.** Interfaith dialogue should be encouraged in order to bolster moderate religious forces on both sides and encourage discourse based on understanding and consensus.
- › **In the current reality, Israel must take the necessary steps to protect the security of all residents of the city.** It must completely refrain from collective punishment and taking disproportionate steps. Both national leaderships must act resolutely against violence and racism and invest in thorough and ongoing educational programs and public campaigns against violence and racism.
- › **The involvement and participation of the Palestinian Authority and the international community is vital to the development of East Jerusalem** – its rehabilitation and development overall, institutional development, and advancement of joint understandings and projects. Such involvement will also help cultivate and reinforce a political climate that encourages a political solution and enhances its sustainability.
- › **The growth and active involvement of both Israeli and Palestinian civil society should be encouraged,** and each provided optimal conditions to act in the interests of their respective communities. A dynamic and developing civil society in both communities

can play a key role in leading social and community initiatives in planning, housing, employment, access to services, economic and cultural development, and the struggle against racism and violence; and promote a climate, vision, and practical proposals supportive of a political solution.

## **RESPONSE TO CURRENT PROPOSALS FOR A SOLUTION IN JERUSALEM**

The lack of diplomatic progress and upsurge in violence has led to the recent promotion of various proposals outlining unilateral Israeli steps involving separation of Palestinian neighborhoods from Jerusalem as a substitute for an agreement or as an interim strategy. In most cases these proposals have been raised by supporters of a two-state solution, as an alternative to the current political stalemate. The sense of urgency to act in response to the current situation is understandable. The implementation of these proposals, however, is vulnerable to systemic, legal, territorial, demographic, and international problems. Moreover, the proposals themselves are detached from any understanding of the fabric of daily life in Jerusalem and seek to impose radical changes on its residents without any consideration of the current reality on the ground. Such proposals would only serve to exacerbate tensions, escalate violence, and further complicate the feasibility of an agreed upon solution in the future.

- › **Unilateral separation plans cannot offer a vision for a functioning city, and are even less viable for a sustainable agreement.** Such proposals reveal a lack of familiarity with the social structure and fabric of life in the city. The conflict in Jerusalem and in the Middle East is ultimately a conflict between peoples, and can only be solved through negotiations involving both sides.
- › **Interim steps can only be constructive if limited in scope and time, and only** as an integral part of a comprehensive and agreed upon framework.
- › **The heart of East Jerusalem is the Historic Basin**, the center of Palestinian religious, cultural, and commercial life in the city. This area is the home of approximately 70,000 Palestinians – more than 90% of the population of the Historic Basin and about one quarter of the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem. An Israeli “disengagement”, while marketed as a “concession” – a tool for separation between Israelis and Palestinians as an interim step ahead of a two-state solution – in fact constitutes a unilateral Israeli move to disconnect a sizeable part of the Palestinian population from the city while tightening Israel's power over those who remain, as well as its control of the historical, religious, and national assets of the entire Palestinian population. Such a move will inflame the conflict, provoke opposition throughout the Islamic world, and deepen Israel's isolation in the international community.

- › **The disconnection of additional Palestinian neighborhoods from the municipal domain will transform them into enclaves of poverty and profound neglect**, as the neighborhoods of East Jerusalem disconnected from the city by the Separation Barrier already demonstrate. Such steps will disconnect tens of thousands of Palestinian residents from their historic home and source of identity while dismantling physical, social, and economic infrastructures and segregating them into ghettos. Not only would such conditions spell disaster for those affected, destroying communities and undermining their residents' physical and existential security inside and outside the city; they would seriously impair the prospects and opening conditions for any future negotiations.
- › **Local administrations cannot act in a vacuum**, without an organic connection to a space demarcated by a firm political, historical, and local identity and linked to a central government and municipal systems; and will require significant investments in professional resources and expertise, and physical and social infrastructures. The viability of such initiatives will be highly dependent on the cooperation and recognition of the Palestinian Authority, the Arab world, and the international community, without which such initiatives cannot be successful; moreover, the failure of such initiatives will exacerbate emergent problems.
- › **The Palestinian Authority cannot be expected to assume responsibility for decision making from which it has been deliberately excluded**, and which will cause lasting damage to the Palestinian domain in Jerusalem, creating enormous infrastructural, social, economic, and political problems. The official or de facto abandonment of areas by the Israeli authorities, without meaningful ongoing coordination with the Palestinian national leadership and the international community, will lead to political, urban, and humanitarian chaos, with grave ramifications for life inside and outside the city and for a future agreement.
- › **Fear of the ramifications of unilateral steps** will cause Palestinian residents to move to the neighborhoods in the Historic Basin in massive numbers, as well as to Israeli neighborhoods/settlements nearby, e.g. Pisgat Ze'ev and French Hill. This phenomenon has already been demonstrated following construction of the Separation Barrier, which fueled a massive migration of Palestinians from the suburbs outside of the city (e.g. Abu Dis, A-Ram and al-'Izariyya) to the neighborhoods within its boundaries. Threats to separate additional neighborhoods of East Jerusalem from the city will likely trigger a similar response, creating enormous pressure on the city, intensifying flashpoints of friction and hostility in the heart of the city, and escalating and deepening the existing situation in both the separated areas and those that remain within the city boundaries.
- › **Fences and closures are no guarantee of security and can in fact contribute to the erosion of security.** The current wave of violence in Jerusalem is rooted in a cycle of hopelessness, despair, and frustration. Coercive actions that dismantle physical, social, and economic frameworks and lead to a drastic deterioration in quality of life will provoke even greater despair and are a certain recipe for escalation of violence and extremism.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Jerusalem is the present home and future capital of two peoples. Israel must take all possible actions, availing itself of all sources of support, to promote an agreed upon political solution, both despite and because of the current challenges to peace. It must refrain completely from taking any steps liable to impair the future feasibility of such a solution.

In the absence of a foreseeable solution, Jerusalem will remain the city of two peoples who share a complex urban reality held together by a delicate system of mutual relations and, in some aspects, interdependency. These balances enable routine life in the city and relative stability, help calm the city during periods of tension, and provide the basis for building trust and consensus ahead of a sustainable solution in the future. In the absence of an agreement, systems for managing Jerusalem must be premised on recognition of the reality in the city – its complex balance of relations – and implemented in cooperation with the civil societies and elected national leaderships of both peoples, as well as the international community.

Israel must take all possible steps to address the root causes of tension in the city. The most critical steps, in this context, will be improving living conditions and existential security for the Palestinian collective in East Jerusalem; protecting its physical and communal integrity; allowing its development in the urban space; and nurturing positive economic, social, and intercommunal prospects for both sides of the city, in the spirit of the steps proposed herein.



27 King George St., P.O. Box 2239, Jerusalem 94581

Telephone: 972-2-6222858 | Fax: 972-2-6233696 | [www.ir-amim.org.il](http://www.ir-amim.org.il) | [mail@ir-amim.org.il](mailto:mail@ir-amim.org.il)