



Two Sides of the Same Village

The “unified” Jerusalem is a complex and problematic reality standing in the way of a future agreement, to which the members of the Zionist Union still proclaim their vague commitment

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Haim Ramon and Isaac Herzog do not let the facts confuse them when they casually propose severing neighborhoods that are organic to Jerusalem, along with hundreds of thousands of residents, from the city. This begins with the anachronistic but deliberate use of the term “villages” to describe the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. In practice, Issawiya, Beit Hanina, Sur Baher and other East Jerusalem neighborhoods are no more villages than are Pisgat Ze’ev, East Talpiot and French Hill, which were built on their lands and alongside them.

If asked, Herzog and Ramon would be hard pressed to list the 28 “villages” they wish to detach from Jerusalem and would find it even more difficult to identify them on the map, since the number of villages actually annexed with their residents is at least one third smaller. As for the other “villages,” they remained in the West Bank from the outset while Israel annexed parts of their lands and built on them the “village” of Gilo, the “village” of Har Homa, the “village” of Ramot and the “village” of Neve Ya’akov. Do Ramon and Herzog also believe that these “villages” are not part of Jerusalem?

True, the 1967 map changed the reality in Jerusalem unrecognizably; but after nearly 50 years of living under one regime, this reality has taken on a life of its own and can only be unraveled through a delicate and complex process in which both sides are partners. The fact is that Ramon and Herzog, and also Amnon Reshef – who published the separation initiative of the Commanders for Israel’s Security a few days earlier – have not been able to garner support among Jerusalemites for their plans, either on the right or on the left, or even in the imagined center to which they are appealing.

Right of Sharon and Olmert

The “unified” Jerusalem is a complex and problematic reality standing in the way of a future agreement, to which the members of the Zionist Union still proclaim their vague commitment. Both Herzog and Ramon have lost the courage and decency to state honestly to the Israeli public that a resolution on Jerusalem requires deep concessions in the city’s Historic Basin – not only at its margins, and not in a manner that serves only the interests of one side. In this sense they are positioning themselves not only right of the Labor Party’s basic commitments, but even right of Olmert and Sharon.

In a reality in which a political resolution does not appear possible in the foreseeable future, the city owes its ability to maintain day to day operations to delicate balances that enable the flow of daily life and a reasonable level of functioning. Strengthening these balances – not

threats of draconian unilateral measures that push the Palestinians into despair and hopelessness – is the key to maintaining relative stability in the city at this time.

These balances exist without barriers, in public spaces, in workplaces and on the light rail, which transports around 140,000 Israelis and Palestinians every day. These balances express the common sense of Jerusalemite “villagers” from east and west; even if a majority of them did not choose the existing reality, they understand that this is the reality in which they must live for the time being. The fact is that some of the Palestinian assailants have come from the East Jerusalem neighborhoods beyond the Separation Barrier, where neglect and deprivation and discrimination are unbearable, and the Barrier – well built, without breaches – is unable to block the despair.

Jerusalem does not need more threats of closures and barriers but rather a policy of hope that recognizes the deep-seated connection of both peoples to the city and their right to lead lives of prosperity and dignity under any political constellation. There are steps that can also be taken in the existing reality: To improve in a systemic and comprehensive manner the living conditions in East Jerusalem; to encourage economic and social development and oppose racism and violence in both parts of the city; to protect the holy sites of both peoples and the three major religions; and to enable the residents of East Jerusalem to build their institutions in the city and to manage their own lives within it. More bully measures will not be helpful in our village.