

Negotiating with the Palestinian Authority now on the issue of the final status of Jerusalem would guarantee to sabotage the peace process: the gaps between the parties are too big and the question of Jerusalem is too complicated. On the other hand, if we want to push the negotiation forward, we should detour the questions of Jerusalem until the end of this decade. This negotiation situation is very delicate and every statement or proposal offered by someone in a leadership position has the potential to destroy the fragile skeleton of the coming stage of negotiations.

Some may have "creative" ideas and thoughts as to a possible solution for this complicated issue. I myself do not have any magic proposals. I believe that we should step forward and accept a long-term interim agreement. Both sides should learn how to live in peace and cooperation with each other. For the time being, we shall have to agree not to agree

on the issue of Jerusalem.

I am sure that a common agreement on Jerusalem is reachable. But it will be found only after a long process of exchanging views and ideas. Each side will have to compromise and agree on common arrangements like those for Har Habayit, the Temple Mount. Israel should stand on the principle of having a vast Jewish majority in the sovereign City of Jerusalem.

It is not far-fetched.

Haim Ramon, a Social Democrat, is considered to be the closest minister to Prime Minister Barak. Ramon has served as a Member of Knesset for almost two decades. He was the Secretary-General of the powerful Histadrut union and Minister of Internal Affairs. As Minister of Health, he legislated the famous "Health Insurance Act," which ensured universal health insurance. He is married and the father of two children.

Jerusalem: The Final Status Talks

Joseph Alpher

The conventional wisdom is probably right: Jerusalem is indeed the most difficult final status issue and should be left for last on the negotiating agenda. There appears to be no way to reconcile Israel's near-consensus position regarding a united Jerusalem as its capital (more or less all of Jerusalem within the boundaries drawn up in late June 1967) with the Palestinian position demanding Palestinian rule and identity for the estimated 200,000 Arabs in East Jerusalem.

But the remaining Jerusalem issues are negotiable and resolvable. First, the Palestinian demand to locate their capital in Jerusalem could be met by designating areas just outside the Jerusalem borders (drawn up by Israel in 1967) that Palestinians consider Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital. Abu Dis, near the Mount of Olives, is the best known candidate. It was featured in the Beilin-Abu Maazen simulation final status exercise of 1995. It is the same distance, as the crow flies, from the Temple Mount as is the Israeli Knesset on Giv'at Ram in West Jerusalem.

Alternatively, or in combination with this

solution, the two sides could agree to expand the borders of present-day Jerusalem to include both Israeli settlements like Maale Adumim and additional Palestinian villages like Abu Dis, and redivide the city. Yerushalayim, the Israeli capital, would encompass all of West Jerusalem, East Jerusalem from the Old City to the Mount of Olives (the "united Jerusalem" that Israelis and Jews worldwide know), Maale Adumim, and additional outlying settlements and Jewish neighborhoods. Al Quds, the sovereign Palestinian capital, would include not only Abu Dis, but also some Arab villages on the far ridge of East Jerusalem (such as Sur Baher) and/or Arab neighborhoods at the northern tip of Jerusalem where urban spread has merged them with Ramallah, which in any case is rapidly emerging as the de facto Palestinian capital. Al Quds would *not* include Israeli neighborhoods in East Jerusalem.

This plan would both reduce the number of Palestinian Arabs under Israeli rule and give Palestinians additional real estate that they consider to be part of Jerusalem. The PLO and the Arab world



would recognize West Jerusalem as Israel's capital, thereby finally giving international legitimization to Israel's claim and enabling the rest of the world to follow suit and relocate their embassies. Israeli Jerusalem would actually increase in size, and the parts of present-day Jerusalem that it would cede are peripheral. This solution was also discussed by Beilin and Abu Maazen. Parts of it have been reportedly floated by Prime Minister Barak, and, at least for now, rejected by the PLO.

Second are the holy places, where the parameters of a solution are self-evident. Israel has never evinced a desire to control Christian or Muslim holy places. From the day it conquered the Temple Mount in June 1967, it has allowed the Muslim Waqf (then Jordanian, now PLO-appointed) to remain in autonomous control over the mosques on the Mount. The PLO has been designated, by default, by the Muslim world to take responsibility for Muslim holy sites. Even Jordan, after having been accorded a role in negotiations over Jerusalem in its peace treaty with Israel, now defers to the PLO. The Christian world also appears to be deferring political control over its holy places to Yasir Arafat, turning over the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem to the Palestinian Authority in 1995, which established an important precedent. Yet Israel must still find a way to recognize a symbolic Palestinian relationship regarding non-Jewish religious sites in Jerusalem without compromising its sovereignty.

This returns us to the truly thorny issue: the sovereign status of the Old City and East Jerusalem, the heart of pre-1967 Arab Jerusalem. For Israel to make any concessions here is to re-divide the city — a solution rejected by a broad Israeli consensus. For Arafat to acquiesce to Israeli sovereignty is equally unacceptable to Palestinians. Here Israel's dilemma is twofold: it controls tens of thousands of Palestinians (probably 150,000, not counting outlying villages) who do not wish to be ruled by Israel. And it controls land that has far-reaching religious significance for Arabs. The current guiding principle of Israeli peacemaking with Palestinians is separation. The only way to apply this principle in Jerusalem is, indeed, to divide the city along Jewish-Arab demographic lines. A

small but growing number of Israelis on both the Left and the Right appears to recognize this. This is also the PLO proposal, which includes a provision for a special status to be applied to the Old City.

In this context, it seems pointless to argue — as some do with considerable reason — that many Arab Jerusalemites are suspicious of Arafat's rule, or that the Arab and Muslim worlds only *rediscovered* Jerusalem as a religious and national icon after Israel conquered and rebuilt it. Israel has had 33 years to integrate Arab Jerusalem into a truly united city and has failed.

We are likely to be left, even under the best of circumstances, with only half of a Jerusalem solution.

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This will be sustainable if all other aspects of Israeli-Palestinian final status — borders, settlements, water, security, refugees, and sovereign status — are resolved. Israel can still offer far-reaching municipal autonomy to Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem. And the two sides can agree to disagree over the sovereign status of the eastern parts of the city, perhaps revisiting the issue after a fixed period of time.

But will Arab-Jewish tensions in Jerusalem be exacerbated or reduced? The answer to this key question will depend on the overall success of final status — an experiment in Israeli-Palestinian separation cum coexistence.

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