



Preempting Jerusalem

Muna Hamzeh-Muhaisen

Under the terms of the Wye Memorandum, Israel and the Palestinians were meant to have launched the final-status negotiations last November 18th. An official opening ceremony of the negotiations—to address the issues of Jerusalem, refugees, borders, and water—was meant to have taken place during the last week of November.

With the subsequent breakdown in the peace process, the commencement of the final-status negotiations has once again been postponed. Even before they begin, however, it appears that the Palestinians will be forced into accepting a shabby deal

that will do little more than ensure Israel's continued control over Palestinian land and therefore their continued occupation of the Palestinians.

By November 20th, when Israel started the first phase of West Bank redeployment as stipulated in the Wye Memorandum, Israeli authorities had already set the stage for legal procedures to confiscate an additional 10 percent of the West Bank, estimated at 125,000 acres. The Israeli intent is, of course, to expand the size of Israeli settlements before the final status negotiations on the permanent borders. When this 10 percent goal is reached, Israel will have actually compensated itself for the 13 percent of West Bank land slated for redeployment in the Wye Memorandum.

When it comes to Jerusalem, the picture looks just as bleak. In an attempt to guarantee its continued control over the disputed Holy City, the Israeli Government is steadily imposing new facts on the ground that, if realized, will virtually render Jerusalem un-negotiable.

A quarterly human rights report issued by the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (LAW) provides some staggering data about Israel's policies in Jerusalem, policies aimed not only at expanding the city's boundaries but also at reducing the number of Palestinians who live there. In what follows, drawing on the recent data in the LAW report, I first review the demographic engineering underway in Jerusalem and then examine the Israeli policies of annexation and expansion. Finally, I consider the ramifications of

these measures for the viability of a future Palestinian state.

ID Card Confiscation and Residency Rights

Jerusalem identity cards not only determine access to municipal services, health insurance, and building permits but also give their holders the right to live and work in the city. Yet since 1967, as part of Israel's policy of ethnically cleansing the Palestinians from the city, nearly 4,000 Palestinians have had their Jerusalem identity cards confiscated.

This policy has been accelerated since the signing of the Oslo Agreement. In 1996 over 689 ID cards were confiscated, constituting a 600 percent increase from the previous year. According to the Israeli Ministry of the Interior, nearly 436 Jerusalem ID's were confiscated by Israeli authorities between January and August 1998 (a rate of ID confiscation estimated to be the same as in 1997).

Furthermore, the Israeli government adopted a policy in 1994 whereby Jerusalem is required to be "the center of life" for anyone holding an ID card. Palestinians soon discovered that temporarily moving away from Jerusalem—for educational purposes, for instance—constitutes reason enough for them to have their ID cards retroactively confiscated.

The Israeli authorities have also refused to issue Jerusalem ID cards to Palestinians from the West Bank who have married a Jerusalem resident. As a result, children who have one parent with a West Bank ID and one parent with a Jerusalem ID have been refused Jerusalem residency rights.

So far, more than 4,000 families have been affected by this policy.

House Demolitions

Jerusalem residents are subject to restrictive zoning laws that severely affect the Palestinian population. By refusing to grant building permits, Israel continues to control the growth of the Palestinian population in the city. Consequently, overcrowding is a major problem in Palestinian areas, bringing with it numerous associated health and social problems.

As a result, Palestinians are forced to build houses without permits only to be faced with demolition orders from the Israeli authorities. Jerusalem's Mayor, Ehud Olmert, has recently declared that 2,600 Palestinians have built illegally in the city and has subsequently embarked on a house demolition campaign. So far in 1998, nearly ten Palestinian homes have been demolished.

Settlement Expansion and Land Confiscation

The Israeli government approved a plan on June 11th, 1998 that would annex more land around Jerusalem and formalize "Greater Jerusalem" under an umbrella municipality of local councils. Incorporating an earlier plan drawn up by an Israeli inter-ministerial committee in 1995, this "Metropolitan Jerusalem Plan" demarcates three borders for Jerusalem—the municipal border, the Greater Jerusalem border, and the metropolitan border. The largest of these, the metropolitan border, covers 40 percent of the West Bank and includes the major

Palestinian population centers of Ramallah and Bethlehem.

Furthermore, the plan calls for the illegal Jewish settlements of Givat Ze'ev and Ma'ale Adumim, as well as other areas inside the Green Line, to be incorporated into the so-called "Greater Jerusalem" area. It further stipulates the acceleration of bypass road construction in the West Bank, including an eastern ring road around Jerusalem connecting settlements in the south with those in the north. A second ring road, known as the "Menachem Begin Highway" was opened on June 22nd.

Finally, the plan proposes the construction of 142,000 apartments in the Jewish part of the city, including the construction of illegal settlements. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has openly claimed that the motivation of the plan is to keep the Palestinian minority down to a population level not exceeding 30 percent of the total.

Greater Jerusalem

A major component of the "Metropolitan Jerusalem Plan" is the area known as "Greater Jerusalem," which is the key to the consolidation of Israeli sovereignty and Jewish majority in Jerusalem. Comprising 440 square kilometers, less than a quarter of "Greater Jerusalem" lies within Israel's pre-1967 border. The Greater Jerusalem plan is meant, in part, to combat an expected demographic parity between Palestinians and Jews, largely due to the higher birth rate in the Palestinian population. To solve this problem, Israel plans in the next 15 years to raise the population of Israeli settlements inside "Greater Jerusalem" from 50,000 to

250,000. These settlements are known as the "outer-ring" settlements and include Giv'at Ze'ev in the North, Ma'ale Adumim in the East, and Betar and Efrata in the south.

Following the planned increase of the settlement population in East Jerusalem—including the building at Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa)—the number of settlers living in the "inner-ring" is also expected to reach 250,000, thus raising the total settler population of Jerusalem to 500,000 in the next 15 years. When this settler population of 500,000 is added to the population of West Jerusalem and the surrounding areas due to be included in the "umbrella municipality," the Israeli demographic goal of 70 percent Jewish and 30 percent Palestinian residents will have been reached.

Additionally, the "Greater Jerusalem" plan includes the E-1 development plan for the area between East Jerusalem and the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim. This area is earmarked for a massive infrastructure expansion, including 10 hotels, which would increase the size of the area of Ma'ale Adumim to 60 square kilometers—an area 20 percent larger than Tel Aviv. E-1 would not only link Ma'ale Adumim with Jerusalem, but would also bisect the surrounding Palestinian areas and impose severe consequences on the development of Palestinian life in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.

Jerusalem, after all, is the religious, political, cultural, and economic center of Palestinian society, and cutting it off from the West Bank would impose economic strangulation. This is even truer considering that both trade and movement

from the West Bank and Gaza have two natural routes that run through Jerusalem. One route runs from Nablus in the north to Hebron in the south. This route is now interrupted by Greater Jerusalem, by the Israeli settlements that cross the West Bank, and by the numerous checkpoints restricting the movement of Palestinians. The second route runs from Gaza to Jericho through East Jerusalem along a horizontal axis.

Since East Jerusalem is the key to Palestinian development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the completion of Israeli plans for Jerusalem would concentrate the Palestinians into cantons cut off from one another and with no possibility of economic expansion.

But it looks like Israel is planning to offer the Palestinians an economic "way out." Early in November, Israel submitted a proposal to the European Union suggesting a separation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip between areas economically controlled by Israel and areas under Palestinian economic control. Press reports indicate that the European Commission has agreed to review the proposal as part of the steps being taken to lift the barriers on Palestinian foreign trade and to settle the issue of export from the settlements. If the EU approves this plan, the Israeli-European Free Trade agreement would apply in West Bank areas under Israeli control, and the Palestinian-European Free Trade agreement would apply in areas under Palestinian control.

Apparently, the most that Israel intends to concede in the final-status negotiations is precisely this cordoning off of Palestinians into cantons that have been

granted some meager level of economic independence. If Palestinian President Yasser Arafat goes ahead and declares Palestinian statehood in May 1999, it is unlikely that Israel would object to such a state. True, Israeli officials now create a media uproar whenever the subject of Palestinian statehood is brought up. But then the Israelis are masters of the public relations game and, at least for now, have to appease the Israeli right. In the long run, however, it would serve Israeli interests to squeeze the Palestinians into an "independent" state of isolated Bantustans and then tell the world that they have kindly agreed to Palestinian statehood for the sake of "everlasting" peace. The question is, would this kind of peace really last?

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