



Jerusalem

Promises, Promises

"Everything possible should be done to ensure equal government, municipal, and social services in all parts of the city."

"The level of services and infrastructure in the Arab sector is far below that of Jewish neighborhoods. There is a desperate need for emergency allocations to improve the physical and social infrastructure in east Jerusalem, and to begin doing so immediately."

"We have no right to say that the city is unified, because there is no practical application to corroborate this. Millions of shekels must be spent to bridge the differences in infrastructure and services."

"It is impossible to speak of united Jerusalem without decent treatment of east Jerusalem residents. Everything possible must be done so that they receive equal treatment to residents of west Jerusalem."

These pleas for urgent action come from 1977, 1992, 1996, and 1999 respectively, and represent the views of former Mayor Teddy Kollek, current Mayor Ehud Olmert, and Ehud Barak's new Interior Minister Natan Sharansky.¹ Asked about the last remark by Sharansky, a Palestinian who had been waiting in line since four in the morning at the East Jerusalem Interior Ministry building said, "I have heard such talk before. These are just promises."²

Why do such promises keep getting made, but never fulfilled? The promises point to the bind that the Israeli government finds itself in in trying to impose its rule over the city. Israel wants to expand Jewish housing and population and make it impossible for the Arab part of the city ever to come under Palestinian national control, which means doing everything to push Palestinians out by making normal community development and expansion impossible. At the same time, it wants to de-politicize and pacify the Arab population, reduce them to a

docile, purely ethnic minority in the larger "mosaic" of the city, a minority without national aspirations, and in doing so project an image of benign Israeli rule—all of which means improving conditions for them and keeping up at least the appearance of equal services.

Obviously the former aim conflicts with the latter. Because the first goal has priority, programs for improving Arab life are only implemented grudgingly when the neglect is becoming so egregious as to damage Israel's public relations effort. Even then, the few projects undertaken are purely cosmetic ones to help Israel save face and to contain the Palestinians. Meanwhile, the policies aimed at bolstering the Jewish presence and driving out the Arabs do just what the other policies seek to avoid, namely, divide the population. They also produce a vacuum in services in the Arab parts of the city that Palestinian institutions end up filling, further dividing the city. Thus periodically Israeli commentators and politicians express alarm at the consequences of their own policies and call for improvements for Arab residents.

The superficial humanitarian concern of the above remarks conceals a cynical Machiavellianism. These officials have no real concern to improve conditions for Palestinians as a matter of human rights and welfare. On the contrary, they are only interested in helping them in so far as doing so serves Israeli rule. A new book by two former municipal officials who worked under Teddy Kollek and by a *Jerusalem Post* journalist who covered Jerusalem during the Kollek years confirms the extent to which these hegemonic considerations,

¹ The quotations are from the following: Teddy Kollek, "Jerusalem," *Foreign Affairs* 55, no. 4 (Summer 1977), p. 704; letter from Kollek to finance minister Avraham Shohat, 18 September 1992, cited in Amir S. Cheshin, Bill Hutman, and Avi Melamed, *Separate and Unequal: The Inside Story of Israeli Rule in East Jerusalem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 26; "Israel on East Jerusalem Spending Spree," *Palestine Report*, 9 February 1996; Ben Lynfield, "Sharansky Favors End to Revoking Jerusalem Residency Permits," *Jerusalem Post*, 21 July 1999, p. 2.

² Lynfield, "Sharansky Favors End," p. 2.

bereft of any concern about rights, dictated Kollek's policies towards Arab residents:

Kollek believed he could buy peace and quiet in east Jerusalem by improving services and carrying out public works projects to make the Arab residents feel they are being treated fairly. Publicity was a central part of Kollek's policy. He repeatedly told aides that no matter how small the project they were carrying out in east Jerusalem, they should try to get big media attention. If a new road was built in east Jerusalem whose opening was not publicized, it was a waste to even build it, according to Kollek. Publicity meant letting the Arab residents know the city was taking action to improve their living conditions. Publicity was also aimed at showing the world Israel was a fair ruler.³

In this passage, and throughout the book, we see in Kollek a mind that has reduced and objectified the "Arabs" to a mere "problem" for Israeli rule, one to be "solved" via the calculations of instrumental reason. There is no indication that he ever once considered the welfare of the city's Arab population as an end in itself. The only reason to meet their needs was to co-opt them into the Israeli system and project an image of benevolent Israeli rule. Otherwise, in his view, doing so was a waste of resources.

As Sharansky's remark above suggests, the new Barak government, which shares the same commitment to a "unified"

Jerusalem as all previous administrations since 1967, is likely to continue to pursue the same contradictory aims with the same results. At most we can expect a slight shift in strategy of the sort represented by Sharansky's own proposal that the Interior Ministry stop revoking the residency permits of Palestinians. Far from being a benevolent gesture, this is a response to the policy's failure to achieve its aim. The new policy of revoking the residency permits of Palestinians unable to prove that Jerusalem is their "center of life," a policy instituted in 1996, has backfired, causing an influx of Palestinians back into the city, not to mention generating bad publicity.⁴ Indeed the reason Israeli officials did not stringently enforce the existing law prior to 1996 was precisely to encourage Palestinians to migrate out of the city. By assuring Palestinian residents that their moving outside the municipality would not jeopardize their residency status, they hoped to reduce the Arab population of the city.⁵ Sharansky is merely reverting to the old tactic. This kind of strategic shift is the most substantial change that the new Labor government is likely to make in Israel's policies towards Jerusalem. The overall aim of "unification" will persist and all the major settlements within the municipality and within the "Greater Jerusalem" area will remain in place.

Barak has made all this clear. On the question of sovereignty Barak's position is: "Jerusalem, united and under our rule forever, period." On the question of settlements he is equally explicit: "I'm not

³ *Separate and Unequal*, pp. 190-91.

⁴ "Backfired," *Palestine Report*, 16 April 1999.

⁵ *Separate and Unequal*, pp. 148-49.

going to build new ones, I'm not going to dismantle any one of them. Israeli citizens are living in them. They came to these places most of them through an approval of the Israeli government. We are responsible for them. ...I believe in strong blocks of settlements that will include most of the settlers in Judea-Samaria and the Gaza Strip."⁶ Clearly, in this view, none of the major outer ring settlements just outside Jerusalem's municipal boundaries will be dismantled, let alone the "neighborhoods" within the municipal borders. At most one can expect that a concern for public relations will influence the timing with regard to implementing settlement expansion plans.

Take, for instance, Likud Defense Minister Moshe Arens' recent approval on 27 May of a master plan connecting Ma'ale Adumim with Jerusalem. The plan will increase the municipal territory of the already massive settlement by some 10,000 dunams (2,500 acres), extending its border

westward to link up with Jerusalem.⁷ Far from this plan representing Likud extremism, it was originally conceived in 1993 during Yitzhak Rabin's term as Prime Minister, and its implementation was delayed by Netanyahu's defense Minister

Yitzhak Mordechai out of fear of damaging the peace process. Indeed Rabin not only authorized the creation of the settlement, but also pushed to make it the first settlement officially recognized as an Israeli city, and oversaw an earlier 3,000 acre expansion.⁸ So far, Barak has declined to take a public position on the plan, though his new Justice Minister Yossi Beilin spoke out against it, calling it a "provocation."⁹ Clearly any delays in its implementation will signal only a tactical change on the part of Labor based on a concern for public relations, not any difference in underlying commitments.

The Case of the Absent-Bodied Professor

As we went to press last July, Professor Musa Budeiri, director of regional studies at al-Quds University and a member of the board of this journal, had his passport impounded by the Israeli Ministry of Interior and was given 30 days to leave the country because "he travels frequently out of the country" and "holds a second [British] passport." Budeiri was born in Jerusalem and has been living here most of his life. His grandfather was the Head of the Shari'a Court in Jerusalem, succeeding many generations of Budeiris who served in the public life of the city and the country. The order came a few days after Mr. Anatoly Sharansky, the new Israeli Minister of the Interior—and himself a Russian immigrant to Israel—declared that Arab Jerusalemites would cease to lose their residency in the city if they established their domicile outside the city.

⁶ Whitehouse Transcript of Clinton-Barak Press Conference, Thursday, 15 July 1999.

⁷ Amos Harel, "Settlement to be attached to Capital," *Ha'aretz*, 28 May 1999.

⁸ Deborah Sontag, "New Path of Israeli Settlers: Moving Toward Mainstream," *New York Times*, 21 July 1999.

⁹ Danna Harman, "US, PA denounce Ma'ale Adumim Expansion Plans," *Jerusalem Post*, 30 May 1999.

Exemplifying this concern for PR, on 22 July Barak's government announced that it would allow the Orient House to stay open, lifting the closure order by the previous government.¹⁰ Meanwhile, behind the scenes, it is business as usual. While refusing to take a position on the Ras al-Amud project, Barak has apparently given the Ma'ale Adumim plan and the Har Homa construction project his approval in a secret agreement with the National Religious Party.¹¹ Confirming these rumors, One Israel's Haim Ramon, the new minister for Jerusalem affairs in the Prime Minister's Office, was reported by *Ha'aretz* as saying that while he will oppose Jewish construction at Ras al-Amud, he believes it is too late to stop the development of the Jewish "neighborhood" on Har Homa.¹² Even this opposition to the Ras al-Amud project is purely tactical. *Ha'aretz* reported that according to sources close to Irving Moskowitz, "Barak gave his initial approval for plans to build at Ras al-Amud several years ago, during a brief interlude in which he served as interior minister under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin."¹³ Also worth recalling is that even after damaging revelations in 1993 of illegal Likud support for settlements in the Old City and Silwan, the Labor government did nothing to dismantle the settlements or to restore the properties to their Arab owners, but merely ordered a halt to state funding for the

purchase of Arab homes in East Jerusalem.¹⁴ In other words, if Barak's government is now talking about halting construction at Ras al-Amud, it simply indicates that Labor is less concerned about support from right-wing settler parties than Likud was, and more concerned about international public opinion and the superficial gestures that facilitate the "peace process."

Clearly, the Israeli government, no matter what party is in power, will try to do whatever it can get away with to advance the Jewish presence in Jerusalem and preserve Israeli control over the whole city. Little is preventing it from implementing its policies at full steam but the fear of international condemnation. The same can be said of the current US administration, which would clearly move the US Embassy to Jerusalem tomorrow were it not for the force of international public opinion. Meanwhile, the US Congress, which cares far less about international opinion than about support from the pro-Israel lobby, continues to pressure the administration to move the embassy and fully recognize Israeli sovereignty over the city.¹⁵ These facts suggest that there is a critical role for popular protests and activism and public relations efforts to raise awareness of Israeli policies in the city. For the pressure of international public opinion has in the past dramatically slowed and postponed Israeli as well as US actions, if it has not prevented them.

¹⁰ Margot Dudkevitch, "Hussein: Orient House won't be a PA political center," *Jerusalem Post*, 22 July 1999.

¹¹ "Jerusalem Chronology," *Jerusalem Monitor*, June/July 1999, p. 7.

¹² Nadav Shragai, "Ramon says it's too late to stop Har Homa - but not Ras al-Amud," *Ha'aretz*, 7 July 1999.

¹³ Nadav Shragai, "Construction at Ras al-Amud kicks into High Gear," *Ha'aretz*, 6 July 1999.

¹⁴ *Separate and Unequal*, p. 219.

¹⁵ Thomas W. Lippman, "U.S. Embassy in Israel to Remain in Tel Aviv; Clinton cites Peace Talks, National Security in Decision to Waive Relocation Law," *Washington Post*, 19 June 1999, p. A14.