



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE QUESTION OF JERUSALEM

“The Question of Jerusalem after 50 years of Occupation and 25 years of the Oslo Accords”

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

PLENARY II

The Question of Jerusalem in international law and Member States’ obligations

Israeli non-compliance and civil society action

Paper presented by

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Jerusalem – "The March of Follies" 1967-2017

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My Personal "Jerusalem Syndrome"

The 7th of June, 1967, remains fixed in my memory until today. In the midst of the Six Day War I entered the Old City of Jerusalem with my paratrooper brigade. It was for me a dream fulfilled. As a youngster I had been preoccupied with the dream that one day I would see a unified Jerusalem. I belonged to the Betar Youth Movement which, in Israel of the 1950's and 1960', viewed unification of Jerusalem as its 'banner'. At age 16 I came up with a crazy idea, to steal over the border between Israeli and Jordanian Jerusalem and to blow the shofar near the Wailing Wall, situated at that time in Jordan. On the eve of Yom Kippur, 1962, I went up to Mount Zion, on the Israeli side of the city where I knew my hero, the national poet Uri Zvi Greenberg, would pray every year, facing the Old City. I came to get his blessing for this absurd idea and was very offended when Greenberg shouted at me "Are you crazy? You will be shot dead by the Jordanian Legionnaires before you even pass the border, and your symbolic sacrifice will be in vain. That is not the way to liberate Jerusalem. Israel and its army should liberate our city and it will happen one day, and you, my young friend, you will live to see it, I promise you". I returned home very disappointed. At that time, only a tiny minority of Israelis thought that Israel should take over the Old City, which was in Jordanian hands since 1948.

A few years later, as history would have it, I belonged to the paratrooper unit that entered the Old City on June 7th, 1967. I was wounded that morning, receiving shrapnel to my head, and was evacuated to Hadassah Hospital for surgery. Lying in bed I listened to the radio report describing my paratroopers' battalion reaching the Wailing Wall. Unable to bear the thought of missing this historic moment, I escaped from the hospital, my head bandaged, and hitchhiked back to the Old City. Within a few hours I was celebrating with my paratrooper friends near the Wailing Wall. I stood there weeping and placed a scrap of paper between the old stones, with a prayer of a single word, "Shalom", Peace. I was sure that this great victory would enable my country to attain its

goals, the unification of our capital city and peace with the Arab world. Like most Israelis I was convinced that this dream would come to fruition in a matter of months.

But my dream of Jerusalem's unification and peace for my country was shattered by reality over the course of the next fifty years. In Jerusalem and only in Jerusalem we can identify the pathological phenomenon known as the Jerusalem Syndrome. It's a well known condition whereby some 200 tourists annually develop symptoms of messianic delusion. Disconnected from reality, they believe they have been sent by God to redeem Jerusalem and thereby their own souls. With hindsight, it now appears that I was suffering from a similar delusion. The problem was that I was not alone. In 1967 the entire country felt that way. Fifty years later I can only lament our naiveté. In place of our hope for peace, we are still at war with the Palestinians. Jerusalem has become the central symbol and main obstacle to peace not only between us and the Palestinians but also a critical issue within the Arab states and, in actuality, the entire Muslim world, who cannot abide the Temple Mount under the Israeli flag.

1987 - A First Israeli-Palestinian Agreement on Jerusalem between Faisal Hussein and Myself

Twice in the past, I attempted to find common ground for a solution based on peace between our peoples and agreement on a political solution for the city, along with my Palestinian colleague and friend, Faisal Hussein, the head of the Palestinians and a close associate of Yasser Arafat. In the summer of 1987 I was a member of the Likud Party Central Committee and a close friend to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. My talks with Hussein was the first time ever that an Israeli and a Palestinian on this political level attempted to reach mutual understanding on the city of Jerusalem, and, for that matter, the first time that an Israeli and a Palestinian on this level attempted to find common ground to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

During our meetings we arrived at a mutual agreement based on two capitals in one city. We agreed that the eastern neighborhoods of Jerusalem would be Al Quds, the capital of Palestine. The Old City, which constitutes only 1 square kilometer of the total 130 sq kilometers of Jerusalem, would be an open city, not divided but managed jointly by Israel and Palestine. The

Temple Mount would be without flags and its sovereignty would be for God. This term, sovereignty of God on the Temple Mount, was agreed upon both by myself and Hussein in order to find the solution to the most crucial issue in the Jerusalem dilemma.

In actuality, the Temple Mount had already become symbolic of the clash between Zionism and the Palestinians, from the beginning of the 1930's. The Palestinians adopted this issue from then on as their banner, in order to rally the Arab and Muslim world behind them.

Hussein and I failed to bring Arafat and Shamir to agree not only on the terms for Jerusalem but even to undertake negotiations.

Our secret talks were exposed and Prime Minister Shamir jailed Hussein in December, 1987, leading to the outbreak of the First Intifada. One of the first demands of that intifada was Hussein's release from prison.

In my opinion, the failure of this opportunity to open a peace venue for the Palestinians instigated the frustration that led them into the intifada that changed the Middle East from that moment on.

Years later, in July 2000, Hussein and I found ourselves, once again, attempting to find common ground for our peoples. This was at the Camp David summit when the three leaders, U.S. President Bill Clinton, Israeli Premier Ehud Barak and Chairman Yasser Arafat, attempted to conclude a peace agreement. At these meetings, Hussein held the Jerusalem portfolio for his people and I held the same portfolio as advisor to Prime Minister Barak. We both brought our mutual ideas for solutions to this conference for what was clearly the most complicated issue, Jerusalem. As had occurred some years earlier, once again we failed to bring our leaders to the kind of agreement the two of us had reached in the course of many years of friendship. At the end of the day, the Camp David Summit in 2000 failed mainly over the issue of Jerusalem.

My Book Jerusalem Syndrome

Some years later I wrote my academic book Jerusalem Syndrome: The Palestinian-Israeli Battle for the Holy City, based on years of research. I dedicated the book to the memory of my friend, colleague and comrade in the battle for peace in Jerusalem, Faisal Husseini, who had died a few years earlier.

In my book I analyzed Israeli policy in Jerusalem since 1967, and proved that Israel has actually failed in all its national objectives in regard to Jerusalem, one by one.

Since 1967, resources invested by the Israeli government in unification of Jerusalem have far exceeded those invested in the entire settlement project in the West Bank. Furthermore, Israel has expended more funds and reserves on Jerusalem than on all other national territorial targets, such as population dispersion in the north and south of the country, relatively sparsely populated regions, for example.

The resources mentioned here have been channeled toward the Israeli governments' five national goals to unify Jerusalem, on which I will briefly elaborate. Documents relating to these objectives are presented in greater detail in my book.

The first and most important objective was to achieve international recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem. All of the Israeli governments believed that its rule over Jerusalem would achieve legitimacy by establishing facts on the ground, just as Ben Gurion's government did in the 1950's, over territories gained in 1948. The Jerusalem Law passed by the Israeli Knesset in 1980 declared this policy in a formal resolution. Nonetheless, the resolution not only failed to strengthen Israel's hold on "united" Jerusalem, but indeed caused it harm. All twenty-four states that had recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital up until this moment, removed their embassies from the city. Today only the United States, , recognizes Israel's sovereignty over Jerusalem. Almost fifty years of diplomatic effort has reaped only disappointment and failure.

The second objective of Israeli policy was territorial. Based on the Zionist assumption that settlements can change reality on the ground, in 1967 Israel expanded the city from 37 to 130 square kilometers. With the intention of settling one million Jews in this area and reaching a ninety percent majority of Jews in the city, billions of dollars were spent to settle approximately

300 Jews in "East Jerusalem". The scope of infrastructure created in these new neighborhoods has exceeded the entire infrastructure Israel created for all its development towns since 1948, combined. Nonetheless, today, less than 300,000 Jews live in what is called "East Jerusalem" compared with 400, 000 Palestinians.

Two important decisions made by its governments led to Israel's failure to actually achieve a large Jewish majority in the city. One was the ill-advised annexation of large chunks of West Bank land in 1967, including twenty-eight villages that today are part of what is called East Jerusalem. The second was the national attempt to extend settlements in the West Bank. The construction of Maale Adumim, Betar Ilit, Givat Zeev, Efrat and other settlements in the West Bank led, in the 1980s and 1990s, to emigration of around 130,000 Jews from Jerusalem to the West Bank. In retrospect, it has become apparent that the enlargement of Jerusalem in 1967 and the decision to build new settlements around Jerusalem, in the territories, were strategically catastrophic for Jerusalem itself. In another fifteen years from now, Jerusalem will lose its Jewish majority, based on the current Jewish and Arab birthrates. In the year 2032 there will be a Palestinian majority in the city.

The third important objective was to strengthen and develop the capital into the economic center of the country. Decision makers, in the euphoric period following the Six Day War, believed Jerusalem could replace Tel Aviv as the economic center. They believed that "within a decade or two Tel Aviv will become a suburb of Greater Jerusalem". Today Jerusalem is the poorest city in Israel.

A fourth objective set by Israeli governments was the "Israelization" of the Palestinians in Jerusalem. Decision-makers believed that the Palestinians in Jerusalem would undergo the same process that Israeli Arabs (Palestinians) underwent in Israel since 1948. At that time, the Israeli government declared the Arab minority left in Israel after the Independence War as "Israelis" and granted them "citizenship". These Palestinians were integrated into Israeli society and are represented in the Israeli parliament. Policymakers hoped to apply this model to the Palestinians in Jerusalem. They offered them citizenship and gave them residential status, but surprisingly,

they refused. By choice, some 300,000 Palestinians in Jerusalem are not Israeli citizens. They view themselves as Palestinians and part of the future Palestinian state.

The fifth objective was to separate the issue of the holy places from the Israeli- Palestinian struggle. The problem of the holy sites had always been the most sensitive and difficult to resolve. The Zionist movement has traditionally attempted to separate this issue from other aspects of the conflict. Zionist leader and Israel's first president Chaim Weizmann was known to say, "I would not accept the Old City even if they gave it to me for free". Most leaders of the Zionist Movement starting with Theodor Herzl through David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, preferred that Israel's capital not be Jerusalem. The reason was and remains until today, the issue of the Temple Mount - Haram al-Sharif - which not only the Palestinians but also all of the Arab states and more than 50 Muslim countries place at the center and focus of their religious aspirations. Jerusalem was and will always be third in importance in Islam, following Mecca and Medina. Following the Six Day War, Israel missed the opportunity to allow internationalization of the holy sites. The most obvious indication of Israel's failure to disengage the issue of the Temple Mount from the conflict is the fact that, in the course of 30 years of negotiation with the Palestinians, the Temple Mount has transpired into the most important issue and, in essence, the central reason for the failure of these negotiations.

What Can be Our Conclusions from Our Failure to "Unify" Jerusalem

Now, as we stand poised to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Jerusalem's unification, I can say clearly that, from the standpoint of policymakers, policies and decisions, Jerusalem has failed to achieve all national goals as they were stated since 1967. What can we learn from this? How can we turn Jerusalem from the greatest obstacle to peace between us and the Palestinians, the Arab world and the Muslim countries, into its key? Perhaps now, after we Israelis have attempted almost everything in order to "unify" this city, policymakers will initiate national soul-searching and re-think Jerusalem. Perhaps, by adopting a different and unconventional approach, we can succeed in achieving what we have not achieved until now. Instead of trying to change the nature of Jerusalem and establish more and more facts on the ground thru expansion, we should simply free ourselves from this mindset that, for the last fifty years, has prevented us from 'winning' or

'liberating' or 'uniting' Jerusalem. Perhaps we should accept Jerusalem as it is, a multicultural, bi-national home to three religions, a concept that has frightened us terribly in the past. Could it be that 5000 year old Jerusalem secretly laughs at us and mocks the new Israelis who seek to turn it into that which it never was nor ever will be? Indeed, perhaps this approach will accomplish more than Israel's anachronistic one. Will we be adversely affected if the Old City of some one square kilometer, less than one percent of the city, becomes an area where Jews, Christians, Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians, are 'partners' rather than 'owners'? Unity instead of division? I can foresee two cities within Jerusalem. The capital of Palestine, Al Quds, fifty square kilometers on the east side of the current city, and the capital of Israel, Jerusalem, sixty square kilometers on the west side. What would happen? Jerusalem would be transformed from the 'problem' to the 'solution'. We would turn Jerusalem into the "great key" not only between us and the Palestinians but between us and the Muslim world. New gates will open before us. The city that has known more wars than any other city in history will become the city of reconciliation and peace, the city of God. It will be as it is called in the Bible, "Ir Shalom" – City of Peace.

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