



Berlin in Jerusalem

The status of Jerusalem has been a subject of dispute ever since Zionism laid its claims to the land of Palestine more than one century ago. Settling in and around Jerusalem was always a central goal of the Zionist movement and - later on - of Israel. Early Jewish colonies in Jerusalem tended historically to fall largely to the west and north of the city, although in the western neighborhoods of the city during the Mandate period, Jews and Arabs were gradually mixing. But despite this growing Jewish presence, the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan did not give Jerusalem to either Jews or Arabs. (This was not a matter of dispute for Zionist leaders who, unlike the Arabs, officially accepted the plan. David Ben Gurion was reportedly planning a capital somewhere in the Negev.)

Before and during the War of 1948, at a time when certain forces on both sides seem to tacitly agree on implementing the Partition Plan through war, Jerusalem was the site of bitter fighting. Zionist forces attempted to take the city, and when they failed their efforts went towards securing a connection between the Jewish settlements in and around Jerusalem and the rest of the Jewish



communities in the new Jewish state. The fight for the key Latroun junction (on the road between Jaffa and Jerusalem) and the expulsion of the Palestinian inhabitants of Lyddya and Al-Ramla in July 1948 were only steps in that direction. Left as they were, those towns would have been a fork disrupting Jewish continuity between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Even before the war there had been several Zionist campaigns intended to drive villagers from the areas neighboring Jerusalem. The impetus was on one hand to create Jewish continuity and secure the road to Jerusalem, and on the other to push the Arabs to the east into Jordanian-held territories or what would have been the Arab state according to the Partition Plan. In April 1948, there were also similar campaigns in the Arab neighborhoods in the western parts of Jerusalem. As a result of this slow dispossession, by mid-1949 following Jordan-Israel armistice agreement, the area of Jerusalem falling inside Israel's boundaries was almost entirely Jewish-composed. There were some Arab villages that remained on the periphery of the Israeli-occupied Jerusalem and along the borders of Jordanian-held territories, but only one or two villages survived between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Historically then, Israel's policy has been to cleanse the land of Arab presence. If Palestinians must remain, then they are to be cut off or hidden so that the average Israeli or European visitor does not notice them and gets the feeling that all of this land is and always has been Israeli.

A similar logic seems to have been in the mind of Israelis after the 1967 War. We cannot say for sure that Israel wanted to keep all of the territories occupied in 1967, but it was clear one day after the war ended that Israel *was* planning to keep all of Jerusalem under its control. Israel's very first act was to cleanse the "Jewish Quarter" of Jerusalem

from its Palestinian Arab residents. The Arabs were kicked out of the quarter and many of them moved north towards Ramallah, to what is now the topsy-turvy border neighborhood of Al-Ram. Israel then demolished the Maghribi Quarter just in front of the Western Wall and established Jerusalem's started settlement activities around Jerusalem with the building of the settlement on the French Hill, to connect with Mount Scopus to the east (an island of Jewish control) as well as the settlement of Neve Yacov. In a sense, the goal of severing Jerusalem from its Palestinian environs and connecting it with the Jewish communities within Israel, the very same goal that motivated the attacks on the villages west of Jerusalem in 1948, was being implemented.

That marked the beginnings of the creation of a "ring" around Jerusalem. In time, that ring would allow the insertion of more than 200,000 Israeli Jews into occupied Arab Jerusalem. The process was easier on Jerusalem's Bethlehem flank because there already were Israeli settlements near Bakaa and Talbiya to the south. The forested hill of Jabal Abu Gneim lay in this area, and now the previously-controversial settlement of Har Homa has been constructed to block Arab access to Jerusalem from Bethlehem.

On the other side of the city, the settlement of Maale Adumim lies in the middle of nowhere, with a Palestinian population between it and Jerusalem's Jewish presence. That Palestinian population, through Jericho, is still able to interact with Palestinians in the West Bank, but not - it appears - for long. Gradually, Israel is closing this gap.

With the escalation of violence and closure policies of the last two years, Israel has found an opportune time to completely seal eastern Jerusalem. While Jerusalem has been "closed" in the sense that West Bankers and Gazans are not allowed to travel there without Israeli permission, now there is the



opportunity to physically encircle the city with walls. These walls, purportedly to keep the Palestinian West Bank population out of the city and besiege Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Abu Dis, will more importantly completely strangle Arab East Jerusalem. Indeed, the only remaining weak point in this circle is that Palestinians are still able to exit the Old City through its Palestinian-inhabited areas and Ras al-Amud, heading on to Jericho and the West Bank.

Enter right wing Zionist Irving Moskowitz. More of Moskowitz's millions made off of the elderly in Florida bingo halls will go to settling with Jews the Palestinian village of Ras al-Amud. Now that negotiations are about to restart (or so we hear), the current Israeli government is doing all it can to excise the final physical connection between Jerusalem and Palestinians who see the city as central to their geographical, spiritual and economic interests.

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