

The 'Security Vacuum' in Jerusalem

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Jerusalem, the *casus belli* of the Palestinian national struggle of liberation and the rallying cry of the Zionist movement for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, was recently described as becoming “a terror hub,” a “hotbed” of violent Palestinian neighborhoods and as being “encircled” by “a security vacuum,” where going into the Palestinian refugee camp of Shuafat “is more dangerous than the (northern West Bank) Jenin refugee camp,” according to the Israeli former “defense” minister who now holds the transport portfolio, Shaul Mofaz, and the director of Israel’s internal security agency “Shin Bet,” Yuval Diskin, respectively.

Those descriptions of the Holy City came as commentary on the lone Palestinian Bulldozer attack in Jerusalem on July 2 and a similar attack twenty days later by a tractor. Both “lone” attacks and an earlier bloody one on a Jewish seminary in March were used by Israeli officials to whip up a mounting internal and external campaign of incitement and hatred against the native Palestinian Jerusalemites, which led Martin Sieff, a conservative defense industry editor for United Press International to stretch the exaggeration out of proportion to write on August 6 that, “A new front in the global war on terror has opened up” in Jerusalem.

However Sieff was unintentionally right to add that, “both the U.S. government and the American media have been blind to the evidence staring them in the face”: This is an Israeli-made “security vacuum” and a self-inflicted “hotbed” of threat.

Since Israel occupied eastern Jerusalem in 1967, the Israeli government extended the municipal borders of Jerusalem to the east, north and south and officially, but unilaterally, annexed, enlarged, united and declared the city “the eternal capital of Israel,” incorporating in the process a large Palestinian population within its boundaries, but squeezing them out by an accelerating expansion of the Jewish colonial settlement, tightening the residency and building laws and taxation policies, and “Wall”ing them in into isolated and separated Palestinian cantons or walling them out of their native city altogether.

Israel’s discriminatory neglect of urban development of the eastern sector, the transfer-oriented demographic policies against its Arab-Palestinian natives, and squeezing out the national Palestinian institutions of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were also crucial factors in creating what the Israeli security experts describe now as a “security vacuum” in the city, which is increasingly being filled by extreme violent elements who are overwhelmed by political despair in view of the deadlocked peace process since 2000.

“Indeed, the policy of neglect is reflected in the gallery of portraits of former mayors that decorate the Jerusalem Municipality: Kollek, Olmert, Mordechai Ish-Shalom, Gershon Agron, Yitzhak Kariv, Zalman Shragai, Daniel Auster, “as if their Arab predecessors had not existed.

But the latter – and, for that matter, the entire Arab population of Jerusalem – cannot be wished away,” Israeli former foreign minister Moshe Arens wrote in Haaretz recently, adding: “Possibly the most blatant example of this (Neglect) is the Shuafat refugee camp, which was included in Jerusalem’s municipal boundaries.”

Ironically Arens missed the fact that Shuafat remains a refugee camp in the heart of the self-proclaimed capital after 41 years of military occupation, thus qualifying Israel to join the Arab states as a host of Palestinian refugees!

Systematically depriving Palestinian Jerusalemites of political representation was not confined to ruling out the PLO, but escalated to contain the other Palestinian mainstream political movement, Hamas, as well as what Israeli security experts describe as the “Hamasization” of the grassroots popular resistance to the 41-year old Israeli occupation, following the landslide victory of the Islamic movement in January 2006 legislative election, which was a direct result of closing the PLO – led institutions as much as it was the result of the dead end the PLO’s peace strategic option is still facing.

The ensuing dual PLO-Israeli crackdown on Hamas following the breakout of the inter-Palestinian divide, especially after Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in June 2007, paralyzed the national Palestinian institutions, polarized the Palestinian society and created a territorial as well as a political de facto separation between the Strip and the West Bank.

On the ground in Jerusalem the crackdown exacerbated the political vacuum among Palestinian Jerusalemites, where both mainstream national movements are either ruled out or outlawed, leaving the ground open to lone adventures and extreme marginal undergrounds, which are opportunistically used by the Israeli occupying power as further pretexts to evade its peace prerequisites and obligations and at the same time to continue misleading the world public opinion about “Palestinian violence.”

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was neither accurate nor historically honest recently when he said that, “Whoever thinks the basic pattern of life in Jerusalem can continue with 270,000 Arabs in east Jerusalem must take into account that there will be bulldozers, trucks and private cars, and no way of preventing terror attacks of this kind.”

For years until Israel closed the PLO Jerusalem institutions in 2001, the Orient House was leading a successful coexistence campaign, pending a successful conclusion of the Oslo interim period accords in July 1999 with a final status negotiations leading to an independent Palestinian state, and since Hamas electoral victory in 2006 bulldozers were used only by Israelis to demolish Palestinian homes or to expand the illegal Jewish colonization of the city.

The Israeli – made “security vacuum” in Jerusalem is self – inflicted and Olmert himself, or whoever would succeed him, holds the Palestinian key to offset it.

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