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The Strategic Situation in Jerusalem Demands a Change of Policy

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Jerusalem stands at the center of the wave of terror attacks of recent weeks, even though the arena has expanded to the entire West Bank, which has seen shootings, stabbings, stone throwing, and Molotov cocktails. The escalation has also spread to the Gaza Strip border, where hundreds of Gazans have repeatedly attempted to breach the security fence and enter Israel. Analysis shows that religious, national, political, and social motives underlie these events.

The uniqueness of the current outbreak of violence is that the force driving it is the young Palestinians of East Jerusalem, who demonstrate willingness to confront Israeli military and police forces and engage in acts of sacrifice. These individuals, who are too young to have participated in the second intifada, are for the most part unrestrained by fear. The particular issue that sparked the violence is the battle over al-Aqsa – the mosque and the surrounding area – inspired by incitement, mostly false, that claims that Israel is violating the status quo and establishing a new reality at the site, with the goal of building the Temple on the ruins of the mosque. The incitement draws on activity by Israeli provocateurs in the area around the mosque who engage in clandestine religious activity. The events on the Temple Mount let the religious genie out of the bottle; they have blended into the greater context of incitement, which includes extensive campaigns on social networks waged by the Islamic Movement – the northern branch in Israel and its branches in the Palestinian Authority, among them the Fatah organization. Allegations contend that Israel will impose the same arrangements existing at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron on the Temple Mount, i.e., assign separate times for prayer for Jews and Muslims. In tandem, campaigns calling for stabbing of Israelis are waged by Hamas in Gaza.

The greater platform for inciting youths in East Jerusalem and motivating them to engage in terror is their ongoing frustration, hopelessness, and despair, as well as the prevailing sense that all paths before them are blocked. More than 30 percent of East Jerusalem youths drop out of school due to a shortage of classes; some of them work in menial labor, and others are idle (in the last two years, the employment level among East

Jerusalem Arabs has fallen 20 percent). All these feed the sense that they have nothing to lose and nurture religious and national radicalization. The materials disseminated on the social networks, including campaigns by the Islamic State, inflame these feelings. At this stage, the youths clearly feel like winners – they are the initiators and inducers of fear among the Israeli public, which in turn harms Israeli commercial activity. As the parties involved understand it, violence pays: because of such violence, a significant drop has been recorded in the ascent of Israelis to the Temple Mount, and against this backdrop, declarations have been made by the Israeli government that it has no intention of changing the status quo at the site.

Israel is expending various efforts to stabilize and calm the situation, including a wide deployment of police, border patrol, and army units in Jerusalem; observation and physical monitoring of those who seek to exit the Arab neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city; a change in open fire procedures against assailants with knives or stones; and punishments – demolition of terrorists' homes and confiscation of blue identity cards that grant them freedom of movement. However, these measures have not reduced the prevalent motivation among the youth, and they have, rather, instilled a widespread sense of collective punishment among the greater Arab population (approximately 50 percent of the East Jerusalem labor force work in the western part of the city or elsewhere in Israel). And while Israel has very limited leverage over the youths of East Jerusalem, among the Arabs in the city, there is no influential leadership at the political, national, local, and social levels, or at the family and educational levels. This can be attributed, inter alia, to the fact that over the years, both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have neutralized most of the leadership echelons in the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem and have not allowed the cultivation of a strong local leadership.

The events in Jerusalem refute three basic assumptions that have guided the policy of the Israeli government. The first is that the status quo is sustainable, not only on the Temple Mount, but also in Israel's greater regional strategic situation, and that any alternative would have more negative implications than those of the current situation. As in the summer of 2014 during Operation Protective Edge, the proliferation of the violent incidents in Jerusalem has made it clear once again that the status quo cannot be maintained, and Israel's political-security situation is gradually worsening. The second assumption, complementing the first, maintains that Israel can remain isolated from the upheavals in the Arab world, and primarily from the increased strength of the radicals under the influence of the Islamic State and other Salafi jihadi organizations. Today, one cannot ignore the infiltration of radical ideas and philosophies into the Palestinian arena, and the growing trend among Palestinian elements to embrace extremist religious worldviews. The third assumption, which is political in nature and emerges in rhetoric, not deeds, is that Jerusalem in its current greater borders is united and will remain so.

Those who continue to preach this are disconnected from what is actually happening in East Jerusalem, primarily in the neighborhoods and villages that were annexed to the eastern part of the city, which are marked by 48 years of neglect. There is almost no entry by Israelis into these areas, and in recent days, Israel has placed barriers and checkpoints to prevent the free movement by East Jerusalem residents to West Jerusalem, and is considering the erection of protective walls between Jewish and Arab neighborhoods.

Joining the variety of proposals that have been raised on how to cope with the situation, what follows are four necessary measures that will help shape the future situation, three immediate and one for the longer term.

- a. **Submission of an Israeli proposal to establish a consulting committee to define and examine the status quo on the Temple Mount,** with the participation of Israel, Jordan, the United States, and representatives of the Palestinian population in Jerusalem. It is also possible to invite Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Morocco to be present (not as members) at this committee. In contrast to the French proposal, there is no intention of internationalizing the conflict and stationing an international observer force on the Temple Mount that will supervise the site. The invitation of leading Arab states to the committee can be based on the interests that some of them share with Israel, given the common challenges in the Middle East, as well as the need to jumpstart a political process between Israel and the Palestinians. This first step can constitute a basis for expanding cooperation into additional areas.
- b. **Economic measures:** A severe negative effect of recent events is liable to be created because of the drop in commercial activity due to the reduced sense of personal security. This is liable to cause damage primarily to small business, so temporary policy measures that combine allowances for businesses (reduction of municipal taxes, tax allowances) should be considered, primarily in Jerusalem, where there has been a drop in commercial activity, together with promoting sales campaigns to encourage consumer activity. At the same time, it is vital to promote training projects and employment for the young unemployed population in East Jerusalem, and direct educated Arabs to appropriate places of employment.
- c. **Inclusion of Israeli Arab leadership in decision making:** So far, leaders of the Arab public in Israel have demonstrated responsibility and prevented a more serious conflagration. It is necessary to enhance and accelerate discourse with them, consult with them, and coordinate measures to calm the situation. The Prime Minister or Minister of the Interior must engage in regular dialogue with Arab leaders and heads of Arab authorities in Israel. In addition, channels of dialogue between rabbis and Muslim sheikhs should be established for the purpose of tempering the religious motive for events.

- d. For the longer term – **the institutionalization of a separate municipal authority** for the Arab neighborhoods and villages of East Jerusalem, which were annexed to Jordanian East Jerusalem through Jerusalem's expansion of its municipal area in 1967 (not including the Old City and Jordanian East Jerusalem, and including the neighborhoods outside the security fence). This authority can be called Metropolitan East Jerusalem and encourage self-management and the election of members of the local population. The new authority would be subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior and receive the budgets required for the development and improvement in the welfare of the residents. (Approximately 40 percent of Jerusalem residents today are Arabs residents of the eastern part of the city.) The establishment of an authority that would function effectively and improve the conditions of the Arab population would serve Israeli interests, whether the current political situation continues over time or whether a political arrangement is established on the basis of two states and two capitals within the Jerusalem space. As a preliminary stage, it is possible to encourage the establishment and strengthening of community administrations in East Jerusalem, which will be managed by the local population, appoint residents to public positions, and channel aid and support budgets to initiatives by local activists, as well as enable the growth of local leadership in the neighborhoods and villages. This local leadership, which will grow from within and not be imposed from above, can take gradual responsibility for local needs – infrastructures, education, society, economy, training and employment centers, culture, and so on. This is the leadership that is lacking in the area today, and would be able to restrain the youth and prevent the escalation in violent incidents that hurts all sides. Israel has nothing to lose from advancing the idea, since opposition and efforts to torpedo it by the Palestinian leadership would prove once again that it thwarts every practical opportunity to improve the situation in the complex relationship between Israel and the Palestinians.

Even if the predictions that the storm will calm down in a short time are correct, and independent of the entire range of Israeli-Palestinian relations, these measures should be advanced in any way possible in order to increase the chances of avoiding the next eruption of violence in the capital and its negative effect on the entire country.

