

# Jerusalem Letter:

# VIEWPOINTS

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### THE AUTONOMY: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

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As we approach the beginning of negotiations on the autonomy, no one has been able to ascertain whether or not Israel has a clear plan in mind to present as the basis for those negotiations. At best, we have some agreed upon guidelines, namely that the autonomy should be extended to people, not territory; that Israel must maintain sufficient control over security matters, water and other essentials that directly affect its safety and the lives of Israeli settlers in the administered territories; and that the right of Jewish settlement remain open. On these points there is such general agreement that they form a consensual basis within the Israeli government, but they do not constitute a plan. For example, even assuming that Israel is successful in securing endorsement of its stand that autonomy falls upon people rather than territories, still there are territories predominantly Arab in population, including most of the duly constituted municipalities in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza region. One assumes that some relationship between people and territory will be worked out so that the people in those territories will implement the autonomy within them. Thus, though the principle is a valid one, it is not automatically self-executing. As we pursue the negotiations regarding the autonomy there are certain basics which can be considered which may help sharpen the debate that will inevitably surround them.

There is no need to review the political and military reasons why Israel is seeking a solution that does not involve withdrawal from the administered territories. But beyond those reasons there are others which also reinforce the necessity to reach an accommodation based upon some combination of self-rule and shared rule in the territories in the interests of both Israelis and Palestinian Arabs. These reasons lie in the changed circumstances of settlement and economic development in which both find themselves.

As an extension of the great frontier of the Western world, the original Zionist settlements were principally rural in character. With the establishment of the state, Israel moved into a second frontier stage which also had its parallel in other Western countries, that of industrialization and urbanization. In the latter years of the 1960's, approximately coincident but not a result of the Six Day War, Israel began to move into the next stage of development, namely metropolitanization. Its industrial base was transferred through the application of sophisticated new technologies while its patterns of settlement were being transformed by new modes of transportation and communication. The earlier unity of place of residence and place of work began to disappear as the possibility of moving quickly across substantial distances on a daily basis became real. So, for example, during the days of the urban frontier, Israeli Arabs living in the Galilee had to forego involvement in the industrialization process because their villages did not attract industry, or move to Jewish cities away from their own cultural frame-

works and live lonely lives in order to achieve greater economic advantage. With the coming of metropolitanization, the same Arabs could remain residents of their villages and take a bus to some destination in the Haifa bay metropolitan region to work in the morning and then back again at night without being unduly burdened as a result.

Israel's urbanization and metropolitanization began along the coast in the Tel Aviv and Haifa Bay regions. Jerusalem, whose urban development had always taken a very different turn, never really entered the urban-industrial frontier because at the time it was cut off at the end of the Jerusalem corridor surrounded by territory under Arab rule. Then came the Six Day War and suddenly Jerusalem was reunited with its potential hinterland, precisely at the time that metropolitanization was beginning to engulf the country.

In the ensuing decade, Jerusalem not only gained strength as a focus for Jewish developmental activities related to servicing the metropolitan frontier, such as higher education, government and other public sector activities, but also was reintegrated with a hinterland in Judea and Samaria that was increasingly drawn toward it. From an agricultural point of view, the region from Hebron on the south to Nablus on the north, Jericho on the east and Bet Shemesh on the west became a single market with produce flowing into Jerusalem daily from every part of it. Jerusalem, in turn, became a magnet for employing the residents of the mountain ridge along the same axis, particularly as development of its Jewish sections required more hands for building, a need met principally by the Arab population. Some of these new workers moved to the city, others remained in their native towns and villages and commuted. Thus the country's metropolitan region united both Jewish and Arab nodes within a single economic framework whose prosperity rested upon their mutual interaction.

This new development, as much as any security or other considerations, makes a return to partition an atavistic step. History has shown that politics can overrule economics even in such circumstances. Jerusalem probably could be cut off at the end of a corridor again and returned to the peripheries of Israel. The Arab areas around the city could be cut off from their natural focal point if political decisions are made to that effect. But in such a case everybody would suffer; not only the individuals who would lose their only significant opportunities for employment but the two peoples as peoples would lose a major opportunity for economic and social development enhancing their prosperity which has been the result of the reconnection since 1967.

Thus there should be a major interest on the part of both parties to work out a political arrangement that will recognize the unity of the country even as it provides for maximum self-government for its peoples combined with shared rule where necessary. The

autonomy plan offers the beginning of a possibility for doing just that, if it is properly developed.

Think of some of the possibilities. Jerusalem by its very nature does not lend itself to becoming a major industrial center. Indeed there are many reasons why the city and its environs have escaped the impact of industrialization so as to preserve Jerusalem's special character. Prior to the metropolitan frontier, this, in effect, doomed Jerusalem to being a backwater and its region to suffering from lack of development. One of the characteristics of the metropolitan frontier, however, is that other nodes in the metropolitan region can industrialize to everyone's benefit without damaging Jerusalem's special character.

On the metropolitan frontier, education itself becomes a major industry, a means of developing a population that is equipped to participate in the sophisticated socio-economic systems of the metropolitan era. Jerusalem is ideally suited to be a major educational center. Indeed, education is one of the functions that is most appropriate to the city, given its historic role.

Jewish Jerusalem has already become the educational center of the Jewish people, through the Hebrew University, its many yeshivot, and, increasingly through the technical colleges sponsored by the Orthodox community and social and humanistic research institutes of various kinds. There are, in addition, many renowned Christian-sponsored institutions for Bible and theological study. While no similar development has taken place in Arab Jerusalem, the beginnings of serious institutions of higher education serving the Arab population are to be found in Birzeit and Bethlehem. Only peace will enable those institutions to develop further. United within a common metropolitan region, they will add an additional dimension to Jerusalem's position on the world's educational map. Together, these institutional complexes can put Jerusalem in the forefront as a world educational center. But it is precisely the ability to concentrate a number of separate institutions, each maintaining its separate identity in every respect, but within close proximity to one another so that synergism can play its role, that will make the difference. This indeed is the essence of the metropolitan frontier -- separate but synergistic -- and is the way in which other great educational centers in the world have become what they have become.

Much of the discussion regarding the autonomy has revolved around whether it should fall on persons or territories. In fact, its success depends upon how it combines the governance of peoples and territories, for there cannot be governance of one without the other. It is clear that the emphasis in the autonomy will be on peoples but it will be necessary to govern those peoples in their territories. At the very least, for the foreseeable future, there will be clearly separate Arab and Jewish cities and villages.

Thus it will not only be possible but probably necessary to link particular local jurisdictions either with the Arab oriented

autonomy or with the Jewish dominated State of Israel. This, indeed, is the direction in which things have developed informally since 1967. In local government matters, Arab municipalities and villages already have almost complete self-rule in local matters, while Israeli settlements began with internal self-rule and have recently been organized into regional councils or given more clear-cut municipal status under Israeli law so that they can formally exercise those self-same powers.

The importance of these local organs should not be minimized. In an age and region where the focus tends to be on national governments and international relations, it is far too easy to minimize the importance of local self-government. Jews with good historical memories will know how the local Jewish community became the focal point for Jewish self government and the maintenance of a Jewish corporate identity throughout the long years of the exile in very meaningful ways. Similarly, it can truthfully be said that the Palestinian Arabs have never had so much self-government as they have had since 1967 under the Israeli policy of maximizing local self-rule through Arab municipalities.

This is not to suggest that the Palestinian Arabs would be satisfied with a simple continuation of that arrangement. There are certain areas of self-government which are closed to them, some of which are substantively important and others symbolically necessary. Be that as it may, the possibilities of building an appropriate combination for governing people with some local territorial base is a real one that offers many advantages.

Beyond that, there is the question of supralocal organization. The original Begin plan talked about a single administrative council for the Palestinian Arab people. Others in Israel thought that it might be best to organize supralocal institutions on a regional basis. In the end, the Egyptians themselves indicated that they preferred to begin to negotiate autonomy for the Gaza region, given the reluctance of the Palestinians to come into the negotiations, thereby making the regional approach de facto the one to be tried first.

Whatever the final arrangements, there is enough experience around the world and, for that matter in the territories themselves, with regard to the mechanisms for autonomy to develop proper substitutions for its implementation. For example, all the tools are available and much has already been done to establish a legal basis for an arrangement in which persons take precedence over territory in determining who belongs where legally. There are nearly 100 models of diversity of jurisdiction arrangements, mixed governments, power-sharing and the like presently in operation around the world from which to draw, not to speak of the highly significant and in the end most important fact that there are twelve years of experience behind us of de facto autonomy in the territories. The problems that often are presented as the most difficult in fact can be overcome technically without any particular inventiveness.

More important by far are the political barriers to implementing autonomy. For in the last analysis, it is a political problem, not a legal or technical one. As a political problem it can only be solved when the parties perceive a political advantage in solving it.

What does the autonomy offer for the various parties in the long run? Needless to say, this is the crucial test and the plan's most useful contribution to creating movement toward a full and comprehensive settlement. It is here that the differences between the territorial compromise approach and the autonomy plan become most apparent. In the case of the former, the first step is also the final one, that is to say, a refusal to agree upon a territorial compromise offers no possibility for going any further, while agreement requires a decision on the final territorial arrangement now. In the case of the autonomy plan, a "no" would also close the doors to movement while a "yes" does not require a final solution immediately but, rather, creates a framework for a movement that could lead in any number of directions.

Take what is for Israel the worst possible case, namely the creation of a Palestinian state. If things came to that pass as a result of the autonomy, they are likely to come to that pass whatever Israel does. That is to say, it will be because the overwhelming pressures of the Arab states plus the rest of the world will prove irresistible in one way or another. Under such circumstances, the autonomy could provide a basis for learning to live together in such a way that a Palestinian state would be neutralized as a threat and change its direction toward a more pacific approach to coexistence. Moreover, sufficient linkages between the two states could be developed and institutionalized so as to provide greater security for Israel even with this worst possible scenario.

On the other hand, take the worst possible case from the Palestinian Arabs' perspective, namely full absorption of the territories into Israel. Even under such circumstances, absorption could only take place in a way that continued the autonomy framework as long as the Arabs wanted it, thereby securing their status as an entity no matter what. In essence, if the autonomy works at all, it could prevent excessive damage to either side in either of the worst case situations.

More than that, however, the autonomy offers the possibility of building toward cases which may be mutually satisfactory for all parties, even if they offer less to any one of them than they would prefer. One such possibility is a renewed linkage with the Arab state on the east bank of the Jordan, either Jordan as it is presently constituted (which is already a Palestinian state demographically) or a Palestinian-dominated state east of the river which is likely to be the case in the long run. Such a linkage could take the form of a repartition with arrangements for a common market and other forms of mutual control over functions of mutual concern or a condominium in which shared rule over the territories by a Jewish and an Arab state, each of which preserves exclusive rule within its

core territory. With or without the East Bank connection, it might be that some form of confederation or economic community would develop, linking the Palestinian and Israeli polities in lasting yet limited ways. Each of these options, in a number of variations, remains open, so that the plan is a very flexible one that allows the development of a peace process and a process of accommodation rather than foreclosing options at the outset.

What we have confronting us is an effort to come to grips with a situation in which two energetic peoples with certain fundamental interests that are diametrically opposed, are fated to share the same land. Somehow they must find sufficient common interest upon which to build a basis for a settlement. To say that this may seem well-nigh impossible is not enough. Sixty years of conflict including three full-scale wars have shown the improvidence of continuing on a collision course. In human history, peoples often continue to be improvident but it is not necessary for them to be so.

In the language of contemporary international relations, there are both symmetrical and asymmetrical elements in the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians. Increasingly, the Palestinians are becoming the Jews of the Arab world. Their diaspora is spread throughout that world and increasingly plays the kind of role within each of the Arab states that the Jewish diaspora communities traditionally have played in the Christian and Muslim worlds. In both cases, the peoples, wherever they live, look to their original homeland as a focal point in their lives, even if they do not intend to live there, and are willing to supply it with resources and to exert political and other forms of influence as necessary to protect or secure what they perceive to be their homeland's interests.

These symmetries are becoming widely recognized. At the same time, they should not obscure the asymmetrical aspects of the relationship. The Palestinian Arabs remain Arabs, that is to say, their relationship to the Arab world is one of kinship, even if it is a kinship that sometimes is less recognized in practical policy matters than the Palestinians would like. Whatever their difficulties outside of Palestine, they have a score of other Arab states which share the same language, religion, and culture. They even have a state -- Jordan -- which has always been considered a part of their claimed homeland and in which they form a demographic majority.

The Jews, on the other hand, may have a more widespread diaspora which feels at home in other parts of the world, but as Jews they have only one possibility for a homeland in which their own language and religion, culture and ways form the basis of its society and polity. Moreover, no one has tried to exterminate the Palestinians. The Jews have not only undergone centuries of persecution, at times bordering on extermination, but came close to being exterminated in our own time and have been subject to further

extermination efforts on the part of their immediate neighbors.

Finally, the Palestinian Arabs may indeed be on the way to becoming a separate people as well as a separate "public" -- a group with long term shared interests -- within the Arab world. It is too early to determine whether that is indeed the case. The Jews, on the other hand, are the most ancient of peoples, a nation whose history stretches back to the early eons of civilization and which has tenaciously preserved its peoplehood and its national identity under the most adverse conditions for thousands of years.

Both the symmetries and the asymmetries must be taken into consideration as a relationship is developed and the peace process advanced. This process is not a matter of one round of negotiations or one final decision at this point, but it can be initiated. The autonomy plan, with all of its risks and perhaps precisely because it is so risky, offers a real opportunity to make that beginning.