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## PEACE, BEAUTY, AND INTIFADA: AN AMERICAN JEWISH POLITICAL SCIENTIST RETURNS TO JERUSALEM

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**Jerusalem Twenty and Ten Years Ago / The Burden of the Present Political System / Looking at the Territories Today / Diversity or Fragmentation in Israeli Society? / No Quick Solutions**

Jerusalem during the intifada is a different city from the Jerusalem of 1968-69 or 1976-77 that I learned to know and cherish in previous periods of residence. One's first impression upon returning to Jerusalem is awe at the beauty of the city and an awareness of the feeling of peace inspired by this beauty. Yet the feeling of peace coexists with, and sometimes is supplanted by, the bustle of west Jerusalem, the hassle of the traffic, and the tensions of the intifada. All these currents are juxtaposed; they are interrelated and each is shaped and refined by the others.

### **Jerusalem Twenty and Ten Years Ago**

Jerusalem in 1968-69 was a city of euphoria. There were severe problems: infiltration from Jordan, the war of attrition with Egypt along the Suez Canal, and periodic terrorist attacks on civilians. Nevertheless, attitudes were

optimistic. Israel had survived the combined Arab attack, and world and especially American public opinion was very supportive. There was a feeling of renewal and the possibilities seemed infinite; even peace with the Arabs seemed possible.

Expectations were high because the political situation was drawn in black and white. Actors and positions were sharply drawn. The Arab nations were the enemy and the aggressors. The war was started by Nasser's Egypt, followed by Syria and joined by Jordan. Israel was victorious on every front and now it was time to make peace. In the interim, Israel would "administer," "occupy," "control" Judea and Samaria, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai desert. Civilian law in each area would remain respectively the law of Jordan, Syria and Egypt. A military administration was established to deal with security and other matters.

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Jerusalem was in a separate category. The city was reunited and would remain so. East Jerusalem, including the Old City, was annexed a few weeks after the end of the Six-Day War.

By 1976-77, the euphoria was gone. Arab rigidity was a fact and the three "No"s of Khartoum meant that no Arab nation would negotiate with Israel. Given the divisions of Israeli politics, there were few incentives to seek a partner. To fix an Israeli negotiating position could only exacerbate internal divisions and differences. Besides, the economy was booming, the standard of living was rising both in Israel and in the administered territories. A new concentration on individual satisfaction and personal fulfillment and on acquisition of the goods of life -- apartments, washing machines and automobiles -- was at the forefront of life. As long as the Arab nations were intransigent, and the Palestinians in the administered territories were quiescent, why not enjoy life?

There was also political excitement in 1977. Labor had been in power since 1948 and the party was losing touch with the electorate. Its leadership seemed tired. Likud had momentum, Menachem Begin was charismatic and the election resulted in the first change in Israel's ruling party. But the triumph of Likud produced neither a new political system nor a new politics. Instead it remained business as usual, and became even more so. The spoils of office continued to be distributed according to the party key; party numbers and position in coalition negotiations determined jobs, office holders and missions.

**The Burden of the Present Political System**

The rigidity of the party structure and its relation to the distribution of spoils after elections has a profound impact on Israeli politics. This rigidity is in marked contrast to the volatility that utilization of proportional representation imparts to politics. In the major parties, new recruits rise up the ladder as proteges of established leaders or as adherents of specific factions. Loyalty, not creativity,

spectacular skills or initiative, is the key criterion of preferment. Position, jobs and money are controlled by the party and the individual goes along. New proposals and ideas face an obstacle course of diverse party interests; they are explored, compromised, refined, and assimilated in various party forums before they are accepted as viable. Intra-party fights are sometimes over matters of principle, but often are sparked by the conflicting ambitions of party leaders. Rigidity of position and policy stalemate are too often the outcome of this structure.

In Israel, the direct election of local mayors, introduced at the end of the 1970s, is the one exception to tight party control of its members. The mayoral candidates have the party label and party help, but their policy focus is on local problems. Appealing as they do directly to the voters, they have more freedom and independence than Knesset (parliament) members.

The proliferation of small parties in the Knesset is a response to the institutional rigidity of the major parties. Seats in the Knesset are allocated by proportional representation and one percent of the vote earns one seat. This encourages those who feel blocked in one of the two major parties to found their own parties where, placed at the top of the list, they may get elected and, if needed to help form a governing coalition, may even get a seat in the government. The increase of small parties injects volatility into Israeli politics. The range of opinions offered by these parties may add color to the political debate, but they also add intensity to the arguments and polarize the adherents of different political factions.

Given strict discipline in the major parties, smaller parties are largely powerless, but they are a drain on the governing ability of the major parties. As support of Labor and Likud remains constant or declines, more media and public attention is paid to the small parties. Their demands or in some cases intransigence exacerbates the difficulties of crafting the

necessary compromises to deal with the intifada, economic problems, immigration and absorption.

Many of the current problems, for example, lack of leadership, strident individual ambition, and contradictory policies, are rooted in the rigidity of the political system. The usual channels of distribution of political goods were not altered by the Likud victory in 1977 and continue to influence political strategy and individual behavior. Recently in a Jerusalem Letter, Daniel J. Elazar wrote of Israel's need to learn to be prudent about power and its uses ("Learning From Our Failures," VP:85 - 2 April 1989). Unfortunately, the party system as it exists offers little training in the prudent uses of power in interparty competition and at times appears to encourage the opposite behavior.

Between 1977 and 1989, peace was concluded with Egypt and the Sinai was returned. The Gaza Strip was not included in the treaty and remains under Israeli control. The Golan Heights were annexed by Israel, and Judea and Samaria continued to remain under Israeli administration. Israel was enmeshed in the Lebanese problem after its invasion in 1982, but retention of a security zone in southern Lebanon currently seems to be of secondary concern.

### Looking at the Territories Today

Now in 1989, there are diverse opinions and a multitude of proposals for dealing with the administered territories, ranging from annexation and expulsion of the Arab population, to quarantine of the Palestinians in the territories, to acceptance of an independent Palestinian state. Each option is advocated loudly and vociferously by its supporters, but there is no consensus about what to do next. Sometimes it even seems that contradictory policies are being implemented at the same time.

There is a new awareness of the demands of the Palestinians and of the complications and costs of Israeli control. But there is also "weariness" with the problem of the Palestinians. People would like a

solution, but some feel that there is no solution. Apathy at times seems the dominant emotion regarding the intifada, in part because every proposed solution seems to have one or more inherent defects. And the discussion has been held so many times over the last 40 years that every player knows his or her lines.

The young on both sides are the new players and active participants. They grew up after 1967 and know a different set of facts than their parents. Young Israelis no longer remember pre-1967 Israel and want to hold their land. The Palestinians intensely feel their condition but do not remember its causes.

The young Palestinian fights the oppressor and believes he has nothing to lose. The Israeli who has fought five wars with the Arab nations sees the intifada as a continuation of that war. Yet the intifada has its own momentum. It perhaps has produced a new moderation in Yassir Arafat and the PLO. But it also has produced provocation after provocation for both Israeli and Palestinian and each responds in kind to the other. The accumulating pile of provocations adds to the burden that history places on the Middle East. Each group remembers its past, the insults, deprivations, revenges and triumphs, and the cumulative effect enhances the impact of new provocations for both Israelis and Arabs.

Despite strong statements that Jerusalem is and will remain united, the intifada appears to have reestablished the "Green Line" (the pre-1967 border) -- at least for some Israelis. Most secular Israelis are reluctant to go into the Old City or to east Jerusalem. Religious Israelis and tourists, albeit for different reasons, continue to cross into the Old City.

The contrast between east and west Jerusalem is marked. In west Jerusalem, the streets are full of people, shopping, looking, talking, and drinking coffee in open air cafes. In the Old City, if no strike is called, the shuk (market) is crowded with shoppers until approximately noon. Then stores start to close, although

some remain open surreptitiously, and the streets empty of people except for an occasional tourist, hawker of goods, and a few children. The contrast from morning to afternoon is striking, and a drive to the top of the Mount of Olives confirms the impression of quiet and the lack of people and activity in the streets. The quiet in the Old City and east Jerusalem is probably the strongest and most effective statement that the Palestinians can make against the Israelis. They have opted out of opportunities for individual betterment to further communal purposes.

### **Diversity or Fragmentation in Israeli Society?**

The mix of populations in Jerusalem appears to be as diverse as ever with the new addition of faces from Ethiopia. The percentage of elderly in the population may be increasing as well as the number of babies. Babies and toddlers are seen in every street and on every bus. Especially noticeable are the many religious couples and their large number of children. At cultural events, of which there are many, the elderly make up the major portion of the audience. Young Israelis probably have neither the time nor the money to support these cultural events but, again, the contrasts are striking.

There has always been diversity of population, of political and religious opinions, and different dreams of the political future, but Israeli society appears less united and more fragmented than in previous years. Major institutions such as the Labor party, Koor, and the kibbutzim and moshavim face economic difficulties. Members of the Labor party, after losses in the Knesset and municipal elections, seem more interested in fighting with one another than in opportunities to strengthen their collective position against the Likud.

The Likud also has internal difficulties; for example, there already are the first scimmages in the fight to succeed Prime Minister Shamir. However, the party has the cement of recent victories to strengthen its organization. Whether Israel will

eventually evolve into a two-party system is an open question, but such an outcome seems unlikely, if only because the religious parties appear to have more discipline, commitment and cohesion than Labor or the Likud. The Orthodox parties have no love for each other and probably could not unite, but each Orthodox party has a cohesion that the secular parties must envy. Although there is a natural limit, in terms of population, to support for the religious parties, they have the tight organization and the ability to mobilize supporters that creates political power.

The secular parties appear less united, perhaps because their supporters are oriented more towards individual goals and achievements rather than communal purposes. The secular population is more fragmented, but the young know they have to do their duty and are willing, at significant personal cost, to do what has to be done in terms of army service. Divisions in the secular population means that Labor and Likud find it more difficult to create a program and enforce discipline than the Council of Torah Sages.

Because the majority is fragmented and has many speakers with various messages, the religious and those who seek to hold on to the entire Land of Israel seem to dominate in the public agenda. The divisions are deep and resemble the divisions that are described in Judges and Kings. The conflicts have the feel of biblical divisions but are played out against the backdrop of the bargains and wheeling and dealing of politics as usual.

### **No Quick Solutions**

Americans expect "happy" endings to political conflict because they assume that a consensus will develop at some point and a compromise will be achieved. Such expectations do not appear appropriate for Israel. The divisions here are not easily bridged. They are based on such different assumptions, interests, fears, and hopes that there is little space on which to develop a meeting ground.

Perhaps the best that can be achieved is a modus operandi with coexistence and respect for difference as the central motifs. The modus operandi would have to facilitate the existence side by side of different ethnic groups and political and religious factions. A model might be the coexistence of the years 1968 to 1987. However a proviso including more political rights as well as economic well-being and development for the administered territories is needed for coexistence to work. To go beyond coexistence means that the problem of sovereignty has to be explored.

Sovereignty is always politically explosive and especially so in the Middle East with its tradition of autonomous groups. Americans fought and argued about sovereignty in 1789 and were able to avoid the full divisiveness of the political problem by establishing the people as sovereign. In the U.S. Constitution, the people created both the nation and the states, and the ambiguous formulation provided a framework in which, over time, political action and community spirit could develop. Resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict needs this kind of ambiguous formulation to provide the space to create a viable modus operandi, but whether one can be crafted is the open question.

There is one mistake, however, that must be avoided by both Israelis and Palestinians in their search. The year is 1989. Arrangements or solutions that seemed viable in 1947 or 1949 or 1967 or 1969 or 1982 are no longer viable. The Arabs rejected the UN partition in 1947 and Jerusalem is not an "international" city. Jordan was once part of Palestine but it will not become the Palestinian state. The moving finger has writ and

new ideas, proposals and initiatives are needed in 1989.

Coexistence must be and is always based on precarious arrangements. Beirut serves as a prime example of what can go wrong, but Israelis can approach coexistence with a new realism. They have in the last year accepted the fact that the Arabs did not want them in 1929, in 1939, in 1948, or in 1967, and do not want them around in 1989. The Israelis are here, however, and will remain here. In 40 years, they have created a vibrant, dynamic and progressive society. The intifada has strengthened communal purposes and bonds for the Palestinians. For the Israelis, it has injected a new divisiveness into politics. The religious parties are the exception and are strengthened by community identification and belief in the rightness of their position. Left and right offer contradictory assessments and programs that are influenced by the uncertainties created by the intifada. The average Israeli needs to rediscover the springs of communal purpose and to develop a new commitment to the public realm; then, as individuals, seek to optimize conditions of existence. In the process, they create joy and sadness, new activities and opportunities, and, above all, hope for the future.

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