



Ehud Olmert against the Israeli zeitgeist

Efraim Inbar, THE JERUSALEM POST

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Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is negotiating the future of Jerusalem with his Palestinian interlocutors. Tzipi Livni, his minister for foreign affairs, admitted that all core issues "are on the table." Few know that before the July 2000 Camp David summit, the then Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, consulted with the mayor of Jerusalem, Olmert, on how to divide the city. Barak violated the taboo on Jerusalem by offering the Palestinians sovereignty on the Temple Mount. This elicited the largest rally ever held in Israel - over 250,000 people demonstrated against it. Barak's coalition disintegrated (for other reasons as well), leading to his political fall.

Today, Olmert is similarly desperate for reaching an agreement with the Palestinians before elections. Yet, no Israeli government is likely to survive concessions in Jerusalem under the current political constellation. The Israel Beiteinu party has already left the coalition in opposition to talks over permanent status issues, while the Shas party threatens to do likewise if the government discusses Jerusalem with the Palestinians. Even elements within the ruling Kadima party will likely desert the coalition if the Jerusalem issue is touched. At least one Laborite (Yoram Martziano) shares a similar position. If elections will be held in the near future, the strength of the opposition to concessions on Jerusalem will only grow.

Nevertheless, Olmert's arrogance leads him to believe that he knows better than his people what is good for the Jews. He ignores the will of the Knesset and is in the process of making concessions on Jerusalem without having the political mandate to do so.

Olmert is out of sync with the Israeli public. His popularity is very low and few trust him. For example, 60 percent of the electorate does not believe his disclaimer that he is not negotiating over Jerusalem. Moreover, his nonchalant attitude is not shared by his fellow countrymen. They look with trepidation at Olmert's intrigues to survive politically even if the price might be the division of Jerusalem.

THE POLLS on the issue of Jerusalem, including a recent survey conducted by the **BESA Center for Strategic Studies**, clearly indicate that over 70 percent of the Jews in Israel oppose relinquishing Israel's sovereignty over the Temple Mount, even if this will be necessary to lead to a peace treaty with the Palestinians. A similar amount of Israelis think it is unacceptable to have a Palestinian capital in the eternal city. In other words, an overwhelming proportion of Israelis are ready to forgo a peace treaty and continue the armed struggle against the Palestinians in order to assure Israel's sovereignty over the holiest place to the Jews. Their views show that they are not tired by the protracted conflict as Olmert, a hedonist, wrongly presumes.

Indeed, Olmert is not listening to the fears of his people. A large majority of the Israeli public believes that concessions in Jerusalem are dangerous to Israel's security. Significantly, 61 percent of the Jews in Israel do



not believe that the division of the city within the context of an agreement with the Palestinians will end the conflict and put to rest Palestinian additional claims. Moreover, 69 percent believe that Palestinian terrorism will continue unabated even after concessions on the Temple Mount. A majority also believes that areas ceded in Jerusalem to the Palestinians will serve as terrorist bases and if holy places are transferred to Palestinian control, they will not be safeguarded.

Olmert arrogantly dismisses the national security concerns of Israel's citizenry. This is not only usurping Israeli democracy, but also prolonging the conflict by providing false hope to the Palestinians that they may gain a foothold in Jerusalem. Olmert's behavior whets the Palestinian appetite for concessions.

Finally, the partition of Jerusalem is simply a bad idea when the zeitgeist dictates uniting cities such as Berlin, Belfast or Nicosia. Why should Jerusalem be different?! Jews have held a majority in the city for the past 150 years. The Palestinian demand to apply the principle of self-determination to Ramallah is valid for Jerusalem as well. Even the Arab minority in the city has shown its preference for living under Israeli rule, as many have moved to the Israeli side of the security barrier being built around Jerusalem. Their choice is reasonable, as Jerusalem offers the quality of life of a modern Western city, while only a few kilometers away, a Third World standard of living, chaos and religious intolerance are the norm. An undivided Jerusalem is the best guarantee for a better life for all Jerusalemites.

Olmert's irresponsible encouragement for the unreasonable Palestinian demand for dividing Jerusalem is dangerous. Days before Passover, when we join past generations of Jews in declaring "Next Year in Jerusalem," Olmert's insistence on dividing the city looks more lunatic than ever.

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