

An Irresponsible Decision

The checkpoints will not stop a determined attacker with a knife. He will find an opening to slip through. Conversely, the disruption of Palestinians' freedom of movement will only heighten the sense of rage, giving rise to more terror attacks. It would be best for us to return to the only real solution: A Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital

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Jerusalem is bleeding again, and we, its residents, are once again compelled to lead our lives in a great cloud of fear. We deserve to live in security: To walk down the street without looking back, to send our children to school without thinking twice, to board a bus without checking closely the appearance of the other passengers. But for the second year consecutively, this basic right has been cruelly taken from us. This is the second year consecutively that the smug and forceful policy of our government has blown up in our faces.

And despite the fact that the fumes of fear easily turn into rage and hatred, we must admit: The residents of East Jerusalem also have a right to security. The demand for a life without fear is also the just demand of the Palestinians who share Jerusalem with us. Indeed, only one thing currently unites East and West Jerusalem, one thing that unites the city's Jewish and Arab residents: Fear. And despite the fact that the current public discourse is intolerant of any talk about recognizing the other side's suffering, that is precisely where the key to rectifying the situation lies: When Israelis and Palestinians succeed in understanding the fear and the suffering of the "other side," those who appear monstrous to them today will suddenly be revealed as human and even similar to them.

But despite the similarity, there is also a great difference. We Israelis enjoy liberty, sovereignty and a powerful state that looks after our wellbeing (although it could do a better job). The Palestinians in East Jerusalem (and of course in the West Bank as well) do not have this liberty. This contrast was recently illustrated once again when the prime minister and the mayor of Jerusalem, and even the opposition leader, called to impose a closure on the neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. They called for the closure and have implemented it: Checkpoints have been set up at the exits from the Palestinian neighborhoods, and people leaving the neighborhoods are being checked.

The decision by Netanyahu and Barkat is irresponsible – not only because it violates the rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem, but because it will do nothing to provide the Israelis with security. Netanyahu refuses to admit that it is his consistent policy throughout his long years in power that has led to this bloody failure. Instead, he employs inflammatory language and promotes forceful measures that create the illusion that he is trying to cope with the crisis. In practice, he has nothing to offer us. Netanyahu is incapable of providing the residents of Jerusalem with security.

These checkpoints will not stop a determined attacker with a knife. He will find an opening to slip through. Conversely, the disruption of Palestinians' freedom of movement on the way to work, to studies, to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, to the hospital, will only heighten the sense of fear and rage that will give rise to more terror attacks, and lead to more fearful, injured and even dead Jews, heaven forbid. For this must be said: The current wave of violence began with restrictions upon Palestinian movement. It was the fact that Muslim worshippers were barred

entry to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif during the High Holidays that set into motion the snowball of mutual violence (yes, mutual) that ultimately erupted in the today's mad wave of terror attacks. The restrictions on Al-Aqsa were also imposed with the pretext of security, but in practice they brought about the complete opposite. Netanyahu and Barkat continue to offer us the same policy that created this crisis.

The truth is that if a real closure is imposed on East Jerusalem [since the publishing of this article, up to 40 checkpoints and closures have been erected across East Jerusalem – Ir Amim], the result will be a complete shutdown of the city, since 50% of Palestinians work for their livelihood in West Jerusalem. On one hand, such a closure will inflict critical harm on the livelihood of many Palestinians. On the other hand, entire industries – hotels, medical services, sanitation and more – depend on Palestinian labor and will collapse without it. This mutual dependence could have been the basis for building a shared life in Jerusalem. In practice, we have never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity to do so.

In the past 48 years, the Israeli governments and mayors of Jerusalem have instituted a policy of severe discrimination against East Jerusalem. The result is not only high poverty rates, a severe shortage of classrooms, non-functional infrastructure, housing shortages and more; the result is an ongoing weakening of the Palestinian community in the city. And when a community that numbers 37% of Jerusalem's residents is made to disintegrate, the damage reaches every resident in the city, for poverty, crime and violence do not stop at the boundaries of the Palestinian neighborhoods and no closure will succeed in stopping them.

If there is anything good about the talk of a closure and fences [since implemented – Ir Amim], it is that it illustrates the falsehood of the talk about a unified city. We have failed in unifying the city, and it does not even matter whether the responsibility is wholly ours or whether the Palestinians also bear responsibility. And since we have failed, it would be best for us to turn to the only real solution, which we have been evading for at least 15 years: a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

When Palestinians have their liberty, we may be able to start the mutual recognition of each other's humanity and suffering. Only then will the long process begin that will ultimately give both Israelis and Palestinians a life without fear and with security.