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SHABBAT SHALOM!

ISRAEL'S NEW COALITION, JERUSALEM'S BOTTOM-UP UNITY—AND ISLAM'S JUDENREIN GHOST CITIES

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MULLING OVER OUR NEW GOVERNMENT

Isi Leibler

[Jerusalem Post](#), Mar. 14, 2013

Bravo! Unless there is an unanticipated last minute reversal, after six tortuous weeks of horse trading, spin and hypocrisy, Israel will have its 33rd government. Most of us, not already having written off our politicians, were thoroughly distressed that even during this crucial period for Israel our elected representatives still spent so much time jockeying for personal or political benefit.

The principal beneficiaries were Yesh Atid and Bayit Yehudi who set aside their major political differences and made a pact to negotiate jointly toward the formation of the government. They succeeded

and thus foiled Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's efforts to play them against each other, ultimately obliging him to concede to their core demands.

The principal losers were the haredi parties who, despite Netanyahu's extraordinary efforts to retain them, were excluded from the government. Reviled by most Israelis as extortionists willing to sell their votes to the highest bidder and seeking to impose the most stringent halachic interpretations on the entire nation, their exclusion was greeted with enthusiasm....

As anticipated, in this government, Netanyahu will be in a weaker position and far more dependent on his coalition partners than was the case in the past. Yet, if he plays his cards properly, this may prove to be a blessing in disguise. It could even represent a new dawn and provide him with a unique opportunity to stabilize Israel's global position and implement crucial, overdue reforms in the social and economic arena that had been repeatedly vetoed by the ultra-Orthodox groups.

Netanyahu's ministerial team includes some stunning new talent, but unfortunately, in some cases, politics prevented the best people from assuming positions optimally suited for them. Thus, Yair Lapid's ascension to the Treasury is a huge risk. He has no financial or business background and it is a major gamble for a novice to take on such a role, especially when he must grapple with a massive opening deficit which will require resolute and unpopular cutbacks.

The choice of foreign minister, whose primary requirement must be to effectively promote Israel's image and articulate the government's policies, is also problematic, especially now as we confront such a hostile and biased world. Avigdor Liberman is a capable and talented politician who could take on any key ministry. But why does he insist on retaining the one portfolio in which, rightly or wrongly, he is regarded with hostility by most global leaders? The appointment of the respected former IDF chief of staff Moshe Ya'alon as defense minister will strengthen morale and signal to the Palestinians that they will pay a heavy price if they resume missile launches or terrorist attacks....

Yair Lapid is a genuine centrist committed to a two state policy, but supports the retention of the settlement blocs, Ariel and a united Jerusalem. This would hardly qualify him as a left-winger and Netanyahu would find him a kindred spirit on most issues. Besides, the Palestinians will undoubtedly maintain their intransigent attitude and refuse to negotiate or, if not, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas will remain unwilling to minimally compromise on any substantive issue.

The government's most urgent domestic challenge must be to introduce painful remedial measures to ensure that our economy does not suffer a meltdown and follow the disastrous example of many European countries. It must take advantage of this historic opportunity to deal with outstanding issues relating to religion and state, especially the profoundly emotional issue of equalizing the burden in relation to the draft. In the latest compromise, national service will become universal in gradual stages over a five-year period. Up to 2,000 yeshiva students will continue receiving exemptions and state subsidies.

More importantly, all subsidized education will be required to incorporate secular core studies of math, English, civics and history, creating constructive citizens who will seek gainful employment rather than subsisting on welfare. Although haredim should be treated with courtesy and respect, they will no longer be a law unto themselves and will be obliged to share the burden as well as benefits of citizenship.

Today, for the first time in decades, there are more religious Zionist than haredi MKs in the Knesset. Bayit Yehudi has the opportunity of reversing the tide of haredi domination of religious instrumentalities like the Chief Rabbinate and promoting Zionist rabbis to occupy state roles, making Judaism more attractive to non-observant Israelis by example rather than coercion. They must ensure that conversion, marriage and divorce, and other life cycle events are conducted with compassion by enlightened rabbis who have the capacity to make Judaism more inclusive.

This government has the obligation to amend the electoral system and reduce the number of parties. It must also devise a new method of selecting MKs and eradicate the current system of primaries which is being abused and riddled with corrupt practices. Despite the fact that Lapid has introduced some talented new personnel into the Knesset, a system must be devised in which Knesset candidates are not simply recruited according to the predilections of individual party leaders. There is no perfect democratic solution but a structure could be devised by which committees are elected which will subsequently preselect candidates and avoid the abuse and corruption associated with the primaries....

If he convinces his coalition to set aside the past and concentrates on devising long-term strategies, both in terms of the peace process as well as implementing the long overdue domestic social, economic and electoral reforms, he will establish a legacy that could enable him to be regarded as one of the greatest leaders of the nation. But to achieve this he must resolve to set aside the sleazy political infighting and concentrate exclusively on serving the national interest. If he fails to do so, the new government's lifespan will be extremely limited.

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GHOST CITIES

Mark Steyn

[National Review](#), Feb. 26, 2013

In a dispute between Hamas and Fatah, it's tempting to take the old Kissinger line re the Iran–Iraq War: It's a shame they can't both lose. But, in fact, only one side wins: In Gaza, al-Aqsa University has just announced that female students will be required to attend in proper Muslim garb from head to toe — i.e., the full body bag. At present, some still wear headscarf, trousers, and a long coat, but that's too revealing for the new Gaza, so time to get fitted for your burka, niqab, or abaya. Al-Aqsa University is funded by the Palestinian Authority — i.e., Yasser Arafat's old Fatah — but it's controlled by Hamas. The higher-education minister, Ali Jarbawi, fumed impotently from Ramallah that the new dress code is illegal and must not be implemented, but the hard men on the ground in the Gaza Strip regard him as just another irrelevant member of a shriveling personality cult for a dead kleptocrat with a taste for Aryan rent boys.

And so it goes across the region: Regimes that represented nothing but their Swiss bank accounts have fallen, and in their stead arises the only alternative — an Islam purified by decades in opposition to the secularists and distilled to a scorching 175 proof. What else is left?

Some years ago, for a telly documentary, the BBC sent the novelist Lawrence Durrell back to Alexandria, the setting of his eponymous Alexandria Quartet, his "prose poem to one of the great capitals of the heart." Durrell had lived in Egypt during the war years, and did not enjoy his return. "The city seemed to him listless and spiritless, its harbor a mere cemetery, its famous cafés no longer twinkling with music and lights," wrote Michael Haag in *Alexandria, City of Memory*. "His favourite bookshop, Cité du Livre on the rue Fuad, had gone, and in others he found a lamentable stock."

Only on the Western fringe of the Ummah, in a few Moroccan redoubts, can you still discern the flickers of the way it was. Otherwise, to anyone who knew the "Muslim world" of the mid–20th century, today's Maghreb and Levant are dull places, drained of everything but Islam. And Durrell was returning in 1977: Another third of a century on, and Alexandria's stock is even more lamentable. Indeed, his cast of characters would be entirely bewildering to contemporary Alexandrians: an English writer (of course), a Greek good-time girl, a homosexual Jew, a wealthy Copt. In the old days, Alexandria bustled with Britons, Italians, and lots and lots of Greeks. All gone. So are the Jews, homo- and hetero-, from a community 50,000 strong down to some four dozen greybeards keeping their heads down.

I got an e-mail a year or so back from the great-grandson of Joseph Cattai, a Jew and Egypt's finance minister back in the Twenties: These days, the family lives in France — because it's not just that in Egypt a Jew can no longer be finance minister, but that in Egypt a Jew can no longer *be*. Now, in the absence of any other demographic groups to cleanse, it's the Copts' turn to head for the exits — as in Tripoli and Benghazi it's the blacks'. In the once-cosmopolitan cities of the Arab world, the minority communities are confined to the old graveyards, like the rubbish-strewn Jewish cemetery of broken headstones, squawking chickens, and hanging laundry I wandered through in Tangiers a while back. Islam is king on a field of corpses....

The "moderate Muslim" Maajid Nawaz writes in the New York Times that his youthful European-born coreligionists, back from Islamic adventuring during the Arab Spring, are anxious to apply the lessons learned abroad. The Danish group Kaldet til Islam (Call to Islam) has introduced "Sharia-controlled zones" in which "morality patrols" of young bearded men crack down on underdressed and bibulous blondes. In the Balearic Islands, Muslims took against the local meter maids, and forced the government to withdraw them. In Dagenham, 20-year-old Naomi Oni, a black Londoner, suffered horrific burns after a woman in a niqab hurled acid in her face. She was returning home from her job at Victoria's Secret. Not secret enough.

Meanwhile, the BBC reports that February 1 was the first World Hijab Day, in which non-Muslim women from 50 countries took a stand against "Islamophobia" and covered themselves to show how much they objected to society's prejudice against veiled women. From Gaza to Alexandria to Copenhagen to London, I don't think we'll have to worry about that. As Balthazar, Durrell's homosexual Jew, muses, "Narouz once said to me that he loved the desert because there 'the wind blew out one's footsteps like candle-flames.' So it seems to me does reality" — for the footsteps of Copts in Egypt, meter maids in Majorca, and Victoria's Secret clerks on the streets of the East End.

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THE QUIET UNIFICATION OF JERUSALEM

Matti Friedman

[Times of Israel](#), Mar. 3, 2013

A passenger boards the Jerusalem light rail at its first stop in Pisgat Ze'ev, a suburb built in the West Bank after 1967, and glides past the local mall. A Russian girl gets on in high boots and works the aisle like a runway, trailing perfume. A toddler with a shiny pink purse sits next to her mother, who wears the long dark coat and hair covering of a religious Muslim. After the car stops in Beit Hanina, a middle class Palestinian neighborhood, the tinny electronic music of a video game becomes audible from the vicinity of two Arab kids and an iPhone.

The train passes Eiffel Sweets, on the main drag through the Palestinian neighborhood of Shuafat, and the Stylish Salon. Outside the battle memorial at Ammunition Hill, three men kneel toward Mecca in a parking lot. Two women board with a gaggle of small boys in black velvet skullcaps and girls in skirts. The Ottoman walls of the Old City pass by before the train reaches the downtown bustle of Jaffa Road, where a crush of everyday Jerusalemites presses on with a backpacking couple in North Face jackets, and the car moves again. The train empties at the central bus station, where Jerusalem has begun to claim the new benches and walls of the light rail stop as its own with grime and graffiti, then fills up again, and travels onward to its final stop near the gravesite of Theodor Herzl.

Beginning in the early 1990s, much of the planning work on Jerusalem focused on how the city could be divided between Israelis and Palestinians. Various schemes imagined walls down the center of main thoroughfares, crossing points, and a border meandering among neighbourhoods and cutting residents off from each other. In recent years, however, new infrastructure projects have quietly but dramatically

created a reality that flies in the face of those plans. The light rail system, an upscale shopping plaza outside the Old City, a new bike trail, the sheer force of everyday life and business — these things are slowly but surely drawing the city's disparate parts closer together.

There is still no great love among the city's different groups. There are steep inequalities in municipal services and funding between Israeli citizens and the one-third of the city's residents who are Palestinian Arabs. The meeting of the different groups is often charged and occasionally violent. But Jerusalem in 2013 is a more integrated city than it has been in decades.

A passenger who rides the length of Jerusalem's light rail line, even one who has spent much of his life here, might be surprised by what he sees out the window. Jerusalem's different areas have traditionally been served by their own transportation services with their own centers, routes and destinations — Palestinians, for example, have their transportation hub at Damascus Gate, while the ultra-Orthodox have taken to using private buses departing from their own neighbourhoods to get to ultra-Orthodox suburbs. The light rail, which opened just over a year ago and whose effects are only beginning to register in earnest, is the first major transportation project in the city to purposely violate those lines and link the different pieces. Early on, that made it the target of criticism from Palestinian Authority officials and advocates of anti-Israel boycotts who saw it, correctly, as a project that would bind Jerusalem's residents more tightly to each other and ease their lives in the present-day city controlled by Israel.

By doing no more than carrying out the necessary urban task of moving people to work and home again, the train ends up reprogramming the way passengers view Jerusalem. Anyone attentive enough to look out the window encounters a place that is home to ultra-Orthodox Jews, mainstream Israelis of various shades, Palestinian Christians and Muslims, soldiers, policemen, clergy, all living in close proximity to each other and moving in and out of the city's shared spaces. This is a city unrecognizable in the newspaper headlines and peace plans that tend to portray Jerusalem as a problem to be solved or a kind of geopolitical puzzle, rather than as what it is: A fractured but distinct urban organism full of people going about their business — one city, indivisible.

The idea of an "east" and "west" Jerusalem has always been more a theoretical shorthand than a workable description of reality. There are Jewish neighbourhoods to the east of the Arab ones of "east" Jerusalem, and Arab neighbourhoods to the west of Jewish ones in the "west." But the recent developments are additional proof — at least for some of those concerned about the city as a place where people live rather than as a chip on the poker table of the peace process — that Jerusalem's urban health lies in the integration of its parts, and that any solution will have to involve sharing the city, not splitting it. "The geopolitical solutions and a functioning city — it's either one or the other," said Eran Feitelson, a geography professor and expert on urban planning at Hebrew University.

Naomi Tsur, the city's deputy mayor in charge of planning, conservation and the environment, is a former head of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, the country's premier environmental group. She was born in Bristol, England, and is certainly one of the only politicians in the country to favour long tweed skirts. Tsur's thinking is driven by urban considerations, not by international politics; she seems intent on insisting that Jerusalem is a city like other cities and that progressive planning can thus be applied here as well. One of the buzzwords is "connectivity." The common sense of an urban planner says trails, parks, signs and public transportation must link Jerusalemites to the different parts of their landscape, a process she calls "connecting the dots."

"It is one of the achievements of this administration to create a language of communication and transport and mobility through the city," she said. Tsur was a key force behind one of the most striking new additions to the cityscape — a 5-mile walking and biking path along a defunct rail line in southern Jerusalem. The path, which opened in part last year and is now nearing completion, begins at the old British Mandate rail station in the German Colony, passes through the working-class apartment blocks of

the Katamonim and behind the city's main industrial zone before terminating at the shopping mall at Malha. On the way, it runs through Beit Safafa, an Arab village once split between Israel and Jordan and reunited after the 1967 war; a first-time visitor might be surprised to find himself suddenly next to the village's mosque and well-tended soccer field.

Eventually, the path is supposed to be part of a ring of bike trails around much of west Jerusalem, linking Beit Safafa and the German Colony to the Valley of the Cross, the Knesset, the central bus station, downtown, and the Old City. "I often wonder how the world thinks it's going to do what it's going to do," Tsur said: A division of the city "is not urbanly possible. We're not an apple that can be cut in half," she said.

At Mamilla, outside the Old City's Jaffa Gate, a new row of luxury shops and cafes has become a bridge between Jewish and Arab areas and the scene of mixing between the city's populations. Marik Shtern, a Jerusalem media consultant active in local politics, investigated the interaction there as part of a Masters thesis at Hebrew University's department of geography. Shtern interviewed 60 people at each of three commercial areas in the city where Jews and Arabs mingle – the shopping mall at Malha, the main Arab market in the Old City's Christian and Muslim quarters, and the Mamilla plaza, where the first stores opened in 2007. "The reality is that the city is becoming more and more integrated, de facto," Shtern said. "But it's done in a way that isn't planned, and I expect there to be more friction as a result."...

Eran Feitelson, the Hebrew University urban planning expert, remembered roaming around the Old City and Jerusalem's Arab areas in the years after the city's reunification in 1967. As a youth group leader in the 1970s, he led night hikes near the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan, and took Palestinian buses from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. That openness was killed in the late 1980s by the first intifada and buried after 2000 by the second. Today, such activities would be all but unimaginable for a Jewish Israeli.

There has been no research done so far on changes to the "mental maps" of Jerusalem residents after the advent of the light rail and the other new projects, Feitelson said. But though the city is not back where it was in the 1970s, he said, "by local standards, we're in a good period."

For Jerusalem, the key will lie not in dividing the city but in continuing the attempt to share it, he said. "The kind of urban planning we're seeing can't go along with the kind of solutions that are being discussed," Feitelson said. "There's a tremendous disconnect between the kind of solutions talked about in geopolitical terms and the kind of planning that we do in order to create a city where people want to live."

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ON TOPIC

Is Jerusalem Really Negotiable?: Alan Baker, *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, Feb. 2013—On August 21, 2012, Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, referring to "the alleged [Jewish] Temple" in Jerusalem, stated that "there will be no peace, security, or stability unless the occupation, its settlements and settlers will be evacuated from our holy city and the eternal capital of our state."

Israel is Not Isolated: Efraim Inbar, *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*, Mar. 2013—A close look at Israel's interaction with countries near and far, as well as with international institutions, belies the claim that it is isolated. In fact, Israel is increasingly acknowledged as a world player in view of its social, economic, technological, financial, and diplomatic achievements.

Jerusalem Mayor Says the City is in the Fast Lane: David Horovitz, *Times of Israel* Feb. 11, 2013—Last month, for the fourth year in succession, Jerusalem's Great Synagogue hosted a public interview in which David Horovitz questioned Mayor Nir Barkat about running what we've come to describe as the world's most complex city.