

## A Cloud over Jerusalem

EVERYONE HAS the right to change his or her mind. Even Danny Tirzeh.

Colonel Tirzeh was responsible for planning the wall that "envelopes" Jerusalem – the one that cuts the city off from the West Bank in order to turn it into the United Capital Of Israel For All Eternity.

And now, suddenly, Tirzeh pops up as the main opponent of the wall he himself planned. He wants to move it, so as to leave the lands of al-Walaja village on the "Israeli" side.

The Colonel has ceased acting on behalf of the Israeli army and now represents private entrepreneurs who want to build 14 thousand housing units for 45 thousand Jewish souls. All this, of course, for the greater good of Zionism, the Jewish people, Israel's Eternal Capital, and many tens of millions of shekels.

COLONEL TIRZEH is not just anybody. He is a symbol.

For years I kept meeting him in the halls of the Supreme Court. He had become almost a fixture: the star witness, the expert and the moving spirit in scores of hearings dealing with the Separation and Annexation Wall.

He knows everything. Every kilometer of the Wall and the Fence. Every hill, every stone. He always carries with him a large bundle of maps which he lays before the judges, earnestly explaining why the Wall must pass here and not there, why the security of the state demands that the Palestinian villages be separated from their land, why leaving an olive grove in the hands of its owner would expose Israeli soldiers to mortal danger.

Generally, the judges are persuaded. After all, he is the expert. He is the man who knows. How can they take upon themselves the responsibility for changing the route of the Wall, if this could result in Jews being killed?

There are exceptions. At Bil'in village, the court was convinced that the Fence could be moved a few hundred meters without causing the security of the state to collapse and heaps of Jewish bodies to litter the landscape.

So the Supreme Court accepted the plea of the villagers and decided to move the Fence and --- nothing. The Fence has remained where it was. The government and the military just ignored the court order.

In vain did the President of the Supreme Court admonish them that her decisions "are not recommendations". Like dozens of other court

decisions concerning the settlers, this one, too, is gathering dust.

The case of Bil'in is especially conspicuous, and not only because protesters – Palestinians, Israelis and others – have been killed and injured there. It is conspicuous because the motive trying to hide behind the Fence is so striking.

Not Zionism. Not security or defense from the terrorists. Not the dreams of generations. Not the vision of Theodor Herzl, whose 150th birthday is being celebrated now.

Just money. Lots of money.

The area lying between the present Fence and the alternative path has been earmarked for the Orthodox settlement Modi'in-Ilit. Giant corporations are to build many hundreds of "housing units" there, a business worth many millions.

Everywhere, the areas stolen from the Palestinians immediately turn into real estate. They pass through mysterious channels into the jaws of land sharks. The sharks then build huge housing projects and sell the "housing units" for a fortune.

HOW IS this done? The public is now receiving a lesson in the form of the Holyland affair, a lesson in installments – every day new details emerge and new suspects turn up.

On the site of an old and modest hotel by this name, a giant housing project has sprung up – a line of high-rise apartment buildings and a skyscraper. This ugly monster dominates the landscape – but the part of the project which can be seen from afar is only a fraction of the whole. The other bits have already received the blessing of all the relevant municipal and government authorities.

How? The investigation is still going on. Almost every day, new suspects are being arrested. Almost everybody who has had anything to do with the authorization of the project, up to the highest level, is suspect – ministers, senior government officials, the former mayor, members of the municipal council, and municipal officials. At present, the investigators are trying to trace the bribe money all over the world.

Holyland is located in West Jerusalem (in what before 1948 was the Arab neighborhood of Katamon).

The question naturally arising: if things are done this way in the West of the city, what is happening in the East? If those politicians and officials dare to steal and take bribes in West Jerusalem – what do they allow themselves in East Jerusalem, whose inhabitants have no representation in either the municipality or the

government?

ONLY A few minutes drive separate Holyland from the village of al-Walaja.

One could write volumes about this small village, which for more than 60 years has served as a target of abuse.

Briefly: the original village was occupied and annexed to Israel in the 1948 war. The inhabitants were expelled and founded a new village on the part of their land which remained on the other side of the Green Line. The new village was occupied in the 1967 war and annexed to Jerusalem, which was annexed to Israel. According to Israeli law, the houses are illegal. The inhabitants live in their own houses, on their own land, but are officially considered illegal residents who can be evicted at any time.

Now the land sharks are ogling this succulent piece of land, which is worth a lot of money for building projects. They follow the proven Zionist routine. First of all, the Arab name of the place is replaced with a pure Hebrew one, preferably from the Bible. Much as nearby Jebel-Abu-Ghneim became Har Homa, before the eyesore monster housing project was erected there, thus al-Walaja has now become Giv'at Yael. Clearly a place called Hill of Yael must belong to the Jewish people, and it is a divine duty to build another settlement there.

So what if this necessitates the moving of the Wall? One can always find a used army officer who will justify this on security grounds.

FOR YEARS now I have been suggesting that this side of the settlement enterprise should be examined more closely.

The public debate was always about lofty ideals. The divine promise as against the human vision. Greater Israel as against the Two-State solution. Zionist values as against the value of peace. Fascism as against humanism.

And somebody was laughing all the way to the bank.

The settlements are growing rapidly all the time. All over the West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements spring up like toxic mushrooms, poisoning the prospects of peace. In this matter there was never any difference between Golda Meir and Menachem Begin, Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon, Shimon Peres and Binyamin Netanyahu.

Among the settlers there is a hard core of ideological zealots. But many of the builders are just clever businessmen, whose only god is Mammon. They easily make friends with the leaders of Likud and the chiefs of Labor, not to mention the Kadima crowd.

The massive settlements in East Jerusalem – those already existing and those still planned – are proceeding along the same lines as the monster on Holyland hill, and they need the same permits from the same municipal and government authorities. Jerusalem, after all, has been united. Therefore, the same dark cloud is hanging over them.

What is needed is a judicial board of inquiry to investigate all the permits issued in Jerusalem in recent years, certainly from the beginning of Ehud Olmert's term as mayor. Olmert fought like a tiger for the establishment of Har Homa and the other large settlements in East Jerusalem. All for the sake of Zionism and Jewish rule over the Holy City. Now he is Suspect No. 1.

Everything must be investigated from the beginning. And every new project must be stopped until its propriety has been established beyond any doubt.

THESE THINGS are grave enough in themselves, and they are even more serious when they are located at the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Israel-US crisis.

For the sake of the Israeli housing projects in East Jerusalem, the Netanyahu government is endangering our lifeline to the US. The extreme-right mayor declares that he doesn't give a damn for government orders and will continue to build all over, whatever Netanyahu may or may not say. The Palestinians understandably refuse to negotiate with the Israeli government while building activities in East Jerusalem go on.

Shall we endanger the future of Israel for generations, just so that land sharks can make more millions?

Do the patriots who are sharing out East Jerusalem include elected and appointed officials hoping for large bribes from the builders?

Is there a connection between the rampant corruption, of which the Holyland affair is only the tip of the iceberg, and historic national decisions?

In short, will we allow the future of the holy land be sacrificed on the unholy altar of the profits of corruption?

*permlink:* <http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/channels/avner/1272747796>