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JERUSALEM DISPATCH French Hill by Yossi Klein Halevi

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JERUSALEM

Tonight it is quiet outside my window. No ambulances, no helicopters, no thuds from exploding tear-gas canisters. Even the call of the muezzin in the Arab village on the next hill is subdued. For a moment my neighborhood, French Hill, is simply a middle-class Jewish enclave where cars bear stickers extolling pluralism and peace. And I can forget that I live at the very edge of northeastern Jerusalem, beyond which lies the West Bank.

Yesterday someone smashed car windshields in French Hill; today police found a Molotov cocktail in the bushes, waiting to be retrieved. My neighbor, a passionate supporter of the peace process, now says that if Prime Minister Ehud Barak fulfills his intention to transfer to Yasir Arafat the two Palestinian villages that border our neighborhood, he's leaving. "How will I bring my children to the park with Palestinian police on the next hill?" he asks. On a wall in our shopping center someone has written, in huge letters, RABBI KAHANE WAS RIGHT.

Here the personal and the political are interchangeable: You enter the supermarket and everyone looks the way you feel. Beyond fear, there is despair--about whether we can endure indefinite conflict; about whether we will ever find our home in the Middle East; about the viability of the Zionist enterprise, which remains, a half-century after Israel's founding, an experiment. What follows are some fragments from the war between my hill and the hill next door.

YASIR ARAFAT: From the beginning of the Oslo peace process, Arafat repeatedly promised Palestinian crowds he would lead a jihad for Jerusalem, and now it has begun. Leaders of Tanzim, the Fatah militia that led the attacks on Israeli outposts, say they were encouraged by Arafat. And, at some locations, rioters were even brought to the scene by Arafat's armed forces.

This week's uprising wasn't a response to Likud leader Ariel Sharon's reckless visit to the Temple Mount but to Barak's refusal to surrender the mount to exclusive Palestinian sovereignty. Arafat is trying to win concessions through televised pictures of dead

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And blackmail, after all, has been his approach to the peace process from the beginning. In the mid-'90s, according to the generally pro-Oslo Israeli military intelligence, Arafat gave Hamas the green light to bomb Israeli targets. He then pointed to the terrorists as the alternative awaiting Israel unless it bolstered him through additional concessions. Now, though, the false dichotomy between Arafat and the Palestinian "enemies of peace" is over; the blackmail tactics have become overt. We can expect that failure to accept Arafat's demands will result in further attacks by his militias--still absurdly referred to by journalists as "police." Arafat no longer needs Hamas; his own soldiers are now leading the clashes he assumes will intimidate an exhausted Israeli public and force Barak to concede even more.

EHUD BARAK: Though he temporarily cornered Arafat at Camp David, it is Barak who now faces excruciating choices. He has already revealed his bottom-line concessions, including Palestinian control of the Old City's Muslim and Christian quarters and shared sovereignty over the Temple Mount. Arafat is also demanding the Armenian quarter--part of which is entwined with the Jewish quarter--and exclusive control of the mount. Barak, whose Camp David concessions alone probably couldn't have survived an Israeli referendum, has nothing left to give. His only hope for a deal is to defer a solution on Jerusalem and yield most of the West Bank in exchange for a temporary end to the violence. In other words, land for nothing.

If he does reach an interim deal with Arafat, Barak's minority government will depend on the support of the nine members of the Knesset's three Arab parties. That risks delegitimizing the deal among Jewish voters, who strongly mistrust the Arab parliamentarians--one of whom, Abdel Malik Dahamshe, hangs a photograph of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin in his living room. For their part, the Arab Knesset members may well refuse to support a government that sanctioned shooting at rioters, anyway.

Barak's alternative is a national unity government with the Likud. But that means risking the secession of Labor's left wing and conceding the failure of Oslo--which he isn't yet prepared to do. Indeed, in a pathetic replay of his misreading of the late Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, Barak has told confidants that Arafat may finally be ready to compromise, because he's now proved his bravado. Still, Barak hasn't ruled out a unity government. Tellingly, he didn't condemn Sharon for provoking the violence; and several of Barak's closest political allies pointedly exonerated the Likud leader and blamed Arafat instead.

JERUSALEM: Barak's suggestions for sharing Jerusalem with Arafat, hardly popular to begin with, will now face even stiffer domestic opposition. More than ever, Israelis want separation from the Palestinians and are likely to support withdrawal from most of the territories for that reason. But shared rule in Jerusalem means greater intimacy with Arafat's regime. The rationale for continuing the Oslo process is divorce; yet what Barak is proposing in Jerusalem is, in effect, marriage.

This week's violence in Jerusalem was largely confined to riots, which Israel quickly subdued; but shoot-outs lasted for days in the West Bank and Gaza, precisely because the territories contain Palestinian militias. After watching those televised scenes, most Israelis are now wary of transferring authority over any part of Jerusalem to Arafat. The logic is straightforward: While it's true that few Jews enter Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem, at least Arafat's soldiers don't, either.

ARAB ISRAELIS: Along with "peace process" and "Palestinian police," this week's armed intifada has discredited the term "Arab Israeli." Since the first intifada, in the late '80s, and especially since Oslo, Israel's Arabs have undergone a series of linguistic redefinitions, moving from "Palestinian Israelis" to "Palestinian citizens of Israel" to "Palestinians who live in Israel." Members of a 1997 delegation of Palestinian Israeli leaders to Assad accepted the Syrian president's definition of them as the "Arabs of 1948," eliminating Israel altogether.

Of all Israel's social failures, the most tragic is its inability to offer Arab citizens genuine equality and a minimal connection to its national identity. To some extent, the alienation of Israel's Arabs was inevitable: They are, after all, a unique minority, at once surrounded by the Jewish majority and part of the regional majority that surrounds the Jewish state--concentric circles of siege. Yet Jewish Israel hasn't encouraged positive trends within the Arab minority--which through the '90s was paradoxically becoming politically Palestinian but culturally Israeli. Now even that fragile cultural opening for a common identity between Israel's Arabs and Jews has been drastically undermined.

Arab spokesmen insist their community's violence wasn't motivated so much by Palestinian nationalism as by frustration with Arabs' second-class status--by a desire to become more, not less, a part of Israeli society. Yet, by timing their protests to coincide with the Palestinian attacks in the territories, the rioters within Israel only reinforced the long-standing Jewish fear that their fellow Arab citizens are a potential fifth column.

Barak may want to soothe Arab voters--who were crucial to his election--by finally ending discrimination in government funding to the Arab sector and perhaps even appointing the country's first-ever Arab Cabinet minister. But, after this week, those gestures would

likely be dismissed by many Arabs as belated tokenism and by many Jews as appeasement of violence. On this issue, as well, Barak can no longer win.

THE GREEN LINE: Oslo was intended to revive the pre-1967 border, and, at Camp David, Barak came close to doing just that, agreeing to withdraw from more than 90 percent of the territories and compensate Palestinians with additional territory inside Israel proper. Yet, while Oslo legitimized the green line for many Jews, it had precisely the opposite effect on Israel's Arabs, encouraging their identification with the Palestinian state emerging just across the border. Even at the height of the first intifada, which preceded Oslo, Israel's Arabs largely refrained from violence. Yet this week the attacks spread from the territories across the international border to the Galilee, where rioters blocked major roads and are reported to have set fires across the region. Suddenly the Israeli right's great fear--that the Palestinian state won't cease its territorial demands at the 1967 border but will revive the 1947 U.N. partition plan that awarded the western Galilee to the Palestinians--no longer seems so paranoid.

THE GALILEE: Until this week, whenever Jews needed to escape the congestion of Tel Aviv and the tensions of Jerusalem, they headed for the Galilee, the one place where Arab-Jewish coexistence seemed to work. They searched Arab villages for the best olive oil and hummus, imagining themselves at home in the Middle East. But now the Galilee is under siege--from without by rock throwers on the Lebanese border, from within by Arab residents. For many Jews, the map of Israel has suddenly contracted, and the Arab Galilee is now as untouchable as the West Bank. This new fear will mean less sympathy for the Arab struggle for equality.

HEZBOLLAH: Palestinian rioters repeatedly chanted Hezbollah's name, invoking its victory over Israel as an omen for their own battle. Indeed, the Israeli retreat from Lebanon is at least partly responsible for the latest violence: For months Palestinians have been citing the Hezbollah model as the most effective way to win territory from Israel. Hezbollah may be tempted to prove its continued viability by staging solidarity attacks on the northern border. Barak has repeatedly said he will hold Damascus responsible for any Hezbollah attacks and will retaliate against Syrian military targets. That could lead to a regional war. The real front to watch, then, isn't Gaza but Lebanon.

A NEW ISRAELI CONSENSUS? The first intifada proved the bankruptcy of Greater Israel; the new intifada has done the same for the peace process. The slogans from the right-wing protest campaigns of the early '90s suddenly seem prophetic: "Don't give them guns," "This is not peace," and, most chilling, "Yesha [Judea and Samaria] is here." This past week, the chaos of Yesha was indeed everywhere.

If Labor and Likud form a national unity government, it may choose the only option we've ever really had:

unilateral withdrawal to essential borders defined by national consensus. Israel would then retrench the settlers into defensible blocks, ensure its continued rule over united Jerusalem, and allow the Palestinians to govern themselves--precisely the solution Barak offered in the 1999 elections, minus a peace treaty. Imposing a unilateral solution would, of course, mean the end of negotiations and the continuation of conflict. But it would face the essential truths of Israel's left and right--that we can't occupy the Palestinians, and we can't make peace with them.

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