

# CUTTING EDGE

BY EDWIN BLACK

## *Siniora Slate Divides Jerusalem*

On the twentieth anniversary of a united Jerusalem, serious plans are being made to create a divided municipality.

Arab editor Hanna Siniora's proposal to run an "Arab list" in the November 1988 Jerusalem city elections was at first seen as a breakthrough for Arab participation in Israeli democracy. But sober second thoughts conclude that if Arabs do indeed participate, "united" Jerusalem will become unworkable. Quickly, the Arabs along with many Jews would seek to administratively partition the city into co-equal "autonomous boroughs."

"A borough system for East and West Jerusalem is exactly what I am pushing for," confirms Al Fajr editor Hanna Siniora, in an interview. "It's my first priority."

Shimon Samuels, director of the American Jewish Committee's Jerusalem office predicts that mainstream Jewish voters may eventually concur. "If Siniora's list gains a block of seats, we will find a City Council with a non-Zionist and anti-Zionist majority," says Samuels. "The change will be too radical to live with. It will then be necessary to create two boroughs, each with a city council, two municipal halves, functioning side by side."

The electoral dynamics are these: The mayor is directly elected by popular vote. Jerusalem's City Council is comprised of 31 seats, assigned proportionally among the various parties standing for election. Currently, Teddy Kollek's One Jerusalem Party, sponsored by Labor, holds a tenuous majority with seventeen seats. Likud's municipal list holds four seats, and five feuding religious factions hold the remaining ten.

All Jerusalemites are automatically eligible to vote if they are official residents as of January 1 of the election year. The electorate breaks down this way: approximately 230,000 Jewish, 70,000 Arab. In the last election, 135,000 Jews voted, but only 12,000 Arabs voted. Of the 12,000 Arab votes, about 7000 went to One Jerusalem, and 500 went to Likud, on the theory that Likud would worsen conditions in Jerusalem, raising the threshold of dissatisfaction.

If Siniora's list runs, the balance of power would radically alter. Both Likud and One Jerusalem would lose seats. Siniora's list would receive not only the existing Arab vote, but as many as 20,000 new votes. His group would surely secure ten to twenty percent of the citywide vote. "If I get five seats, I'll be satisfied," says Siniora. That might rank his list second in power only to One Jerusalem. Plus, Siniora's people would of necessity chair -- albeit not control -- several key Council committees, say Health, Education or even Tourism. Whichever, they are, he will have a key role in the life of the city.

What's more, without a clear majority, the City Council would be reduced to the same petty horse-trading that engulfs Knesset. Siniora would be the new swing vote. "I want to be the power-broker of Jerusalem, just as the religious parties now are. If I vote with the secular, there will be a soccer stadium that people have wanted for years. If I vote with the religious, there will be no shabbat traffic in more of West Jerusalem."

Siniora intends to use his swing vote to pass his borough concept. With Siniora controlling a handful of committees, and with his votes frustrating the Zionist enterprise in Jerusalem, the borough concept could find broad if reluctant acceptance from Jewish Councilman.

"I can see it," admitted one Labour Coun-

cilman, who asked not to be named. "The city is almost impossible to govern now. An Arab and religious coalition? The secular residents will not be able to live here. So then we'll be better off with East Jerusalem as an Arab borough." Citizens Rights Party leader Shulamit Aloni concurs that Siniora's move would indeed be the beginning of the boroughing of Jerusalem.

The concept is not new. Teddy Kollek and other Jewish city leaders have long advocated co-equal boroughs as a modus vivendi with Arab Jerusalem. It has been resisted on the theory that an Arab borough would quickly become the basis for a Palestinian state, explains Likud Council leader Rubi Rivlin. "And for this reason, we must resist it now as well." Labour MK Simcha Dinitz agrees. "Any attempt to divide the city, not only physically, but functionally," he insists, "must be resisted."

Just how separate would these two Jerusalem be? Shimon Samuels, of the American Jewish Committee here, who has studied the borough concept in Europe explains. "They would certainly do more than pick up their own garbage. They could have power over taxes, schooling -- everything a city requires." Siniora defined the system this way: "Everything in the West would be mirrored in the East." However, most observers, including Siniora, precluded separate police departments.

There seems little doubt that a coalition between haredim and Siniora is possible. The morning after his announcement, a Mea Shearim envoy walked into Al Fajr's office unannounced and offered Siniora "50,000 to 70,000 votes."

Next was Rabbi Moshe Hirsch, who claims to speak for the virulently anti-Zionist and pro-PLO Naturei Karta community. According to Siniora, Hirsch said that if Siniora would "re-interpret or re-state" his proposal from one of existence and mutual recognition, to one of utter Zionist rejection, he could see value in it." Siniora politely declined.

Mea Shearim circles could help Siniora garner seats two ways. First, protest voting and cross voting are entrenched in Israel. Just as many Arabs now vote for the Likud, National Religious Party and even Kahane's Kach party to increase political frustration, "so will ultra-orthodox who normally boycott Jerusalem elections be willing to vote with an Arab list," explains one haredi editor.

Second, within the Palestinian community, votes from disinterested Arabs can be bought with "walking money," explained one religious political activist. Famous along Chicago's Skid Row, an indigent would receive \$2 to walk into a poll booth and cast a vote. "In Chicago it would be the precinct captain passing out the money. Here it would be the local mukhtar," the source explained. "All the parties here do it too -- Likud and Labour."

Asked about this, Siniora would only respond, "there is a long tradition of cooperation between Palestinians and the haredi community."

Rivlin, of Likud, decried this support as "very dangerous -- but not unexpected. Our answer is to convince every Jew in Jerusalem to vote, and to form a coalition between Labor and Likud."

An Arab borough would only be the first step for Siniora. "My next move would be to gerrymander back in all the Arab sections recently gerrymandered out of the municipality. I want a total re-districting. Right now, more and more Jewish suburbs are being included in the city proper, while more and more Arab suburbs are being legislated out." Siniora estimates that 100,000 additional Arab residents, including some 40,000 additional Arab voters could be re-districted in.

Ironically, Rivlin applauds the idea. "I welcome Siniora as a Herutnik," declared Rivlin. "If he wants to include these West Bank areas under Israeli Jerusalem's civil administration, we agree. I am not worried about the extra numbers because then we will seek to add Maale Adunim and other outlying Jewish suburbs. Then I will add 150,000 extra Jews and retain a Jewish majority."

While politicians are busy forecasting, the greater question is whether Siniora will ever

proceed with his plan. His election bid was announced without any consultation with key Palestinians. He shocked a June 5 Foreign Press Association meeting, attended by many Palestinian journalists as well, called to discuss the 20th anniversary of Jerusalem's unification. Al Awdah, an East Jerusalem weekly, described the announcement as "a bombshell."

Since then, condemnation from nearly all Arab quarters has been swift and unequivocal. The pro-Jordanian faction cursed his move. The original mentor of the plan, Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, has disassociated himself from it. A gamut of Arab Palestinian organizations, from the Arab Chamber of Commerce to the Journalists Association have all called for Siniora to be spurned.

"I have taken a hell of a shellacking from my own people over this," admitted Siniora. In truth, he is waiting for one man's comment: Yassir Arafat. "The wishes of Arafat and the executive committee of the PLO are taken into consideration by every Palestinian," insists Siniora. "No one will defy (him). We believe in Rabat (where the Arab League declared the PLO the sole representative of the Palestinians). So far, Arafat has been silent." Asked if he would proceed in the absence of clear approval from Arafat, he replied, "If Arafat is silent, this too is a message, and a good one. My plan is no secret. If he wants to comment, he can."

It is understood that Siniora, while no popular Palestinian, is indeed Arafat's choice to negotiate with Israeli. Shimon Peres has also listed Siniora as "an acceptable" Palestinian to negotiate at any international conference. Siniora concedes, "I only took this move because of the failure of the international conference. It is dead, not only for this year, but for at least three more years. So," he continues, "we have new circumstances. I believe in dual recognition, dual sovereignty. I am not interested in working with anyone who wants to increase tensions here. I want to cooperate with the Israelis. But I demand that they recognize my legitimate rights as well."

At press time, Arafat remains silent, and Siniora's plan is picking up momentum. For example, the day after his announcement, Siniora declared, "I have no one to join my list, no financial backing, it is just an idea, and all in uncharted waters." One day later Siniora asserted, "not only do I have the people to run, I have people to bankroll the campaign as well. Several East Jerusalem Palestinians have already approached me. Money will be no problem. We are in fact already studying the cost of television time."

He added that money and support would also come from America. Shortly, Siniora flies to Washington to address the National Arab-American Association. "I assume I can interest them," he said. He emphasized that he expected help from many in the Jewish community as well. "I have good connections among the Jewish community in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Baltimore," he explained. These contacts, he said, are through the good offices of Peace Now, Israel-Palestine for and Israeli-Palestinian Peace headquartered in Chicago, and the International Center for Peace in the Middle East in New York, all of which thrive on liberal Jewish American support.

Perhaps the greatest question is not one of dollars and voting districts but of life and death? Will Siniora live to see an election should he continue in his plan. "I think he is a very brave man. The threat of assassination is great," remarked Shimon Samuels. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine has already declared from Damascus that Siniora's is "treasonous," a codeword for "assassination." For his part, Siniora admits, "In the Middle East, many issues are decided with violence. I know this is dangerous. But I am not worried. So far I have received no threats. I am not getting cold feet, my feet are firmly planted on the ground."

But a ranking Likud source commented coolly, "Let's not ask what happens if Siniora gets elected. Let's ask if Siniora will survive to even run."