



Reality In Jerusalem

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On Wednesday, President Donald Trump announced that the United States officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. "This is nothing more or less than a recognition of reality," he said. "It is right thing to do. It has to be done." He also said the U.S. will begin the formal process of moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to the Holy City.

Trump was making good on a 2016 campaign promise that previous presidents also made; they, however, used the national security loophole in the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 to avoid following through.

Critics opposed the move as a threat to the peace process. For decades it has been U.S. policy that Jerusalem would not be recognized until after the final status of the city was determined by an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., sent a letter to the White House arguing that "the future of Jerusalem is an issue that should be decided by Israel and the Palestinians, not unilaterally by the United States," and that "recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital - or relocating our embassy to Jerusalem - will spark violence and embolden extremists on both sides of this debate." Ironically, Feinstein has been on both sides of the debate herself, being a cosponsor of the original Jerusalem Embassy Act that passed in the Senate 93-5.

On cue, leaders in various Arab countries voiced their disapproval. Turkey called for a conference of Islamic states to discuss the move. Palestinian leaders announced three "days of rage," and the Palestine Liberation Organization office in Washington canceled its annual Christmas reception. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas accused the U.S. of "withdrawing" from the peace process.

But Trump cautioned that the "decision is not intended in any way to mark a departure from our strong commitment to reach a lasting peace agreement," and argued that this was "a long overdue step to advance the peace process" between Israel and the Palestinians.

To those who accuse Trump of stirring the pot, his answer is that's the point. The peace process has been off the rails for years. There was no substantive progress in resolving any outstanding issues during the two Obama terms, and during the George W. Bush years the most dramatic step, the "land for peace" transfer of Gaza to Palestinian rule, was a dismal failure.

A major stumbling block has been the lack of incentives for the Palestinians to act. International pressure has been applied to Israel to make concessions, but not so much on the other side. The Palestinians could also count on the presumed American need to appear impartial, and solid backing from Arab states in the region, many of which do not even recognize Israel.

But times have changed. Iran's rising power and influence have made Israel a more logical strategic partner for Sunni Arab countries, regardless of their past animosity toward the Jewish State. The Palestinian issue, which had been useful for promoting Arab solidarity, pales in comparison to the clear and present danger posed by the "Shia crescent." And the collapse of energy prices in recent years has forced the kind of austerity on the region that won't allow for continued subsidies to the Palestinian Authority.

Trump's Jerusalem declaration ends America's role as a fair negotiator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The corresponding emergence of the United States as a dominant energy producing state also gives Washington greater flexibility in dealing with the region. And the enmity between the U.S. and Iran fits an emerging regional alignment in which the Palestinians are merely a sideshow.

So, after Palestinian youths are done burning tires and throwing rocks, the leadership will be forced to approach their aspirations for statehood with a new seriousness. Trump has taken a bold move to restore American legitimacy and signal that he will not be bound by the failed framework of the past. The United States is pushing things towards a recognition of the world as it is, not as people hoped it might be 50 or 70 years ago.

Israel made Jerusalem its capital, a decision rooted in history and tradition. It defended the right to the city through four wars and countless acts of terrorism. Today, Jerusalem is a united, bustling modern metropolis. Israel has earned the right to it. The United States is simply acknowledging and respecting their choice.

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