

Think Again: Trump's Jerusalem Decision May Actually Revitalize the Peace Process

Conventional wisdom is that President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and decision to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem will hinder the peace process. But this "wisdom" ignores reality—the reality that Jerusalem has been Israel's capital for 69 years, a reality acknowledged by an overwhelming bipartisan majority of Congress in passing the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995.

The true hindrance to the peace process has been a Palestinian narrative that refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist. Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas has stated, "The Palestinians won't recognize the Jewishness of the State of Israel" and even referred to the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem as the "alleged temple." According to this narrative, the Jewish people have no historical connection to Israel and are to be viewed as modern crusaders who were gifted land in the Levant due to guilt over the Holocaust. This narrative denies accounts in the Gospels mentioning the Temple as well as overwhelming archeological evidence.

By acknowledging Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Trump has publicly rejected this false narrative and instead embraced the historic ties of the Jewish people to Israel and Jerusalem. Many have criticized Trump for tipping the scale in favor of Israel, but an honest assessment reveals that Trump has only balanced the scales, and in doing so perhaps found a way to revive a process that can finally result in peace.

For decades and culminating with President Obama's decision not to veto the one-sided U.N. resolution declaring the West Bank and Jerusalem (including even the Western Wall) to be occupied territory, the strategy for achieving peace has been the same regardless of which party controls the White House. It has been to pressure Israel into making concessions while not holding the Palestinians accountable for continued terrorism. Feckless pleas have done nothing to stop the PA and Hamas from inciting and glorifying terror and even rewarding terrorists and their families financially. After the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, launching the "peace process," terror attacks against Israel increased sharply, with a toll now of thousands of Israeli civilians injured and murdered.

It is no wonder why this strategy has failed; there has been no incentive and no pressure for the Palestinians to make concessions. The Palestinians have had the luxury of spurning generous Israeli peace overtures such as the one made at Camp David in 2000. Frustrated by then PA president Yasser Arafat's unwillingness even to propose a counter offer, President Clinton admonished him, "You and the Palestinians did not come to this summit with

sincere intentions.” Shortly after walking out of the Camp David talks, Arafat launched the bloody second Intifada.

Trump’s decision is a watershed moment. It puts the Palestinians on notice that the failure to negotiate in earnest has negative repercussions. If he remains consistent in his message, the Palestinians will realize eventually that they can gain more at the negotiating table than by engaging in a war of attrition against Israel through the use of terror and unilateral efforts at achieving statehood and demonizing Israel at the U.N.

It has been said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results. Though I often find myself disappointed with the president, I must commend him for stopping the insanity of denying a reality that is obvious to anyone who is serious about achieving peace. That is that Jerusalem is and will remain Israel’s capital.

This recognition does not preclude the Israeli government from making future concessions even regarding Jerusalem, as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert did in 2008. Olmert was prepared to forgo sovereignty of the Temple Mount, Judaism’s holiest site, proposing that the area containing the religious sites in Jerusalem be managed by a special committee consisting of representatives from five countries: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Palestine, the United States and Israel.

Those who are concerned that Trump’s decision will spur increased terrorist attacks should consider Alan Dershowitz’s warning that “terrorists should not have a veto over American policy.” Over the long run what emboldens terrorists the most is success. Holding American policy hostage to their threats of violence would be an act of capitulation that would only encourage more threats and violence.