

# Arabs Must Accept Jerusalem's Status

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**In light of entrenched Arab public opposition to Jewish rights in Jerusalem, insisting on them up front as a non-negotiable may be the only way of moving the two-state process forward.**

**O**n Wednesday, the Trump administration declared Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. It is the right decision and long overdue to repair the historical injustice and recognize the reality of many decades that Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish people. As God told Moses in the Koran, "O my people, enter the Holy Land which Allah has assigned to you."

As an Arab American who grew up in the Middle East, I was taught from a young age that Jews have no right in Jerusalem and the whole of Israel is Arab land. Hence, I am astonished to hear some U.S. pundits objecting to Trump's move on the grounds that it makes it less likely a Palestinian president will sign a document dividing Jerusalem or even acknowledging the Jewish right in the holy city.

It is also always puzzling to witness Arab officials lie about their acceptance of Jewish rights in Jerusalem. I was taught at school, mosque and on television that Jews have no historical claim to and no rights in the holy city. As my Arab history teacher once said in middle school, "Jews do not belong or own one meter in Jerusalem." A clear recent example took place on Wednesday following Trump's announcement: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas stressed Muslim and Christian heritage in the holy city without mentioning anything related to Jewish rights.

Based on my personal experience, I think U.S. policymakers over many years have been irrational, even deluded, to think that millions of Arabs -- let alone Palestinians -- will accept a peace settlement acknowledging Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish State. The fact is, insisting upon this up front, laying this down essentially as a non-negotiable, is the only chance the idea will ever get through their heads. So it was up to the United States to fix this historic injustice and make the Arab populations look in the mirror and see the hypocrisy of their leaders, who have

misled them for years.

We have heard all the talk about coming violence, even Armageddon, if and when the United States acknowledges Jerusalem as the capital of Israel -- despite the fact that the U.S. Congress has repeatedly declared this to be the case. The coming days and months will prove those warnings to have been overblown. Yes, there will be outrage and protests in some countries. But Arab governments criminalize free speech and right to assemble. Any protests, the ensuing violence, and rioting are likely to be staged or permitted by Arab governments to blackmail the U.S. policy community into following their views, which unfortunately previous U.S. administrations have tolerated.

The more likely reality is that, in this Arab Spring world, Arab citizens are less likely to protest and die for the cause of Palestinians. They would rather focus on making a living in the dire economic conditions they live in.

Those who do protest will be driven by a political agenda that denies Israel's right to exist outright and are fundamentally hostile to the United States. Moreover, many of the protests we do see are likely to be led by Iranian proxies in Arab states such as Lebanon and Iraq. We cannot let the Iranian-led axis in the Middle East dictate U.S. foreign policy.

It is time to settle the status of Jerusalem forever. Successive U.S. administrations have delayed such a move in the hope that Palestinians and Israelis will someday compromise on this issue.

This was a grave mistake. First, Palestinian leaders have never compromised freely without pressure. The Palestinian Liberation Organization never renounced violence until it suffered successive humiliating defeats at the hands of the Israeli Defense Forces in the 1970s and 1980s.

Second, peace detractors have utilized the issue of the holy city to hinder and block any progress toward a peace settlement. Acknowledging Jerusalem as Israel's capital just may be the necessary breath of fresh air we need: It will settle this issue, and if they want and need a state, Palestinians will have to move on to issues that truly deserve and demand negotiations. Can they? Will they?

*Haisam Hassanein is the Glazer Fellow at The Washington Institute.* ❖

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