

America's Recognition to Jerusalem as Israel's Capital Is Good for Arabs

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835 words

Arabs should not allow having 128 countries condemn President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, mislead them. Despite this major vote, Trump's decision is far from being reversed. It is about time that Arabs face reality and be strategic. The time of blaming others has passed. Instead of fulfilling the classic narrative of getting emotional, declaring their relentless support to Palestine, while, taking no constructive action. Arabs should use Trump's decision as piercing wakeup call to realize their weak reality. To see that the ship sails only with strong allies. And, to acknowledge that the time of waiting for the Messiah has passed, this generation has to be its own Messiah.

Last week, over 50 Muslim countries met in Istanbul to slam President Trump's decision. This summit came after an Arab League's urgent meeting serving the same purpose. Both meetings ended on a similar note, action free. The streets of major Muslim and Arab cities as Jakarta, Lahore, Cairo, Amman, Beirut, Istanbul, and Jerusalem are flooded with protesters and banners that reject this forced reality.

But this anger will pass. And when it does, Arab leaders must face some hard truths about their own domestic and regional challenges. From the backlash to the Arab Spring and the ongoing civil war in Syria to violent extremism that often explodes into mainstream society, Arab leaders have no shortage of problems that have nothing to do with Jerusalem, or even the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jerusalem has been used as a rallying cry for generations. But its political purpose was an excuse for inaction. Now that Trump has seemingly taken away this excuse, each Arab country should stand strong alone, before they can be strong together.

For Israelis, Trump's announcement did not come with a surprise but with fear of violence outbreak. Most Israelis considered Jerusalem (West and East) as their capital since they captured East Jerusalem in the 1967 six-day war. On the other hand, Palestinians consider East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian State. According to the U.N., Jerusalem is under international control, until peace negotiations take place. Trump's decision marks the first international recognition for Israel's move.

While the implications of this international recognition remain unclear, what is vivid is that more than 300,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem feel unsafe, defeated and on the verge of displacement. The fate of the diplomatic negotiations over a two-state solution is unknown. Meanwhile, no country has promised to follow Trump's lead. The EU announced that it will not acknowledge Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan promised to open an embassy in East Jerusalem. And, Egypt has drafted a UN resolution highlighting "Jerusalem as Arab."

Some Arab citizens in different countries criticize their leaders for maintaining their diplomatic ties with the U.S. and Israel. They accuse their leaders of being biased towards Trump's administration and of protecting the interests of the United States and Israel over their local ones.

On the contrary, those leaders could be awakened to the fact that their states are weak and torn. They have decided to put ahead of the domestic growth over Arab nationalism.

Unity is a relentless potent power. If Arabs unite they can make real and crucial change happen for Palestine. However, the Arab nations have never been more divided. Saudi Arabia is busy fighting Yemen. The Gulf states and Egypt are standing against the threat of Qatar and Iran. Egypt is collecting its remnants post a revolution and an army rule. Libya and Iraq are navigating their ways midst inner terrorism and tribal divisions. And, Syria is burnt by a civil war.

That being said, the Arab nations have no option but face their reality and to focus on building their individual countries before showing rage. The people along with their leaders should be transparent on how much effort they are willing to put in bringing back Jerusalem. The international community fears the Arabs' anger, speculates their violence but is not necessarily worried about their tactics. This has to change. It will only change by changing behavior, channeling anger into nations' building.

On the other side, the absence of collective action might be interpreted as acceptance and could open the door to further "defeats." As the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Al-Jaafari said during the Arab League's emergency meeting, "if we do nothing about [Trump's decision], there will be many, many more tragedies." This is neither a call for passivity nor inaction. It is a call to speculate post the storm, beyond the anger, and choose each step carefully to take us towards where we want, not away from it.

I learned to focus on the part of the glass that is full. The slight portion of the glass full of Trump's acknowledgment of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel lies facing reality. It lies in accepting that "we are the ones we have been waiting for," as the author Alice Walker puts it. Our hands need to get stronger before our voices get louder.