

Trump and the Embassy: The Dogs Bark, The Caravan Moves On

by Hugh Fitzgerald



If you've been listening to NPR or the BBC or almost any news channel, you've been told again and again these days that Jerusalem is a city "holy to three faiths." This is comforting for those who don't like to make distinctions; it doesn't, however, adequately convey the fact that Jerusalem as an entire city means far more to Jews and to Christians than to Muslims. For Muslims, Mecca and Medina are the two supremely holy cities, off-limits to non-Muslims. The qibla, or direction toward which Muslims face while prostrate in prayer, is Mecca. For a very short period, when first in Medina, Muhammad, in an attempt to win Jewish converts, had his followers when praying face north toward Jerusalem. After this attempt failed, Muhammad turned against the Jews, killed many of them, and directed the qibla southward, toward Mecca.

Muhammad's abandonment of Jerusalem explains the fact that this city is not mentioned even once in the Qur'an. After Palestine was occupied by the Muslims, its capital was Ramle, 30 miles to the west of Jerusalem, signifying that Jerusalem meant very little to them.

Islam rediscovered Jerusalem 50 years after Muhammad's death. In 682 CE, 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr rebelled against the Islamic rulers in Damascus, conquered Mecca, and prevented pilgrims from reaching Mecca for the Hajj. 'Abd al-Malik, the Umayyad Caliph, needed an alternative site for the pilgrimage and settled on Jerusalem, which was then under his control. In order to justify this choice, he relied on Qur'an 17:1, which states:

"Glory to Him who caused His servant to travel by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, in order to show him some of Our Signs, He is indeed the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing."

The meaning the Umayyad Caliph ascribed to this verse was that "the furthest mosque" (al-masjid al-aqsa) must have been in Jerusalem (although there was no mosque in Jerusalem during Muhammad's lifetime) and that Muhammad was conveyed there from Mecca one night, on the back of al-Buraq, a magical horse with the head of a woman, the wings of an eagle, the tail of a peacock, and hoofs reaching to the horizon. He tethered the horse to the Western Wall of the Temple Mount and from there ascended to the seventh heaven together with the angel Gabriel.

And that is how Jerusalem, which is not mentioned even once in the Qur'an, took on the significance it has for Muslims, who simply appropriated it, at a time when Mecca was temporarily off-limits, and assigned it to be the place – the "farthest mosque" – to which Muhammad travelled from Mecca (the isra), before he ascended to the seventh heaven (the miraj). That Night Journey begins from a rock on the Temple Mount, the

holiest site in Judaism, upon which both the First and Second Temples were built. Muslims appropriated for their own purpose the Temple Mount, which they renamed Al-Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, upon which were built the Dome of the Rock, from which, Muslims believe, Muhammad ascended into heaven, and the al-Aqsa Mosque, where Muhammad prayed after his Night Journey. This appropriation of the main Jewish site – the Temple Mount – for the Muslim narrative, is not surprising: Islam has taken over a great deal from the prior monotheisms, including Moses and Jesus (as “prophets”); it is natural that it would also lay claim to physical sites holy to Judaism and Christianity.

For Christians, Jerusalem is central to the faith. It’s the site of the temple where Christ was taken to be circumcised, the temple where Mary was taken to be presented, the city into which Christ makes his entrance on “Palm Sunday,” the place where Christ kicked out the moneylenders from the temple, the place where, on a hill, Christ was crucified after carrying the cross through its streets, and where He was buried, at the site of what is now the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Compare the role of Jerusalem in Judaism. It has been the center of Jewish life, and longing, since 3000 B.C. Some Orthodox Jews still turn physically toward Jerusalem in prayer, while other Jews, while praying, turn their thoughts toward Jerusalem. For centuries Jerusalem was the capital city of Jewish kingdoms, the city of King Solomon and King David, the location of Judaism’s holiest sites (the Western Wall, the Temple Mount), and the historical focus of Jewish political life. It has been continuously inhabited by Jews for nearly 5000 years. As the Psalmist says, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”

So we must remember that Jerusalem, then, is far less significant for Muslims than it is for Jews and Christians.

Sites in Jerusalem important to the Jewish and Christian faiths – the Western Wall, the Temple Mount, the Via Dolorosa, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and many others – you do not need to be either a believing Jew or a Christian to know that those sites really exist, and that they are revered by both. But for you to believe that Muhammad flew on his winged steed Al-Buraq from Mecca to Jerusalem, and from there ascended to the Seventh Heaven, you have to be a Muslim.

Now that President Trump has become the first president to honor his campaign pledge to move the embassy to Jerusalem, showing up all those presidents before him who made similar promises but then refused to honor them, let's remember the prevarications of his predecessors. It begins with Bill Clinton, who in his campaign attacked George H. W. Bush for not moving the Embassy to Jerusalem, and promised that he, Clinton would do so. When he became president, Clinton promptly forgot that promise, having decided it would merely complicate his incessant attempts at "peacemaking" with Arafat. That "peacemaking" led to nothing, since Arafat in the end rejected even the huge concessions, amounting to 96% of the West Bank, which Ehud Barak, in a fit of madness, had offered him.

Next came George W. Bush who, in his own campaign for president, criticized the failure of Clinton to follow through and move the embassy, a charge with which he also saddled his opponent Al Gore. But when Bush was elected, he did nothing about moving the embassy himself. To be fair, he was president during the 9/11 attacks, and had many other Middle Eastern and Islamic matters on his mind, including the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and that may help explain his failure to follow through on his embassy promise.

Barack Obama did not discuss the Jerusalem Embassy issue during his campaign, but he declared in a 2008 campaign speech, "Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided." Sounds good. But not only did he

backtrack on this almost immediately, but in his last press conference he warned against moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem. His administration also attempted, unfortunately with success, to prevent Americans born in Jerusalem from listing Israel as their place of birth. One wonders if, in light of Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, whether that issue will be re-litigated.

Tired of the earlier promises, and prevarications, from the Executive Branch, Congress had passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 on October 23, 1995. It was intended to initiate and fund the relocation of the Embassy of the United States in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, no later than May 31, 1999. It was an attempt to withhold 50 percent of the funds appropriated to the State Department specifically for "Acquisition and Maintenance of Buildings Abroad," as allocated in fiscal year 1999 until the United States Embassy in Jerusalem had officially opened. The act also called for Jerusalem to remain an undivided city and for it to be recognized as the capital of the State of Israel. The proposed law was adopted overwhelmingly, by the Senate (93-5), and the House (374-37).

What Trump has done is extraordinary. He has forged ahead, despite all the grim warnings of terrible consequences; it seems fears of Middle East mayhem were grossly exaggerated. Several thousand Arabs, not more, in the West Bank, have rioted, and have been held well in check by tear gas and rubber bullets and water cannons; in Gaza, a total of 4,500 Arabs have gathered at six different spots along the border with Israel and thrown rocks and burning tires into Israel; two rockets were fired by Hamas into Israel. The Israelis returned live fire only against those identified as the ringleaders of the violence; two "Palestinians" have been killed. Compared to previous demonstrations, these have been comparatively small and restrained. "Days of wrath" is what Hamas' leader Ismael Haniya promised. So far, not much wrath.

As for Arab leaders, most were muted in their protests. Egypt's El-Sisi, who has good relations with Netanyahu, counselled "caution." Right now El-Sisi is most concerned not with where the American embassy is placed, but with how to wipe out the terrorist groups – ISIS, and the more uncompromising members of Hamas – in the Sinai, and how to keep up the pressure in Egypt itself on the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been attacking Copts with impunity.

King Abdullah of Jordan, King Hassan of Morocco, and other Arab leaders have expressed dismay over the embassy move, claiming that it would be harmful to the "search for peace." But there is already peace between Arabs and Israelis, a peace that remains durable as long as Israel is strong enough to repel any aggressors, whether or not such a peace is formally recognized in a treaty. The peace-keeping force in place – no other one is needed – is the IDF. And the basis for that peace-keeping is "deterrence." It worked during the Cold War to keep the peace between the United States and the Soviet Union, and it's been working fairly well for the Israelis ever since the Yom Kippur War. "Peace" is different from, and may even be undermined by, a "peace treaty" that would push Israel back to something like the pre-1967 lines with minor adjustments – that is, the 1949 Armistice Lines – for these are borders that would make it hellishly difficult for the IDF to defend Israel adequately, and would only invite further Arab aggression.

King Abdullah of Jordan has been warning ever since last February that, as he repeated after Trump made his announcement in early December, this week, "moving the embassy at this stage will have repercussions in the Palestinian, Arab and Islamic arenas and threatens the two-state solution." But succumbing to Arab threats and not moving the embassy, after Trump has been discussing making that move ever since the campaign, would also have "repercussions in the Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic arenas." It would make the Arabs, and

especially Mahmoud Abbas and the “Palestinian” Arabs, think they can yet again make an American administration yield to their demands. One should not be surprised at King Abdullah, or Abdel-Fatah El-Sisi, or other Arabs, for their standard-issue warnings about the embassy move, but compared to protests in the past, the tone is relatively subdued, for they understand Trump will not be bullied, and besides, they have now far more important worries than the ever-present “Palestinians.”

As mentioned above, El-Sisi has a lot on his plate. He has to deal with the ISIS terrorists in the Sinai who recently killed more than 300 Sufi Muslims in a mosque. But he has also been fighting a different terrorist threat from Hamas and its collaborators in the Sinai and in Gaza, who have preyed on Egyptian police and soldiers. He has to worry about attacks on Coptic churches and homes from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt proper. He has used methods, in crushing these enemies, that the American Congress considers too harsh, and some \$300 million of Egypt’s \$1.5 billion in annual aid has been cut as a result. But in Arab terms, he’s an enlightened despot, an Egyptian nationalist, friendly to Netanyahu, eager to cooperate with Israel on security matters, unenthusiastic about wasting Egyptian resources and risking trouble with the Americans for the “Palestinians” who, to judge by their behavior in Gaza and the Sinai, are not well-intentioned toward El-Sisi. He has laconically expressed his dismay at the embassy move (it “would undermine the chances of peace in the Middle East”), been a measured voice of calm among his fellow Arabs, and put Egypt’s interests first – including its interest in maintaining good relations with its main supplier of arms and foreign aid, the United States.

King Abdullah of Jordan does not have a terrorist threat akin to that facing El-Sisi in the Sinai, but he does have a different worry: Syria seems now to be firmly in Shi’ite Iran’s camp. There are now more Iranian troops (70,000),

including Revolutionary Guards, in Syria than there are troops in the Syrian army (50,000). In addition, Iran pays salaries for 250,000 mainly Shi'ite troops, consisting of Lebanese Hezbollah, Afghan militias, and Palestinian, Pakistani, and other militiamen. Equally troubling to King Abdullah, in Baghdad the Shi'ites now control the government that, under Saddam, was firmly in Sunni Arab hands. King Abdullah would like the American government, and for that matter, though naturally he doesn't talk about it, the Israeli government, to help contain both Hezbollah and, behind that group, the Iranians. He will utter the expected condemnation of the embassy move, but do nothing more. After all, he needs the \$1.3 billion in annual American aid Jordan now receives.

As for Saudi Arabia, behind the scenes its relations with Israel have never been better. Israel and Saudi Arabia share intelligence because they share the same dangerous enemy: Shiite Iran. The Saudis have in recent years not always been happy with the "Palestinians": two years ago they cut off aid to them over policy differences, then restored it, but they thereby demonstrated that the "Palestinians" cannot count forever on Saudi aid. Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman has bigger fish to fry than Mahmoud Abbas, Saeb Erekat, and the perennially complaining "Palestinians." He's planning a complete overhaul of the Saudi economy, spending \$640 billion on a new megacity that will emphasize high-tech companies and technically-advanced Saudi employees. He will need cooperation with the Americans for this project. And to keep an aggressive Iran at bay he is already getting intelligence help from the Israelis, who are certainly of greater value now to Saudi well-being than are the ever-demanding "Palestinians." No wonder his father criticized Trump's embassy announcement in the mildest possible terms as "irresponsible and unwarranted," which in the context of heated Muslim rhetoric, hardly counts as criticism at all.

In Yemen, where Sunnis ruled for decades, the Shi'a Houthis

have managed to seize, and hold, both northwestern Yemen and also the capital, San'a. The day before Trump announced the embassy move, a Houthi sniper killed Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had ruled Yemen for 34 years. Though a Sunni himself, Saleh had in recent years been allied with the Houthi, but just this month had switched sides. Now he is dead and the Iran-backed Houthis, despite an intensive Saudi bombing campaign lasting many months, still control San'a and have tightened their grip. The Saudis cannot afford to lose to the Shi'a in Yemen.

Meanwhile, the Saudis are also worried about Iran's ally Hezbollah in Lebanon. Even though the Lebanese Shi'a are only 27% of the total population, over the past few decades they have created the country's most powerful military force, Hezbollah, and gained more and more power at the expense of Lebanese Sunnis. The recent opera-bouffe attempt by the Saudis to engineer the resignation of Said Hariri was prompted by their belief that he could not stand up to Hezbollah, whereas his older brother Bayaah, so the Saudis thought, might be made of sterner stuff. In the end Said Hariri changed his mind, took back his resignation, and decided to stay on as Prime Minister. For the Saudis, the worry about Shi'a Iran remains, a worry that focuses for now on Yemen, where the Houthis are holding their own, and on Lebanon, where Hezbollah pulls the strings, and on Syria, where both Hezbollah and the Iranians have helped ensure that Bashar al-Assad would not be toppled. For now, this Shi'a threat both to the north and to the south is far more important to the Saudis than where the American embassy may be built in Jerusalem several years hence.

With all this going on in the Middle East, two parties were most vocal in attacking Trump's move.

The first was Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish leader who was his usual bombastic self. He declared that if Trump moved the embassy, that would be a "red line" for Muslims. He threatened to break off relations with Israel were Trump to act on his promise. Perhaps Erdogan will wait, claiming that he meant the

“red line” would be crossed only when the new embassy is actually built and open for business, thus giving him time to reconsider. He can always invoke “changed circumstances” at a later date.

Turkey has a lot to lose from breaking off relations with Israel. The huge natural gas fields Israel possesses just offshore were originally planned to be connected to Europe through a Turkish pipeline. Turkey was to be paid with gas, enabling the country to diversify its sources of energy. Furthermore, the extremely close military and security ties between Israel and Turkey, that ended with the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010, have over the past seven years been slowly and painfully re-established, under pressure from the Turkish military; now Erdogan threatens to undo all the progress that has been made. Because of the Mavi Marmara incident, the aerial reconnaissance capabilities of the Turkish air force suffered mightily from being cut off from Israel. A plan had already been prepared by the Turkish military to procure high-definition electro optics and radar pods from Israel to be used in RF-4E Phantom planes. But because of Erdogan, the contract with Israel was canceled. In another project with Israel planned before 2010, 170 Turkish M60 tanks had been modernized. Plans were made to upgrade another batch of 169 tanks and offer them to the international market, but they were shelved when relations cooled and Israeli know-how was no longer available. Finally, Turkish tourism suffered when Israeli tourists, once an important segment of the market, dropped by 90% from 2010, and only in the last year have the figures again started to rise. If Erdogan were to cut off relations, Israeli tourism, and the large sums it generates for Turkey, will again collapse.

So, as we have seen, were Erdogan to break off relations with Israel, as he threatens, Turkey would suffer in many ways: it would lose access to abundant and clean energy close to home (Israel’s natural gas); it would no longer be able to rely

on the help it used to receive from the Israelis in defense matters, both in the sharing of intelligence, and in the weaponry that Israel either manufactured and supplied to Turkey or, if the weaponry were American-made, that Israel's military helped the Turkish military to upgrade. The loss of Israeli tourists, for a second time, would be a heavy blow to Turkey's tourism industry. So would the loss of Israel as a major consumer of Turkish goods, including plastics and rubber, minerals, textiles, concrete, asbestos, ceramics, glass machinery, and cars. Finally, if Erdogan, who has few friends in Washington, were to break off relations with Israel, Turkey would undoubtedly pay a price, with both Congress and the Executive branch. And even if Turkey were no longer to have Israeli help in customizing or upgrading them, it will still need access to American weapons systems.

Along with Erdogan, the other most vocal party to denounce Trump consisted of the "Palestinians" – the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. Mahmoud Abbas repeatedly warned Trump not to announce any embassy move to Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish state. He "warned of the dangerous consequences such a decision would have to the peace process and to the peace, security and stability of the region and of the world." But there has never been a true "peace process" with the "Palestinian Arabs," who've repeatedly claimed that they intend to make Jerusalem the undivided capital of their future Palestinian state, a state which, many "Palestinians" insist, will be made free of all Jews and which, the "Palestinians" of Hamas claim, will include all of Palestine. Their rhetoric makes clear that their ultimate goal, whatever interim arrangement might be temporarily accepted in order to gain a base from which future attacks could be launched, remains a "Palestinian" Arab state from the Jordan to the sea.

The Hamas leader Ismail Haniya has gone even further than Abbas. He said the US decision on recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is a "war declaration against Palestinians,"

and called for a new “Intifada”, or uprising.

Haniya said in a speech in Gaza City on Thursday that US President Donald Trump’s recognition “killed” the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

“This decision has killed the peace process, has killed the Oslo [accord], has killed the settlement process,” he said.

“The US decision is an aggression, a declaration of war on us, on the best Muslim and Christian shrines in the heart of Palestine, Jerusalem.”

The “peace process” between Israel and the “Palestinians” has been a farce for several decades. It was a farce when in 2000 Ehud Barak offered the “Palestinians” 96% of the West Bank, including even the Temple Mount, and Arafat turned the offer down. From the Muslim point of view, there cannot be a permanent “peace” between Muslims and non-Muslims that leaves the latter in control of land that was once Muslim, which must, therefore, revert to Muslim possession. Any outcome that left the despised Jews still in control of any land that had once belonged to Muslim Arabs would be intolerable for any Muslim population and would, therefore, be only a stopgap measure, needing further correction, whatever lip service might be given to that idea by some “Palestinian” political figures hellbent on reassuring the West.

Then there was Hezbollah, which answered Trump by announcing in its Beirut newspaper Al-Akhbar “Death to America,” thereby outdoing, in the rhetoric of rage, both Hamas and the Palestine Authority. Now Hezbollah’s Nasrallah has just called for a third intifada against Israel.

Iran, Hezbollah’s powerful supporter, has been crying “Death to America” for nearly the past 40 years, and none of it seems to have scared the Americans. But Hezbollah, and Iran, have managed to frighten the Sunni Arabs, who see them as more

dangerous, right now, to their interests than either America or Israel. The Sunnis are all deeply worried about an aggressive Iran and its Shi'a proxies, from the Houthis in Yemen who threaten Saudi Arabia from the south, to the Shi'a who rule in Baghdad, to the Shi'a militia, Hezbollah, which helped to rescue the Alawite despot Assad in Syria, to Hezbollah's home base in Lebanon, where it is now more powerful than the Lebanese army, and fills the Lebanese Sunnis with apprehension. The Shi'ite crescent of which Sunni leaders have long been warning now exists. The Sunnis in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon are more anxious about Iran and its Shi'a proxies than they are about whether the American government formally recognizes what, in all its dealings with the Israeli government, it has for nearly half a century informally recognized: that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. The embassy in Jerusalem is years away from being built, and can be dealt with, if need be, at a later date. The threat from Iran and its allies is an immediate one. The Houthis are swaggering through San'a, unsubdued by Saudi bombs; Hezbollah is swaggering through Beirut, uncooked by the likes of Said Hariri. Right now Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan need both American military aid and, especially in the case of Saudi Arabia, Israeli intelligence assistance.

There have been surprisingly few protests in Muslim lands in Asia against Trump's embassy announcement. Those that have taken place have been distinctly underwhelming, with pitiful turnouts: "hundreds" turned out in Pakistan, "a thousand" in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia). "Hundreds" again held a rally in Kashmir. In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, with 260 million people, only "three hundred" people participated in a protest in front of the American Embassy in Jakarta, where they shouted "go to hell, Israel." In Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, a few hundred demonstrators held up signs in front of the American embassy; only one protester set one American flag on fire. Not exactly massive demonstrations by Muslims anywhere in Asia. Those were the

figures as of Saturday morning. Perhaps the protests are just off to a slow start.

In Arab countries, the turnout has also been unimpressive. As of Saturday morning, three days after Trump's announcement, only a few hundred people had turned up to demonstrate at al-Azhar in Cairo to protest. The Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Ahmed El-Tayeb, announced he would not meet with Mike Pence when he visits Egypt. I'm sure the Americans can survive that. In Jordan, there were several protests around the country, each with a few hundred people, demanding that Jordan cut diplomatic ties with the American government. That, of course, would leave Jordan without the \$1 billion in annual American aid it relies on. No demonstrations at all were reported in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf sheikdoms; the Saudis limited their comments to the bare minimum, first calling the planned embassy move "unjustified and irresponsible" and later describing it as "disappointing." On Saturday, the Saudi government told media outlets in the kingdom to severely limit their coverage of Trump's embassy decision. It also issued a statement warning Saudi citizens in Jordan not to take part in anti-American demonstrations. The Saudi imams of the Grand Mosques in Mecca and Medina – clearly under orders from the Royal Court – did not even mention Jerusalem in their Friday sermons. This is hardly the ferocious denunciation of Trump that the "Palestinians" expected from the most important Arab country. In Mogadishu, a few hundred Somalis marched, chanting slogans against Trump. In Istanbul, there have been reports of "thousands" of protestors, who left the mosques after Friday Prayers to join demonstrations, with no report more specific as to the number of those "thousands," but clearly it was not in the tens of thousands. In Afghanistan, the biggest demonstration was in Herat, with 2,500 protesters. It appears that the largest demonstration outside Gaza and the West Bank was in Beirut, where close to 5,000 Palestinians and Lebanese marched to a cemetery near the Shatilla refugee camp where Christian Falange troops under Elie Hobeika carried out a

massacre of "Palestinians" in 1982.

For all the dire warnings about the "Palestinian" response, there has actually been less violence, according to the Western journalists on NPR,, in both the West Bank and Gaza than during previous Arab outbursts. About 3,000 in the West Bank threw rocks, marbles, Molotov cocktails. 28 people were arrested and about 65 injured. Two rockets were fired into Israel from Gaza by Hamas; in return, the Israelis bombed a Hamas training compound and ammunition warehouse. A grand total of two people have been killed in Gaza; no one has yet died in the West Bank. An NPR reporter in the West Bank, described most Arabs going about their business, not rushing to join demonstrations, which has become a young man's game. Besides, there is no change on the ground: Jerusalem was Israel's capital, and continues to be its capital. Trump was recognizing, not creating, a fact of life.

According to Bassam Tawil, an Arab journalist in Israel, the Arabs who demonstrate or riot often follow the same script: Western journalists are alerted by local Arabs that a protest is about to begin, or has just started, and they are told where to go to record the violence being staged accommodatingly for their cameras and the international news outlets. Tires are burned, rocks are thrown, molotov cocktails may be tossed by the Arabs, and, in response, water cannons are turned on, tear gas canisters are thrown, rubber bullets fired, as slowly, methodically, Israeli soldiers push the rioting Arabs back.

Demonstrations elsewhere in the Arab and Muslim world have been almost comically small. Arab leaders understand that Trump cannot be moved; about this embassy question he is, and in the best sense, implacable; many in the Arab world and in Western Europe tried for months to dissuade him, but having thought about the matter at great length, he had made up his mind, and was determined to follow through. He is unlikely to be swayed in the slightest by Arab threats that he'd better

change his mind or else. If anything, this may make him more eager than ever to have the building of the embassy begin at once so that it is up and running during his first term.

And what can the “Palestinians” actually do? They are now refusing to meet with Vice President Pence. So what? In 2016, the “Palestinians” received, both directly and through UNRWA, over \$712 million from the American taxpayers. They received this year close to \$1 billion, directly and through UNRWA. That amount could be cut, or eliminated altogether, if the “Palestinians” continue to create whatever mayhem – such as that threat of a “third intifada”– they can, continue to excoriate their benefactors the Americans, and refuse to resume even the pretense of “peace” negotiations with the Israelis. But now, with Trump, they have to worry about the price they may have to pay.

Some have said this announcement was not good timing on Trump’s part. I disagree. I think this was a perfect time to announce the Embassy move. Trump becomes both the first president to honor his campaign promise on this matter, and the first, too, to abide by, rather than seek a waiver from, the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995. But even more to the point, Trump realizes that the most important Sunni countries in the Middle East feel themselves to be in a state of maximum peril, and it has nothing to do with Israel.

While this war between Sunnis, their camp headed by Saudi Arabia, and the Shi’a, headed by Iran, is going on, many other countries – Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan – are also involved. The “Palestinian” claim on Arab attentions has dimmed; the war with Israel no longer dominates Arab hearts and minds.

As Bassam Tawil has written [here](#), the “Palestinian” media circus has already begun. Photojournalists have, as Tawil described, been summoned by the Palestinian Authority to take pictures of “Palestinians” setting fire to posters of Trump

and to flags of America and Israel. The scenes are arranged in such a way as to make it seem that a “handful” of violent protesters are really a multitude. In fact, Tawil says, whenever photographers do not appear for these staged demonstrations, the “spontaneous” group of indignant “Palestinians” also are known to disappear – apparently they maintain their indignation only insofar as there are photographers to capture it.

To sum up:

1. President Trump has honored his campaign pledge, in contrast to his pusillanimous predecessors, to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem. In this he is also fulfilling the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, passed overwhelmingly by both houses of Congress. He has listened to, and rejected, the warnings of nearly a dozen Arab states.

2. The President is aware that this is a moment of maximum peril for the Sunnis of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon