

That American Embassy Move Is Doing Just Fine, Thank You

by Hugh Fitzgerald



When, in December 2017, President Trump announced that the American Embassy would be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, many people in the foreign policy establishment warned of dire consequences. Richard Haass and Aaron Miller, both of whom have been involved in the Israeli-Palestinian “peace process” for decades, tweeted about the potential for mayhem and mass protests by the “Arab street.” So did journalists, such as Susan Glasser of *The New Yorker*, Anne Barnard of the *New York Times*, Obama’s speechwriter David Rhodes, and many others.

There have been similar hypertrophied fears about Arab reactions to American policies, expressed on other occasions. Back in 1991, after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, Saudi Arabia welcomed American and other Western military forces into the Kingdom to protect it against a possible invasion by Saddam Hussein. Middle Eastern “experts” predicted there would

be mass protests, even uprisings throughout the Arab world. How could Infidel armies be allowed to remain in the Arabian peninsula without the Arabs erupting in furious protest? Surely the Arabs everywhere would be enraged. As it turned out, the Western troops remained; Saddam Hussein was as a result dissuaded from any possible move on the Kingdom; and there was hardly a peep of protest from the much-feared "Arab street."

Exaggerated fears of how the Arabs might react to an American policy thought to favor Israel go all the way back to the Truman Administration. Both the Secretary of State and former Chief of Staff, George C. Marshall, and the Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, were against recognizing the State of Israel, for fear of the supposed dire consequences to American interests in the Arab world. America's top diplomat, George Kennan, agreed with Forrestal and Marshall that Israel should not be recognized because of the damage to American interests in the region. Whether they – and others – all really believed this, or whether some may have been driven purely by an anti-Israel animus that was rampant among the "striped pants boys" in the State Department, is unclear. But in any case, President Truman ignored the advice of these "Wise Men," recognized Israel, and braced for the reaction, but there were no anti-American protests to speak of, no burning of flags, no furious Muslim marchers denouncing Truman in Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, or Riyadh.

Another fear expressed by many in the foreign policy establishment was that Israel, once recognized by Washington, might nonetheless become a Soviet satellite. This made no sense; there was not the slightest evidence of Israel making common cause with the Soviet Union. Yet Secretary of State Marshall warned, on the basis of no facts whatsoever, that "There was a danger that if the Jewish state came into being it would be a front for the Soviets." This canard has its roots, of course, in older charges about "Jewish Bolshevism."

At the same time, a different worry was expressed, that if Truman recognized Israel, this move would push some of the Arab states, in reaction, to become Soviet allies. Neither of these consequences was realized. Communism did not mix either with Zionism or with Islam.

Which brings us to the warnings issued by so many Middle Eastern “experts” more than a year ago about what would happen if America moved its Embassy to Jerusalem. *The Wall Street Journal* reported at the time that the State Department had informed US embassies around the world about the plan to make the move and to begin planning for how to deal with the protests that would, it thought, inevitably follow.

The Wall Street Journal's report included the warning, as its State Department sources wanted it to, that if Trump made good on the pledge to move the Embassy, American diplomats abroad would be in real danger. There were even predictions that **“the response of the Arab street will likely be nasty and might rival or even exceed the destruction, violence and even murder that resulted when a Danish newspaper published a few satirical cartoons about the Prophet Mohammed. Egged on by Iran and other radical Islamists, protests will be massive and will carry a hefty price tag.”**

Many Middle East “experts” and much of the media were sure that the Embassy move would lead to catastrophe.

Sean Dolan of CAMERA reminds us of their exaggerated fears [here](#):

When the Trump administration announced in December 2017 that it would belatedly implement the bipartisan Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 and recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, commentators howled with disapproval, warning that “the Arab street” would explode. NPR, The Washington Post, The New York Times, and USA Today, among others, filed dozens of reports warning about an impending disaster. Arab nations would

punish the United States they warned – and if those regimes failed to express adequate disapproval, they risked being overthrown.

*The Middle East analyst Noah Pollak highlighted several of the overblown predictions in the Washington Free Beacon. Susan Glasser, then of Politico and now at The New Yorker, breathlessly repeated claims made by an Israeli Arab Ayman Odeh, a leading Arab Israeli member of parliament that “**Trump is a pyromaniac who could set the entire region on fire with his madness.**” Ben Rhodes, an Obama senior official turned pundit, said that “**In addition to making the goal of peace even less possible, Trump is risking huge blowback against the US and Americans. For no reason other than a political promise he doesn’t even understand, an international crisis’ was likely to materialize.**” “Pray,” said The New York Times’ Anne Barnard. Aaron Miller who had in the past been deeply involved in negotiations with Israel and the Arabs, tweeted: “**Jerusalem is a tinderbox waiting for a match. What’s the compelling US interest in recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital?**” Ned Price, who had been a special assistant to President Obama for security affairs, tweeted that:*

In order to cater to his political base, Trump appears willing to:

Put US personnel at great risk;

Risk C-ISIL momentum;

Destabilize a regional ally;

Strain global alliances;

Put Israeli-Palestinian peace farther out of reach

But nothing significant – no setting of the region on fire, no international crisis, no huge blowback against the US – happened.

For all the fearmongering about likely “violence, killing, terrorism, rioting, protests, instability, blowback, and general catastrophe,” there were no attacks on American diplomats, or consulates, or embassies. A handful of protests, scarcely visible, could be found here and there in a few Arab countries. Instead, there were everywhere calls for calm by the Arab states, and a most muted reaction. Even the American flag-burning in Tehran was no more vehement than it had ever been. The Cairo-based Arab League, with 22 members, issued a pro-forma statement, urging the “international community” to oppose Washington’s move. Egypt’s al-Azhar University, meanwhile, urged the “international community” to use “all peaceful means” to “dismiss positions of countries that sided with the Zionist entity,” called the move an “unjust decision,” and deplored the ongoing “Israeli occupation” of Jerusalem.

There was no new destabilization in the Middle East as a result of the Embassy move; the statement of the Arab League was practically boilerplate, the same remarks it often trotted out to mechanically express its anger. No massive crowds assembled to shout their rage at Trump, or at their own governments for not being more forceful in attempts to halt the Embassy move. Nor were there any attacks, as so many claimed were highly likely, on American diplomatic personnel. Some in Washington even suggested that the response of the “Arab street” would be unusually nasty and might rival or exceed the destruction, violence, and even murder that resulted when a Danish newspaper published a few satirical cartoons about the Prophet Mohammed. None of this occurred.

Trump ignored the doomsayers and the mickey-mockers, and moved, as he had long promised, the Embassy to Jerusalem. And the sky did not fall. That American move, in turn, led others to change their policies. Guatemala followed suit, and moved its embassy to Jerusalem. Current reports suggest that President Bolsonaro of Brazil will soon do the same, as he has

repeatedly promised, saying “it is a question of when, not if” (we move the Embassy). Arab countries have threatened to cut their billion-dollar purchases of Brazilian beef if he does so, but this attempt at economic blackmail has been waved off by Bolsonaro, who seems dead-set on his own embassy’s move to Jerusalem. Honduras is likely to move its embassy too, very soon, in exchange for Israel upgrading its consulate in Honduras to an embassy, and supplying Honduras with Israeli know-how in cyber security, water and agricultural technology (including advances in drip irrigation and waste-water recycling), and law enforcement. Australia has already moved its Embassy from Tel Aviv to West Jerusalem, a move that was welcomed by Israel, even if it was mildly disappointed that the Australians explicitly left open the possibility that eastern Jerusalem could ultimately become the capital of a “Palestinian” state. All of these embassy moves made or promised by Brazil, Australia, Guatemala, and Honduras would have been unthinkable without Trump first moving the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Other countries have given signs, too, that they are considering such a move, including the Czech Republic (where President Milos Zeman announced his support for such a move) and the Philippines (where President Duterte has expressed a similar desire to move his embassy). Three members of the E.U – the Czech Republic, Romania, and Hungary – blocked a resolution drafted by that organization that would have condemned Trump’s December 6, 2017 decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and move the US Embassy there from Tel Aviv. In May 2018, ambassadors from those three countries, plus Austria, again defied the EU when they attended a celebration of Washington’s embassy move at Israel’s Foreign Ministry. These countries, it should be noted, are also deeply opposed to accepting Muslim migrants; it is no accident that they would also be pro-Israel in their foreign policies. Several of these countries are on the likely-to-move list, just after Brazil and Honduras.

Trump moved the Embassy months ago, and all those dire consequences so confidently predicted by so many “experts” on the Middle East never came to pass. Instead, at least two and possibly as many as six other countries will be moving their embassies to Jerusalem, encouraged by Trump’s example and the Arab reaction – or rather, lack of it – to his move.

Not for the first time in the Muslim Middle East, if you do not bend, others will learn to live with the “strong horse.” Trump’s determination ensured that his embassy move would be accepted, albeit reluctantly, by the Arabs without too much fuss. They not only originated the famous proverb, but have lived it: *The dogs bark. The caravan moves on.*

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