Trump has Added Insult to Injury by Recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's Capital

Just a couple days ago, US President Donald Trump announced Washington was prepared to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, noting that he decided that the time had come. The US President also announced that Israel must establish its borders within Jerusalem through the course of negotiations with Palestine. This announcement was followed by a series of preparations on the part of the US State Department to transfer the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

It was known in advance that Trump was preparing such a statement, and this announcement triggered a barrage of criticism from around the globe. Turkey and other Muslim countries all of which enjoy membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation would threaten US and Israel with the cutting of diplomatic ties. As for the representatives of Palestine, they warned the White House that such a step is equivalent to declaring a war on the Middle East as a whole. The League of Arab States, the European Union, Britain, France, Germany and even the Pope himself would urge Washington to abandon these plans. Even Saudi Arabia, an obedient ally of the United States, warned Trump that his unilateral decision would undermine efforts to pursue a peaceful settlement.

The status of Jerusalem is the stumbling block of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The eastern part of the city, seized by the Israelis during the war of 1967, is perceived by most Palestinians as the future capital of the independent state they seek to one day establish. According to a number of UN resolutions, this territory is considered as occupied land by Israel and its status should be the subject of negotiations. However, Israel continues insisting that
Jerusalem is its capital.

This latest development has replaced reports about the situation in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, along with the ongoing Sunni-Shia confrontation on the front pages of all major international media sources. The Arab-Israeli confrontation and its main component – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has been in the shadow of the Arab “color revolution” and the events that it triggered, but has once again taken center stage. After all, Jerusalem is a shrine for all Muslims, meaning that at least 60 states with predominantly Muslim populations have been affected by Trump’s decision, along with at least another 50 countries where Muslims constitute a large minority. Moreover, Muslims are to be found in virtually every country of the world, except for such minor states like Tuvalu and Tonga.

So, with a single stroke of a pen Trump has drastically affected the lives of 1.8 billion people, or 25% of the world’s population. The American president has created controversy in the face of such states as Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Turkey, Iran, as well as in the Muslim communities in England, France, Germany, Spain, and the US. Russia can also consider itself to be offended, since Muslims make up one fifth of its population.

Of course, there’s been steps taken in this direction before. Back in 1980, Israel passed a law according to which Jerusalem was to be transformed into its capital, but no state formally acknowledge this step. The international community reached a consensus that Jerusalem wouldn’t be regarded as the capital of Israel until the moment that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was settled. Trump has destroyed this consensus now. Even for Israel this decision may not bode well, as the usual course of events has broken down at a most unfortunate point in time: when Tel-Aviv is preparing military operations against Hezbollah and Iranian forces in southern Syria which can trigger a full-scale war with Iran. The ongoing non-stop bombing of Iranian facilities deep within Syrian territory can be regarded as preliminary steps in an invasion campaign. And now the conflict in Yemen with its ongoing confrontation between Shiites and Sunnis has burst out with renewed strength.

An increase in tensions is by far the worst contribution Trump could make to the Middle East right now. The region is destabilized in the sense of a balance of interests. Both the second invasion of Iraq and the poor damage control shown by Washington in its aftermath has tipped the scales of balance. Then followed the Arab Spring and American attempts to put a large bet on “moderate” militants and Qatar. Finally, the third and final nail in the coffin of regional stability was placed by the awkward solution to the Iranian nuclear plan and ongoing attempts to review it.

Syria in a series of these events was a mere road bump over which Washington tried to redraw the regional map in accordance with the US-Israeli-Wahhabi vision, but this attempt failed largely due to a timely Russian intervention.

The goal that Sunni countries along with Israel are pursuing is to force Iran to accept what they believe to be an “acceptable framework or regional security.” It should be noted that Iran made a number of steps that regional players wouldn’t tolerate, such as attempting to establish a military foothold in Iraq and Syria. Apparently, carrying out the first strike has been delegated to Israel, which is vitally interested in creating a demilitarized buffer zone along its borders, free of Hezbollah fighters and Iranian armed detachments. And this is where Trump, with his recognition of Jerusalem, upended the game in such a catastrophic manner. One cannot resist the question: was it routine incompetence or a calculated step? Given the chaotic actions Trump is known for one can regard this as incompetence, but there’s no telling for sure.

Russia’s withdrawal from Syria right now is a logical step, although it will leave a number of assets behind. If it stays there, it can get involved in the military conflict brewing between Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel and the US, thus getting involuntarily drawn into a major armed conflict.

There’s no doubt that Trump’s decision will inevitably reduce the role Washington plays in the Middle East. The official reaction of Palestine on the issue of Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem has been indicated by the fact that a number of high-profile Palestinian figures would travel to Washington to warn the Trump administration about the potential consequences of such a dangerous step. They have already announced that should the White House proceed in this direction, Palestinian leadership would consider itself to be free of any agreements previously signed with the United States. In other words, the Palestinian leadership will change its approach both towards Israel and the United States.

Even the pro-American president of France, Emmanuel Macron, contacted Trump to warn him of the consequences of unilateral steps in Jerusalem and expressed France’s concern over any actions that could change the status quo. Of course, France hosts well over six million Muslims that constitute 10% of the population. German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel has also notified the United States that any decision on the status of Jerusalem is risky. Of
course, the Arab states, especially Egypt and Jordan have also warned Washington that the latest move by the Trump administration will contribute to the growth of tensions in the region. For the Egyptian regime the steps that Washington have made may prove to be fatal, since it’s already amid an ongoing war with ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood, both of which can blame the Sisi government for betraying fellow-Muslims across the region. That is, Trump has put Cairo in a situation where no one can guarantee the preservation of an already fragile stability in Egypt. In turn, the League of Arab States stated that the recognition of occupied Jerusalem by Israel as the capital of Israel by the United States would be seen as a manifestation of aggression against Arab and Palestinian people. Generally speaking, no one in the Arab region and the Islamic world is willing to accept the American position that could affect the future of Jerusalem and change its status at the international level. Thus, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation called for an emergency meeting if the United States decides to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, since it considers such a step to be “aggression” against all Arabs and all Muslims in general. Turkey has also warned the Trump administration about the consequences of such a decision.

In any case, the Middle East is now on the verge of a catastrophic conflict provoked by the awkward steps Washington has been making. The United States will begin to put forward new ideas and proposals for resolving the conflict, which will only complicate the situation further. In turn, this will lead to more disappointment and will only increase tensions around Palestine. Perhaps the Trump administration is not aware of the seriousness of the problem of Jerusalem. Perhaps it hasn’t learned anything from the history of this ongoing conflict.

Even if the current situation is the result of some confusion, the damage caused by it will affect the ability of the United States to act as a mediator in the ongoing conflict, since it cannot be regarded as an honest broker if it is blindly committed to supporting Israel. Obviously, Washington supports the Netanyahu government, and this use of Jerusalem in its political maneuvers is yet another American failure that will go on the list of President Trump’s mounting mistakes.

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