

RECOGNITION OF JERUSALEM AS ISRAEL'S CAPITAL: THE RIGHT MOVE AT THE RIGHT MOMENT



Last December, U.S. President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and announced the transfer of the embassy to that city. This historic decision caused controversy around the world. The leaders of the main Western countries expressed their disagreement, many Arab nations condemned it, and the terrorist group Hamas called for a new "day of rage" in response. Opinion leaders and commentators highlighted that this move could ignite more violence and terror in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

However, nothing of the sort has happened since then. On the contrary, President Trump's decision has normalized an indisputable reality: Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. Moreover, we strongly believe that this is also the beginning of a new, better phase in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and across the entire Middle East.

President Trump's decision is truly coherent as well. It is a mandate issued by the U.S. Congress in 1995 when it approved the transfer of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. In addition, recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and relocating the American embassy there was one of Trump's electoral promises. However, above all, **it has been an act of historic justice, which promises a new paradigm for the new Middle East taking shape today.**

The capital of Israel, being Jerusalem, is a reality, regardless of the conflict that exists with the Palestinians over the sovereignty of the city and its final borders, which must be agreed upon in bilateral negotiations according to

the Oslo Accords. Except Defense, all ministries, Parliament, the Supreme Court, and other government agencies are in Jerusalem. In 1980 the Israeli parliament passed a Basic Law by which Jerusalem was declared the capital of the State of Israel, and thus applied a sovereign attribute that any country has when choosing its capital. Also, **Israel's administration has improved the wellbeing of all its citizens, Jews and Arabs.** Under Jordanian rule from 1949 to 1967, East Jerusalem including the Old City, was in a significantly worse state in terms of administration, economy, public services, security, and democratic rights, such as the freedom of worship and religion. According to polls and surveys, many Arab residents of East Jerusalem agree and indicate a preference to moving to Israel—or applying for Israeli citizenship as they have the right to do—in case of a partition of Jerusalem.

In sum, **Israel cannot accept a peace agreement that does not include Jerusalem as its capital.**

The history of Jerusalem is also quite clear, despite UNESCO resolutions seeking to deny the Jewish link to the city and the international assault on Israel's legitimacy. Jerusalem was the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Israel and it is obviously linked to the Jewish religion as a central worldly pillar of that faith. In this regard, in 2001, Sari Nuseibeh, Palestinian professor and president of the Al-Quds University in Jerusalem stated; "I would be blind to disclaim the Jewish connection to Jerusalem." Conversely, Jerusalem has never been the capital of a Palestinian State—no state called Palestine has been set up on the territory—Israeli claims to Jerusalem as its capital are very legitimate and the recognition by the U.S. administration is an important step to achieve fair and lasting peace, not only between Israelis and Palestinians, but also, as noted, in the entire Middle East.

The final status of Jerusalem is still pending, and Israelis have always been open to negotiations. Even so, in 2000, Ehud Barak offered to partition Jerusalem, including the Old City, and the Palestinian leadership said No to peace once again.

President Trump's decision, at last, establishes a new framework for the peace process negotiations, where realities on the ground and the minimum demands of Israel are starting to be acknowledged — a new framework where Israel's existence begins to normalize. This is undoubtedly a very important step for regional peace.

The pathway to peace rests on the recognition of Israel's right to exist by the Palestinians and all Arab nations — and this right naturally includes Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Spotlight

IRAN PROTESTS: THE PEOPLE AGAINST THE THEOCRATIC REGIME

On December 28, popular protests began in Iran's second most populous city, Mashhad, and they have spread throughout the Islamic Republic, reaching Tehran on January 3. So far, there are more than 2,000 people arrested and more than 20 casualties, attesting to the harsh repression the Ayatollahs' regime exacts over its civilian population.

The mass protests started due to price increases for basic goods and deteriorating living conditions for the population. These protests **have quickly become an amendment to the theocratic regime governing Iran since 1979.** The chants of the demonstrators have been clear: "We don't want the Islamic Republic" or "Death to the dictator", among others against the theocratic regime. The nationwide popular unrest reveals the population's dissatisfaction for not being able to afford decent minimum standards, in addition to being **deprived of their freedom of expression and left without any another channel to exercise civil liberties.** In this regard, freedom of the press does not exist in Iran and the government has blocked the internet to help drown the protests.

The protests show that, despite the bad nuclear agreement that led to the unfreezing of billions in assets and the lift of sanctions, Tehran has not been able to improve the economy. **Iran has a corrupt economy, controlled by the IRGC, which prevents economic growth and the welfare of its citizens in favor of the unjust enrichment of the establishment.**



In addition, it is worth noting once again that today's **Iran is the country with the highest execution ratio per capita in the world**, where women are second-class citizens, minorities are persecuted based on sexual orientation, and human rights are conspicuously lacking. Furthermore, as we have been denouncing for years, Iran is the main state sponsor of terrorism in the world and extends its influence throughout the Middle East, from Yemen to Lebanon via Baghdad and Damascus. Regarding its foreign policy, the regime's official position is the destruction of Israel, as the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned last year. Iran's hostility towards the U.S. has constantly been on display in the regime-controlled "Death to America" rallies. **Iran's current regime is thus a danger to its own population, to the stability of the Middle East, and to the security of the entire world.**

Western countries, as the U.S. has rightly done, should strongly support protesters for reasons of political decency and commitment to freedom and justice. That would be in stark contrast with the lack of support they showed for Green Revolution in 2009. For European democracies, not even the commercial justification is admissible. The economic ties with Iran cannot eclipse its malign activities and the constant violation of human rights and civil liberties in particular. Moreover, doing business with Iran, as we have warned and this crisis has shown, is full of perils and pitfalls. As FOII's Board Member, Ambassador Giulio Terzi, has stated; "European values deserve better interpreters and much more convincing actions."

In this struggle of the people of Iran against the corrupt, terror-sponsoring theocratic government, we as Westerners must not leave them alone.

FOII'S ACTIVITIES

OP-EDS AND MEDIA

"What Is Wrong with Europe's 'Iran Policy'?", **Ambassador Giulio Terzi**, *Jerusalem Post*, November 15 ([Read](#))

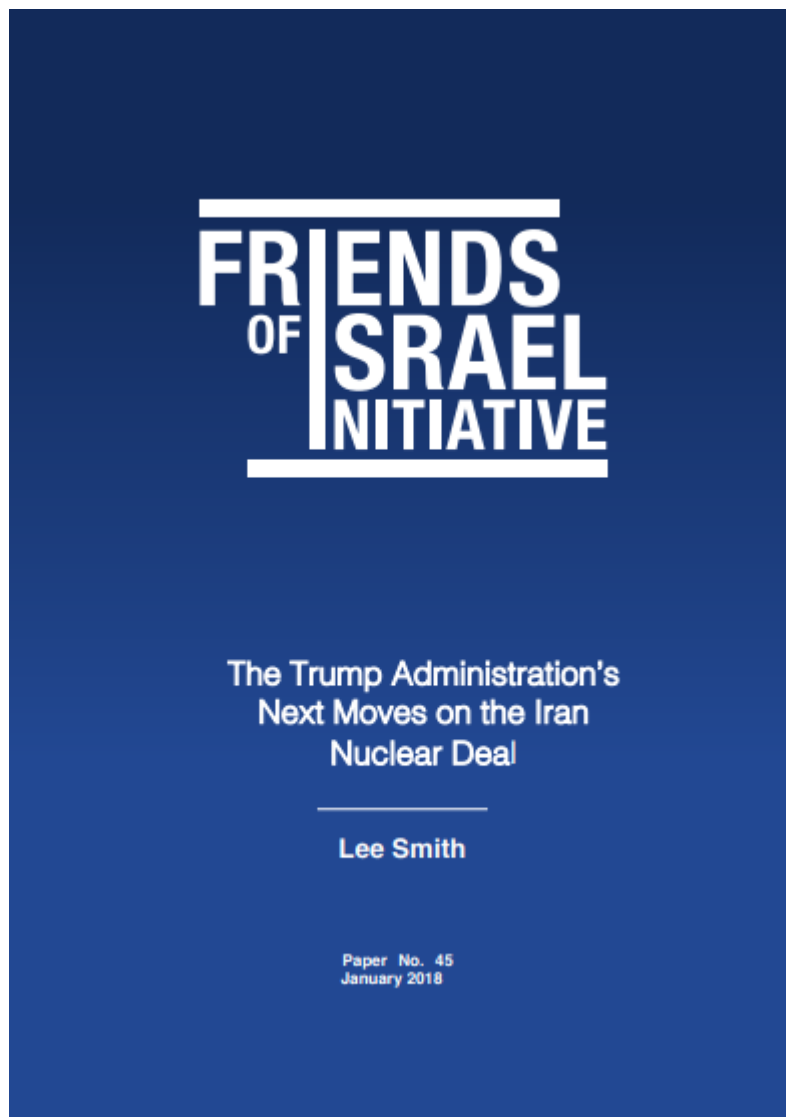
"Jerusalem: Trump's Smart Move vs. Brussels' Error", **Rafael Bardaji**, *La Gaceta*, December 14 ([Read](#))

WORKING PAPERS

The Trump Administration's Next Moves on the Iran Nuclear Deal

Lee Smith

Lee Smith analyses the Trump Administration's next moves on the Iran Nuclear Deal as the next JCPOA certification is taking place in mid-January. With a view to the massive protests in Iran, the author concludes that Iran's regime cannot be fixed -nor the JCPOA by the US Congress or by the European nations.



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