

# Jerusalem Letters

## **Trump Recognizes That Humiliating Israel Didn't Bring Peace**

By Yoram Hazony, January 9, 2018

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For nearly seven decades, the state of Israel has endured an unusual humiliation: Alone among the nations of the world, it has been denied the sovereign right to determine its own capital. Israel has regarded Jerusalem as its capital since its War of Independence in 1948. It is the seat of Israel's president, prime minister, Knesset (parliament), Supreme Court and most government ministries. Yet for the better part of a century, the U.S. has led what is effectively an international boycott of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, keeping its embassy in Tel Aviv as part of a fiction that the status of Jerusalem remains undetermined.

The roots of this policy go back to the first half of the 20th century, when European diplomats set their sights on making Jerusalem an "international city"—a kind of second Vatican, controlled by responsible Europeans rather than by Jews or Arabs. When Jewish forces took the western half of the city in 1948, and especially after Jerusalem was united under Israeli rule in 1967, this fantasy of a Euro-Jerusalem disappeared forever. But rather than recognizing Israeli sovereignty, the international community decided to leave Jerusalem's status for "future negotiations."

Yet now half a century has passed, and still there is nothing but Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem anywhere in sight. In a dramatic address Wednesday, President Trump brought to an end the fiction that something

else is going to happen. “Today we finally acknowledge the obvious,” he said. “Jerusalem is Israel’s capital. This is nothing more or less than a recognition of reality. It is also the right thing to do.”

Mr. Trump is right about this. But he also understands that there is more to it. The dream of rebuilding Jerusalem, destroyed in Roman times, is the linchpin that holds Jewish faith and nationhood together. Three times each day, Jews bless God as *Boneh Yerushalaim*, “the Builder of Jerusalem.” When Jews read, at every wedding, “If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand lose its strength” (Psalm 137:5), we are teaching a subtle truth: We Jews cannot give up on restoring our ancient capital without giving up the source of our strength.

Would we really be giving up on restoring Jerusalem if Israel negotiated a “deal” to share sovereignty in the city? Consider the options: Israel will never agree for Jerusalem to be divided as Berlin was, with mutually hostile police forces on either side of a security barrier. Jerusalem was divided in this way from 1948 to 1967, and anyone who lived through that time of snipers on the city walls knows that such a scheme amounts to destroying Jerusalem, not rebuilding it. The other choice is to govern the city by committee—which would mean that every construction project, excavation, restoration or economic initiative favored by Israel would be subject to an Arab veto (and probably also to a European one). This is a formula for reducing Jerusalem to wretchedness.

For Israelis, then, any conceivable “deal” over Jerusalem does indeed mean giving up on the hope of restoring the only capital we’ve ever had to sanctity and splendor.

Like it or not, this means that foreign powers have to choose—whether to stand by the project of establishing a fully sovereign Jewish state with the right to make Jerusalem its capital, or to limit permanently Israeli

sovereignty, while effectively internationalizing Jerusalem under cover of peace talks with the Arab states and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

For 70 years, the U.S. and most other nations have declined to stand with the Jewish people on this, believing that peace would somehow be forthcoming if Israel were humiliated in this way. But this approach has not brought peace. It has only encouraged Israel's enemies. This week, Mr. Trump announced that America will therefore stand by the Jewish state. All over the world, Jews are saying *shehehianu*, the traditional blessing thanking God for letting us live to see this day.

We have been warned by enemies and by friends that this historic moment will be met with violence. That is quite possible. Every significant step in the return of the Jews to Israel and Jerusalem since the Balfour Declaration has been met with acts of vengeance. But if this pattern has a clear lesson for us, it is this: If the American administration holds firm, this storm will pass.

Many disparaging things have been said about President Trump's fitness to lead. But this week, on the issue of Jerusalem, Mr. Trump has withstood the howling dismay of the world's nations, to perform one of those rare deeds that truly have the potential to change history for the better.