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# *Intellectual Discourse*

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## **US Embassy in Jerusalem: Reasons, Implications and Consequences**

**Abdul Rashid Moten\***

**Abstract:** President Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has been condemned across Arab and predominantly Muslim countries. Based on the documentary analysis, this study analyses the reasons for Donald Trump's decision, its implication and consequences for Palestinian peace-process. It is found that President Trump was following through on his major campaign promise to recognize Jerusalem and was simply implementing the Congress decision to relocate Jerusalem. The argument that this decision will adversely affect the role of the US as an honest broker in Israel-Palestine conflict is untenable. The US has never been an impartial moderator and has sided with Israel militarily, economically and politically. The peace-process did not materialise simply because Israel was not willing to concede to an independent Palestinian state and because the US was not willing to exert pressure on Israel to agree to a two-state solution.

**Keywords:** Jerusalem, two-state solution, Arab-Palestinian conflict, the Peace process, US mediation.

**Abstrak:** Pengisytiharan Baitul Maqdis sebagai ibu negara Israel oleh Presiden Trump telah dikutuk oleh seluruh negara Arab dan sebahagian besar negara-negara Islam. Berdasarkan analisis dokumen, kajian ini menganalisis sebab-sebab yang membuatkan Donald Trump membuat keputusan tersebut, implikasi dan akibatnya kepada proses pendamaian Palestine. Didapati bahawa Presiden Trump telah menunaikan janji utama kempennya untuk mengiktirafkan Baitul Maqdis serta untuk mengimplementasi keputusan kongres untuk menempatkan

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Baitul Maqdis ke tempat lain. Hujah bahawa keputusan ini akan memberikan akibat buruk terhadap peranan Amerika Syarikat sebagai pengantara yang tulus dalam konflik Israel-Palestine tidak dapat dipertahankan lagi. Amerika Syarikat tidak pernah menjadi moderator yang berkecuali dan ia telah memihak kepada Israel secara militari, ekonomi dan politik. Proses pendamaian tidak berlaku kerana Israel tidak rela mengiktiraf Palestine sebagai negara yang bebas. Di samping itu, Amerika Syarikat turut tidak bersedia untuk memberi tekanan kepada Israel untuk mempersetujui penyelesaian kepada dua negara.

**Kata kunci:** Baitul Maqdis, penyelesaian dua negara, konflik Arab-Palestine, proses pendamaian, Amerika Syarikat sebagai orang tengah.

### Introduction

Defying public opinion and decades of U.S. and international policy, President Donald Trump on Wednesday 6th of December 2017, declared the formal recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (Landlerdec 2017). This was his approach to advance the prospects for peace in the Middle East. Such recognition, according to Trump, was “overdue” and “the recognition of reality.” He also directed the State Department to begin the process of moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Donald Trump’s announcement was controversial. While the Israeli government claims Jerusalem as its capital, the Palestinian National Authority (PA) considers occupied East Jerusalem to be the capital of the future Palestinian state. In fact, the United Nation’s Security Council declared Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, to have “no legal validity, constituting a flagrant violation under international law...” Adopting resolution 2334 (2016) by 14 votes, with the United States abstaining, the Council demanded that “Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem” (United Nations 2016).

Responses to Donald Trump’s decision have received approval from the supporters of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, Christian Zionists and the enthusiasts of American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Otherwise, the condemnation of the decision has been swift and negative. Public figures and international public opinion are decidedly against the move. It is argued that Trump is supporting Netanyahu’s

approach to repudiating the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It implies the denial of the Palestinian quest for statehood its right of self-determination. In the emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council held on Dec. 7, 2017, the members (14 out of 15) condemned the decision as it is in violation of U.N. resolutions and international law (Fassihi 2017). The European Union, through its foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini reaffirmed the commitment of all its members to a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital (Irish 2017). Similarly, Muslim leaders and organizations like the Arab League and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have voiced grave concern about such a declaration. Why did Donald Trump take such a decision? Why has this decision angered the Muslims and not appreciated by members of world organizations? What are the implications and consequences of such a decision? These questions need to be answered to arrive at a proper understanding of the peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **Why Jerusalem Matters?**

Jerusalem lies at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly because of its religious significance. It has some of the holiest sites for Jews, Christians and Muslims. Followers of each of these religions have controlled all or part of the city over the past few thousand years. In 1,000 B.C.E., King David established Jewish control over Jerusalem. The city fell in and out of other hands during the next couple of millennia; particularly during the Crusades, when Christian crusaders fought competing Christian and Muslim factions for control of the city. And between 1517 and 1917, the Ottoman Caliphate ruled the city. Jerusalem features prominently in the Hebrew Bible. In the Jewish tradition, it is the place where Abraham, the first Patriarch of Judaism, offered to sacrifice his son Isaac to God. It was the capital of King David's Israel as well as the city where David's son Solomon built his temple.

For Muslims, Jerusalem has a very special significance. The Qur'an calls Palestine, "the Sacred Land" (Qur'an: 5:21) and its surroundings as "Blessed Precincts" (Qur'an: 17:1) because of its association with the lives of many of the Prophets. Islam recognises all the Prophets and Messengers of God and they are mentioned in the Qur'an by name. Their stories and teachings are told at varying length throughout the

Qur'an. Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Zechariah, and Jesus are honoured as great Prophets. Jerusalem is the city that witnessed the life and works of the greatest Prophets and Messengers of God who lived and moved in its valleys and its streets. Makkah and Madinah are blessed cities in Islam because of their association with the Prophets Abraham, Ishmael and Muhammad. In a similar way, Jerusalem is blessed and important in Islam because of its association with other Prophets like David, Solomon and Jesus. Jews and Christians do not recognise Ishmael and Muhammad as Prophets and Messengers, so they do not consider Makkah and Madinah as sacred cities. However, Muslims believe in prophets Moses, David, Solomon and Jesus, and hence they recognise the sacredness and significance of Jerusalem.

Historically, Muslim-Arabs ruled Jerusalem longer than any other religious groups. For Muslims, Jerusalem is holy. It was the first direction of prayer, *qiblah*, before Makkah. According to the Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), experienced a miraculous nocturnal journey, *Isra*, from Mecca to Jerusalem. It was from Jerusalem that Muhammad ascended to heaven, known as the *Mi'raj*. It was during the *Mi'raj* that the five daily prayers became canonical. To commemorate the *Isra* and the *Mi'raj*, the Umayyad caliph built, in Jerusalem, the mosque of the Dome of the rock and the al-Aqsa mosque towards the end of the seventh century. The Dome is the earliest surviving Muslim building, while the inscriptions inside the dome are earliest dated fragments of the Qur'an. Muslim philanthropists built many hospitals and religious centres in and around the city. They purchased land in the city and dedicated it as a Waqf (endowment) for religious purposes. The whole city is virtually Waqf land that is nonsalable and non-transferable. The Al-Aqsa Masjid was a great seat of learning and there are many Muslims' graves in the city of Jerusalem. Muslim rulers recognized the rights of Christians and Jews who held the city dear to their hearts and sacred in their faiths. Different sects of Judaism and Christianity lived under Muslim rule and enjoyed some influence in the city. According to Karen Armstrong, Muslims were most tolerant and respectful to devotees of other faiths (Armstrong 1996, pp. 228-232).

It was only at the end of the nineteenth century, that Palestine had become a burning issue. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 announcing the British government's support for the establishment of "a Jewish national home in Palestine" as well as "civil and political rights of

existing non-Jewish communities” alienated Jews and Arabs from each other. Zionist institutions became extensive and the Jewish population grew. Violent uprisings erupted in 1929 and 1936.

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations (UN) Resolution 181 partitioned Palestine into two: an Arab and a Jewish state with the latter occupying 56 percent of the territory. Resolution 181 also recommended for the city of Jerusalem becoming a *corpus separatum* because of its religious significance to Muslims, Christians, and Jews. The Zionist leadership accepted the UN partition plan hoping somehow to expand the borders assigned to the Jewish state. The two subsequent UN resolutions, 194 in 1948 and 303 in December 1949, reconfirmed that Jerusalem should be an international city (Mark 1999). These resolutions were overtaken by a quick succession of events. It began with what Israel calls the 1948 “war of independence” which fulfilled the Zionists’ dream of establishing the state of Israel. A collective Israeli identity was created, the law of return was passed and absorption centres were established. In the war, Israel captured about 78 percent of the land. The West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza came under Egyptian and Jordanian control.

After the 1967 war, Israel conquered East Jerusalem and, within ten days, annexed the territory which has never been recognised internationally. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 242, which emphasized the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force,” and calls for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories. This resolution entailed Palestinian recognition of Israel without the recognition of Palestinian national rights. However, Israel reaffirmed its annexation in 1981. Gradually, the Israeli government took measures to control the Old City and East Jerusalem as a whole. In 1980, Israel passed the “Jerusalem Law” that declared Jerusalem, “complete and united” “capital of Israel,” thereby formalising its annexation of East Jerusalem. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 478 in 1980, declaring the law “null and void”. Noticeably, no country recognises any part of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital except Russia, which announced its recognition of West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. During the period 1967 – 2017, a total of 25 resolutions condemning Israel’s occupation of East Jerusalem has been adopted by various organs of the United Nations Organization (see Table 1).

*Table 1: Number of UN resolutions on Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem*

UN Security Council	UN General Assembly	UNESCO
(12 Resolutions)	(7 Resolutions)	(6 Resolutions)
242 Nov. 22, 1967	2253: July 4, 1967	150: Nov. 27, 1996
252: May 21, 1968	36/15: Oct. 28, 1981	159: June 15, 2000
267: July 3, 1969	55/130: Feb. 28, 2001,	184: April 2, 2010
271: Sept.15, 1969	10/14: Dec. 12, 2003	192: Jan. 13, 2014
298: Sept. 25, 1971	60/104: Jan. 18, 2006	196: May 22, 2015
465: March 1, 1980	70/89: Dec. 15, 2015	202: Nov. 18, 2017
476: June 30, 1980	71/96: Dec. 23, 2016	
478: August 20, 1980		
672: Oct. 12, 1990		
1073: Sept. 28, 1996		
1322: Oct. 7, 2000		
2334: Dec. 23, 2016		

Source: "UN resolutions on occupied East Jerusalem" (7 Dec 2017) at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/resolutions-occupied-east-jerusalem-171206081326131.html> (Accessed December 15, 2017).

Most Israelis see Jerusalem as their "eternal and undivided capital." Palestinians, on their part, want East Jerusalem as their capital giving rise to the long-standing international formula for peace known as the two-state solution. Basically, the idea that an independent Palestinian state would be created alongside Israel, along the boundaries that existed before 1967 war. A change in the status of Jerusalem can be only be made as part of a negotiated peace deal. No such deal has been made and the conflict continues.

Israeli leaders often vent their frustration that there is no recognition of full Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem, particularly from international allies. Almost all the embassies in Israel are located in or near to Tel Aviv. The relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem generally indicates that the U.S. recognizes that territory as being within the latter state's sovereignty. This recognition of sovereignty, in turn, confers certain rights and obligations under international law that Israel may exercise in controlling that territory.



## **The Relocation Decision**

President Donald Trump's declaration recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is nothing new. For decades, American presidential candidates from both parties have promised to move the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. In 1992, Bill Clinton, while running for Presidency, declared, "Jerusalem is still the capital of Israel and must remain an undivided city accessible to all." George W. Bush pledged, as a presidential candidate in 2000, to "begin the process of moving" the US embassy to Jerusalem as soon as assumed the office. Barack Obama took an even more vigorous stand supporting Israel than his predecessors. In 2008, Obama emphasized, "Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and must remain undivided"(Fatah 2017). Once elected, they refrained from implementing the idea.

In fact, the U.S. Congress, in 1984, passed H.Con.Res. 352 stating that the U.S. embassy should be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Over the years, the Congress generally has supported Israeli claims to sovereignty over the city and has opposed the policy of avoiding actions that might prejudice negotiations. Clyde Mark points out further that:

Congress passed S.Con.Res. 106 and H.Con.Res. 290 in 1990, stating that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and that the city should remain undivided. A similar resolution, S.Con.Res. 113, passed both houses in 1992. In 1993, the House and Senate passed H. R. 3474 stating that the United States should veto any United Nations resolutions that called Jerusalem "occupied territory," but the section was deleted in the conference (Mark 1999).

Additionally,

On October 5, 1994, 260 House Members wrote to President Clinton stating their belief that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, and 93 Senators wrote to Secretary of State Warren Christopher on March 20, 1995, urging that the embassy be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. 84 Senators voiced a similar opinion to the President in a July 23, 1999, letter (Mark 1999).

Indeed, the most important U.S. legislation with respect to Jerusalem is P.L. 104-45, which became law on November 8, 1995, without the President's signature. Section 3(a) of P.L. 104-45 states categorically

that it is the policy of the United States: that Jerusalem should be Undivided; that it should be recognized as Israel's capital; and that the U.S. embassy should be moved to Jerusalem by 31 May 1999. However, the Congress gave the President the authority to waive, if necessary, Section 3(b) for 6 months. Many legal experts argue that the President is bound to move the embassy regardless of the waiver.

Though all the Presidents expressed solidarity with Israel, they took advantage of the waiver clause. Bill Clinton, George W Bush and Barack Obama all signed that waiver every six months and were able to indefinitely delay the embassy move. They used the waiver clause for several reasons. One, they preferred to resolve the status of Jerusalem through negotiations among the interested parties. Two, they felt that they need more time to construct an embassy in Jerusalem. Three, there was the problem of buying land to build the embassy in Jerusalem. The Israeli government did offer an embassy site but it was rejected because of security flaws. Finally, the US also had to take into consideration the Palestinian claim that it is illegal for Israel to lease the land, Allenby Tract, to the United States for an embassy since it is a land donated to a religious trust for the benefit of all Muslims. The US needs to resolve the claim to the land before constructing US embassy in Jerusalem.

President Trump was unhappy that his predecessors did not execute the Jerusalem Embassy Act which “passed Congress by an overwhelming bipartisan majority and was reaffirmed by a unanimous vote of the Senate only six months ago.” In his statement, Trump said:

Yet, for over 20 years, every previous American president has exercised the law's waiver, refusing to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem or to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital city... Some say they lacked courage, but they made their best judgments based on facts as they understood them at the time. Nevertheless, the record is in... It would be folly to assume that repeating the exact same formula would now produce a different or better result. Therefore, I have determined that it is time to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (The White House 2017).

President Donald J. Trump was following through on his major campaign promise to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel. His action enjoys broad, bipartisan support in Congress, the government of Israel and some non-governmental organisations. President Trump

has asked the US State Department to begin the planning process to relocate the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Whitehouse 2017). Donald Trump knew that his declaration has the public support. A Gallup poll conducted in February 2016 found that about 62 percent Americans expressed their sympathies with Israel as against 15 percent who sympathised with the Palestinians (Sharp 2016, p. 1).

Donald Trump's declaration was aimed at boosting his popularity with the evangelical community in the United States. In one of his foreign policy speeches, Trump promised the audience at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee that he would do what no American president has done before: move the embassy to Jerusalem, "the eternal capital of the Jewish people." For this, he received a loud standing ovation. The declaration aimed also at making Sheldon Adelson, Trump's biggest campaign contributor, happy. Eli Clifton reports that Adelson, who is also a major supporter of Prime Minister Netanyahu, "has reportedly grown impatient with Trump's delays to follow through on his campaign promise to move the American embassy (Clifton 2017).

### **Implications and Consequences of the move**

Donald Trump's declaration is considered by some as a clear aggression against the Arab and the Muslim World. Jordan's King Abdullah II warned that moving the U.S. Embassy "will undermine the efforts of the American administration to resume the peace process and fuel the feelings of Muslims and Christians" (New York Times 5 December 2017, p. 7). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan convened in Istanbul an emergency summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), seeking a coordinated response to Donald Trump's declaration. He denounced Israel as a state defined by "occupation" and "terror" and was rewarded by Donald Trump for "all the terrorist activities it has carried out." The OIC's final statement declared "East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine" and invited "all countries to recognise the State of Palestine and East Jerusalem as its occupied capital" (*New Straits Times* 14 December 2017, p. 15). In the summit, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas likened Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel as a "gift" to the "Zionist movement" as if he "were giving away an American city." He added that Washington will have no role to play in the Middle East peace process. The issue was taken to the UN Security Council and the Egyptian-sponsored resolution was

approved by the 14 of the 15 council members. The US Ambassador, Nikki Haley, vetoed the resolution that would have required President Trump to rescind his declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (Schwartz 2017). Earlier, she issued warnings to governments around the world that they would pay a price if they voted for the UN resolution against the United States. The Palestinian government slammed the US veto as “unacceptable” making it evident that the US is taking the side of Israel. Finally, the Palestinians settled for the path of lesser resistance - the General Assembly where the Palestinians have historically enjoyed what’s called “the numbers game.” The United Nations General Assembly voted 128 to 9, with 35 abstentions, for a non-binding resolution demanding that the United States rescind its December 6, 2017, declaration on Jerusalem (Gladstone 2017). Every important country in the world, without exception, supported the resolution which demonstrated the declining American leadership ability. Assembly votes, however, are reflections of international opinion and no more. US ambassador to UN, Nick Haley, brushed aside the voting saying that the US will put its embassy in Jerusalem and that the vote in the United Nations will make no difference on that. Evidently, President Trump’s decision has many ramifications including violence in Israel and the occupied territories and implications for a future two-state solution. However, perhaps the major impact is on the United States’ standing in the Middle East. The Trump administration has abdicated Washington’s role as a responsible custodian for Arab-Israeli affairs.

Historically, the United States has played a significant role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Since 1967, the US has been the only major power that exercised influence on both sides. The collapse of the U.S.S.R. and the end of the Cold War led to the emergence of the United States as the main steward of the peace process. It used diplomacy, military power and its position as the leader of the unipolar world to bring Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table and to make territorial compromises.

On several occasions, the US used its military power to force the party to the conflict to make compromises and arrive at a solution of the problem. President Eisenhower, following the 1956 Suez crisis, threatened economic sanctions and forced Israel to withdraw from Sinai and Gaza. President Ford, in 1975, reassessed US relations with Israel and refused to provide it with new arms deals until it agreed to a second Sinai withdrawal which the latter did. In September 1977,

President Carter threatened to terminate US military assistance if Israel did not immediately evacuate Lebanon. He also made clear to Israelis and Palestinians at Camp David that the United States would withhold aid and downgrade relations if they did not sign an agreement. Finally, there was the US secretary of state, James Baker, who in 1991 forced Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to attend negotiations in Madrid by withholding a \$10bn loan guarantee that Israel needed to absorb the immigration of Soviet Jews. That was the last time the United States applied pressure of this sort.

Since Oslo,<sup>1</sup> the US has done quite the reverse by financing the Palestinian government with the proviso that they would live in peace with Israel and that they will not confront Israel in international institutions. Since the mid-1990s, the U.S. government has committed more than \$5 billion in bilateral economic and non-lethal security assistance to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. As Jim Zanotti points out, the U.S. aid to the Palestinians aimed at: one, promoting the prevention or mitigation of terrorism against Israel; two, “fostering stability, prosperity, and self-governance” that may incline Palestinians toward peaceful coexistence with Israel and a “two-state solution”, and, three, meeting humanitarian needs (Zanotti 2016, p. 1). Interestingly, the US Congress’ Appropriations bill included a stipulation prohibiting foreign aid to the Palestinian Authority unless it stops supporting terrorism and demonstrates a commitment to peaceful coexistence with Israel. The U.S. government has never provided Palestinians with military aid, although it has given Palestinians aid for policing their own people.

On the contrary, the US aid to Israel was unconditional and aimed to ensure its security and to govern effectively the territories acquired. The process began with President Kennedy who assumed office in 1960. He laid down the foundation for an intimate relationship with Israel. He voiced the American moral and emotional attachments to the Jewish state and began selling arms to Israel. He even thought that the return of the Palestinian refugees to their ancestral land might create security dilemma and economic hardship to Israel (Gerberding 1966, p. 345). Since then, there developed a “special relationship” between the US and Israel (Quandt 2005, p. 13; Khalidi 2013, p. xix). Back in 1959, Ferrel observed that it is the financial and military support of the United States

that sustained and indeed strengthened Israel to wage costly wars and occupy territories (Ferrel, 1959, p. 356).

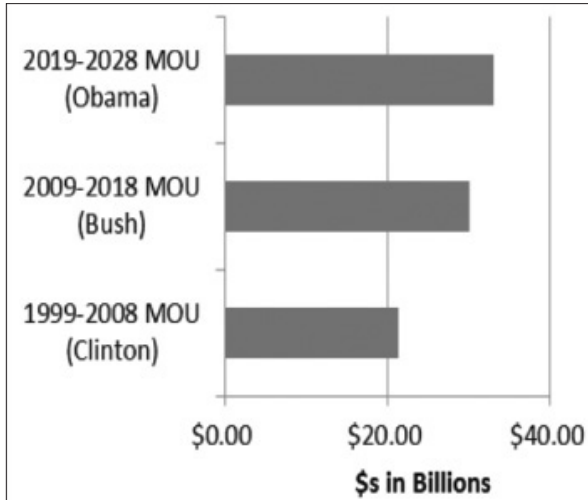
Since 1973, the US assistance to Israel exceeded the amount it gave to any other country. Total direct U.S. aid to Israel amounted to a little over \$140 billion in 2003. About one-fifth of America's foreign-aid budget (about \$3 billion per year) goes to Israel. Israel receives its entire appropriation at the beginning of each fiscal year and Israel is not required to spend of all it in the United States. Israel used roughly 25 percent of its aid to subsidize its own defence industry. Moreover, the United States has provided Israel about \$3 billion to develop weapons systems like the IAI Lavi ground-attack aircraft and gave Israel U.S. weaponry like Blackhawk helicopters and F-16 jets (Mearsheimer 2006, p. 31). The massive amount of U.S. military aid aimed at helping Israel maintain "qualitative military edge" (QME) over the armies of neighbouring countries. Most importantly, the United States gives Israel access to intelligence and has turned a blind eye toward Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons. According to Cohen, Israel crossed the nuclear weapons threshold in the mid to late 1960s, particularly, on the eve of the 1967 Six-Day War (Cohen 1999; Hersh 1991). Israel is the only nuclear-armed state that does not acknowledge its possession of the bomb, even though the entire world knows about its existence (Cohen 2010, p. 168).

Since 1999, overall U.S. assistance to Israel has been outlined in 10-year government-to-government Memoranda of Understanding (MOU). The first such agreement (1999-2008) was signed under the Clinton Administration, known as the "Glide Path Agreement," in which the US committed to providing Israel with at least \$26.7 billion of which \$21.3 billion was in military aid. In 2007, the Bush Administration pledged \$30 billion military aid package for the 10-year period from FY2009 to FY2018. In 2016, the US signed a new ten-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) pledging \$38 billion in military aid covering FY2019 to FY2028 (See Fig. 1). Upon the signing of the MOU, National Security Advisor Susan Rice commented as follows:

This is the single largest pledge of military assistance—to any country—in American history. At a time when we're tightening our belts across the board, with the harmful "sequestration" spending cuts set to return in several years, this MOU nonetheless greatly increases

our military assistance commitment to Israel. That's not an accident. It's a reminder of the United States' unshakeable commitment to Israel's security (Sharp, 2016, p. 6).

*Fig. 1: U.S. Military Aid to Israel over Decades, MOUs*



Source: Jeremy M. Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel*. DC: Congressional Research Service (December 22, 2016), 7.

It has been observed by many scholars that Israel commits atrocities in Palestine because of the support it receives from the United States. So long as the United States provides the wherewithal, comments Chomsky, Israel will use it for its purpose. Chomsky continues:

It is surely hypocritical to condemn Israel for establishing settlements in the occupied territories while we pay for establishing and expanding them. Or to condemn Israel for attacking civilian targets with cluster and phosphorus bombs 'to get the maximum kill per hit,' when we provide them gratis or at bargain rates, knowing that they will be used for just this purpose. Or to criticize Israel's 'indiscriminate bombardment of heavily-settled civilian areas or its other military adventures, while we not only provide the means in abundance but welcome Israel's assistance in testing the latest weaponry under live battlefield conditions, to be sure, against a vastly outmatched enemy, including completely undefended targets...' (Chomsky 1999, pp. 1-2).

In addition to financial and military aid, the United States provides political support to Israel. The US shielded Israel's arsenal from calls for

a nuclear-free Middle East and exercised its influence to defend Israel from criticism. It has vetoed UN Security Council resolutions that were not in Israel's favour. Since the establishment of the Security Council, the US used its veto power 83 times. Of the total, 42 vetoes were used with respect to resolutions relating to Israel. Between 1991 and 2011, the US used veto 24 times of which 15 vetoes were used to protect Israel (Okhovat 2011).

In July 2002, the John Negroponte, the United States representative in the United Nations, came up with what is known as the "Negroponte Doctrine" which stated that the USA would veto any resolution in the Security Council concerning the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that condemn Israel without also condemning by name terrorist groups of al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, the Islamic Jihad and Hamas (Gruenberg 2009, pp. 508-511). No draft resolution has condemned the three groups by name but there were some drafts that condemned the actions of both Israel and Palestine. They were, however, also vetoed by the USA. The US vetoed a cease-fire resolution that would have stopped Israel from continuing the devastating war against the civilian population in Lebanon. The US delayed the passage of a resolution calling for an end to the Gaza Massacre during the Operation Cast Lead that began on 27 December 2008 and ended on 18 January. Thus the US consistently prevented the Security Council from adopting resolutions that condemned Israeli settlement activities in East Jerusalem or asking for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and many other resolutions that condemned actions carried out by Israel. Consequently, the US has often faced the epithet of "Israel's lawyer" at the United Nations. The U.N. Human Rights Council, under Richard Goldstone, found Israel to have committed war crimes during the operation cast lead but the U.S. Congress rejected the Goldstone report. Hammond rightly points out:

Through its virtually unconditional support for Israel, the U.S. has effectively blocked any steps to implement the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The so-called "peace process" has for many decades consisted of U.S. and Israeli rejection of Palestinian self-determination and blocking of any viable Palestinian state (Hammond 2016, p. 12).

The US, nevertheless, always pretended to be playing the role of an impartial mediator in the peace process. It appeared to be promoting



a “two-state solution”, one made up of Palestinians and the other consisting of Israeli Jews. This formula, which enjoyed international support, failed largely because Washington has never served as an honest broker between the two parties. It has always favoured Israel at the expense of an essentially voiceless Arabs and Palestinians.

On their parts, the Arabs and the Palestinians have played into the hands of the US and conceded to almost all their demands. Some Arab leaders did their best to satisfy the ludicrous conditions placed on them by the US and the Israeli leaders to restart peace negotiations. The PLO accepted Israeli sovereignty over 78% of Palestine. They were willing to settle for the return of the 1967 occupied territories but Israel refused. Egypt, under President Sadat, decided to get its occupied land back. The 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement neutralized Egypt and transformed the Arab-Israeli conflict into a Palestinian-Israeli issue. In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon and forced the PLO into exile. In 2002, Arab League states adopted the land for peace proposals in which most Arab League members agreed to recognize Israel in return for Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in the 1967 war, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. Israel, however, had no intention of allowing the Palestinians to have a sovereign state. Netanyahu is reported to have said in 2015 that “anyone who is going to establish a Palestinian state today and evacuate lands is giving attack grounds to the radical Islam against the state of Israel”. When asked if “a Palestinian state would not be established if he were re-elected the prime minister.” Netanyahu answered, “Correct” (Booth 2015).

## **Conclusion**

The decision of US President Donald Trump to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has generated a series of reactions in Palestine and around the world. Jerusalem is home to key religious sites sacred to Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Israel occupied East Jerusalem in the 1967 war and annexed it in 1980. Israel regards the whole of Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel. President Trump also ordered that the US embassy be moved to Jerusalem thus breaking rank with the rest of the global community which maintains their embassies in Tel Aviv. President Trump’s declaration has been condemned across Arab and predominantly Muslim countries.

The US has been criticised for reversing decades of neutrality in the peace process. To be sure, Trump's declaration does not represent a drastic departure from his predecessors. Past U.S. presidents have also pledged to relocate the embassy to Jerusalem. Unlike his predecessors, Trump went beyond rhetoric and delivered the decision. Trump was simply executing the Jerusalem Embassy Act passed by Congress in 1995 but had been continuously postponed. Trump's relocation decision also fulfilled an election pledge to his base of Christian and Jewish conservative supporters and the prominent pro-Israel Jewish activist, Sheldon Adelson.

Trump's relocation decision has also been interpreted to mean an end to the two-state solution and, of course, an end to the United States' image as an "honest broker" for peace. To the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the US has "disqualified" itself from the Middle East peace process and that the US was "no longer an honest mediator." The fact is that the United States has never been an "honest broker" between Israelis and Palestinians. It has, instead, consistently defended Israel's interests, has tolerated the colonization of Jerusalem and has enabled Israeli intransigence through annual aid and military assistance packages. The U.S. has provided unlimited support and blind endorsement of Israel's policy to ensure hegemony over all of Palestine. Trump's recognition of Jerusalem made it abundantly clear that the United States was never an impartial mediator in the conflict, and has instead presided over decades of Israeli settlement expansion that undercut Palestinian claims for sovereignty. Trump's pronouncements should help bury the illusion that the dream of a Palestinian state can be realized through the United States' mediation.

### **Note**

1. The Oslo Accords are a set of agreements, signed in 1993 and 1995, between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) whereby the two sides formally recognized one another. These accords created a Palestinian Authority in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The accords were supposed to lead to a peace process aimed at achieving a Peace treaty based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The accords implied the creation of a Palestinian state which did not materialise because of the opposition of Benjamin Netanyahu and Ariel Sharon and because of the failure of the U.S. to serve as an impartial mediator.

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