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# THE JERUSALEM POST



PEOPLE PROTEST in Brussels earlier this week. (Photo by: REUTERS/ERIC VIDAL)

## The battle for Jerusalem: Europe vs. America

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12/16/2017

Analyzing European reactions to Trump's announcement

US President Donald Trump's announcement last week recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital was monumental. But perhaps just as monumental, as well as fascinating, were the European objections to the announcement. This contrasted with the relatively tame reaction among Palestinians and Arab states so far.

There have been protests, but they have fallen far short of the boiling point, which as some observers feared, could lead to another intifada.

For now, a lot can be ascertained from the European backlash.

For one, it symbolizes the shifting spotlight away from discussion of a two-state solution toward a focus on earlier stages of the conflict.

This is because the refusal to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel predates 1967 and has nothing to do with the two-state solution, settlements or the occupation.

The primary reason for that is a 1949 UN resolution, which calls for the internationalization of Jerusalem and Bethlehem (General Assembly Resolution 303-IV). The resolution, which draws on the 1947 Partition Plan for Palestine, seeks to establish Jerusalem and Bethlehem as a "corpus separatum," administered under a special international regime. Yet, in the last 20 years, Europeans have generally recognized Bethlehem as part of the Palestinian territories, essentially making the notion of separate bodies irrelevant.

In other words, by its own logic, if the EU and European nations do not recognize west Jerusalem as part of Israel, then it must also not recognize Bethlehem as part of the Palestinian territories.

Similarly, when European leaders state that Jerusalem should be decided in final-status negotiations, logic would suggest that they should also make similar statements about Bethlehem, a once Christian city, but now predominantly Muslim. The Europeans, of course, would not do that.

As the example illustrates, European positions are often self-contradictory.

If a solution should be based on the 1967 lines – the traditional European position – then what is wrong with recognizing west Jerusalem, which was in Israel prior to 1967? And by invoking the corpus separatum idea to refute that, how can Europe reconcile the possibility of Jerusalem being an international city, and handed over to a special regime, with its own values of self-determination and human rights? Furthermore, if European leaders wish to pry open the lid of 70-year old items, why not do so in Europe? There is no shortage of bizarre resolutions and arrangements over the last century on the European continent. (For example, should German-speaking South Tyrol really be part of Italy?) As if the notion of selectively ignoring long-established realities is not sufficient to expose European contradictions in reasoning, then comes the orchestra of doomsday scenarios from European leaders and pundits.

A common argument heard in recent days is that the US recognition of Jerusalem would spark violence of extreme proportions.

This is perhaps symptomatic of a monolithic (and arguably Islamophobic) view some Europeans have of Palestinians – the latter act in unison as a mob, rioting on command.

A Westerner, who wishes to remain anonymous, lives in the Palestinian territories and works for a Palestinian organization, spoke to The Jerusalem Post Magazine, offering his take on the unfolding reaction to Trump's declaration. "It takes a few years for Westerners to understand the dynamics in Palestine. Palestinians as a whole are tired of listening to those who tell them what to do. Riots have a rhythm. They take place at particular times and on particular streets. It is not the Palestinian nation that riots – it is in particular kids from specific socioeconomic classes. It is self-empowering for them, but it is not representative of the average Palestinian."

It should be pointed out that many Europeans in Jerusalem work for the EU, various UN agencies, and NGOs dedicated to aiding the Palestinians – a sector that has been derisively called the "conflict industry." Usually funded by European taxpayers, these organizations and their members form a tight-knit community in Jerusalem and Ramallah, and are known for their insularity from Israelis, and arguably from Palestinian viewpoints as well.

Such a split between European and Palestinian views became evident last month as observers marked the centenary of the Balfour Declaration, which expressed Britain's support in 1917 for establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In various conferences, discussions and events one could observe a demarcation between Palestinian and European attitudes.

Palestinian presenters spoke about the "occupation" of the West Bank while some European speakers preferred to describe it as a "siege." Similarly, Palestinians talked about "injustices" while some Europeans spoke about the "genocide" perpetrated by Israelis against Palestinians. Palestinians furthermore talked about British colonialism as an enabler of the State of Israel, while some Europeans spoke about British war crimes.

These viewpoints seem to emanate largely from Europe's far Left. But are they indicative of a mainstream European reaction to Trump's Jerusalem announcement? And could tension – rather than common understanding and a basis for fruitful debate – be the historical basis of European-Israeli relations? Taking the long view, one could argue that tensions date back to ancient times, to the Greek and then Roman invasions of Judea, and continued through the many hostilities European Jewry faced. But such hostility toward Jews and the concept of Israel encountered two powerful disruptors: the American Revolution and the establishment of a Jewish state.

The American Revolution was, among other ideas, about the establishment of a new narrative. Part of it was about a return: the return to Zion and to Jerusalem.

Chris Mitchell, Christian Broadcasting Network's Middle East bureau chief, explains: "There is a bond between the United States and Israel that goes back hundreds of years. The pilgrims had a historical connection to Israel. Jerusalem has been the capital of the State of Israel since 1950. The move of the embassy is viewed as a natural expression of the US relationship with Israel."

US Congressman David Brat notes that James Madison, the author of the US constitution, studied Hebrew while he was at Princeton. In an interview with the Magazine, the Virginia Republican congressman says, "The role of Jerusalem and Israel in the American narrative cannot be overstated," adding that "the relationship between our nations and traditions informs our very identity."

Indeed, presidential candidates from Bill Clinton to Barack Obama stated during their election campaigns that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. The US Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act in 1995 with an overwhelming majority of 95-3 in the Senate and 347-37 in the House of Representatives. Such broad bipartisan support is a testament that it is not politics but ideology that drives American attitudes about Jerusalem.

Indeed, both the US and Israel are fiercely ideological countries.

Israel is rooted in an ideological bedrock of Zionism, and the US is rooted in Americanism. That is why both nations can weather strong internal disagreements and challenges, while maintaining a common vision, political culture and sense of principles.

Europe, on the other hand, evolved in a completely opposite direction – away from religion and away from Jerusalem.

In the aftermath of World War II, Europe adopted a set of values that ran in direct contradiction to the values of Americanism. The prevailing view was that wars are caused by religion, nationalism, ideology and particularity. Hence Europe pivoted toward post-nationalism and post-religion.

Dr. Emanuel Navon, a French-Israeli political scientist and foreign policy expert at Tel Aviv University, elaborates: "There is not only an ocean between Europe and America, there is also a big gap when it comes to various issues: abortion, religion and gun control. The same is with the issue of Jerusalem."

To aggravate matters further, Europe, through the EU and other mechanisms, has aggressively attempted to spread its vision throughout the world, including to the US.

Mitchell explains how that is met by fierce objection by groups in the US such as Christian Evangelicals. "They do not want to be like Europe. They do not want to be secular. A lot of them felt that this is what was happening during the eight years of president Obama – that he wanted America to become more like Europe, like the EU, like the UN," he says.

Underscoring the differences between Europe and Trump's America, Mitchell adds: "President Trump said a few days ago, 'I was not elected president of the world, I was elected president of the United States.' [His voters] rejected globalism and accepted a candidate who would express their values and views. They wanted the United States to be the United States, which they see as a superpower and a bastion of freedom for the world."

It is exactly this point that frustrates some in Europe. Navon argues that while there is admiration for America, there is also a deep resentment. "The French have this attitude about Americans of how dare they rule the world when we are more sophisticated."

Brat believes there is also an economic angle to European attitudes. “They [Europeans] can clearly see the writing on the wall that the US model seems to be on the rise, with an economy that is roaring and stock markets that are sailing ever higher, and our country experiences a renewed optimism that has not hit the European continent as of yet.”

Instead of optimism, some fear that the same freedoms enjoyed in America might begin to be compromised in Europe.

Europe’s escalating feud with its Muslim immigrant communities, coupled with “politically correct” attitudes, is leading Christians and Jews to fear that Europe is turning against religion as a whole. And for Europeans, Jerusalem represents religion.

Europe’s perceived assault on religion is already beginning to affect Jews. In the United Kingdom, in what is broadly viewed as an effort to curtail radicalization in Muslim schools, Jewish religious schools have been targeted by the Office for Standards in Education. As reported in The Jerusalem Post (“UK Jewish school risks closure for refusal to teach LGBT issues”), they have been reprimanded for failure to teach about gay issues, and have been subsequently downgraded. Jewish leaders claim there has been an uptick of snap inspections of Jewish schools.

In Austria, the anticipated crackdown on Muslim extremism by the newly elected government has generated fears in the Jewish community that Austria would outlaw Jewish circumcision.

SINCE THE creation of the Jewish state in 1948, the issue of Jerusalem has ascended to the forefront of the European tensions with Israel. This came to a head in 2016 when, astonishingly, European countries supported or abstained from a UNESCO vote that suggested Jews and Christians do not have a historic connection to the Temple Mount, and by extension to the city of Jerusalem. The vote passed and was supported by other multinational organizations.

The UNESCO vote can be seen as a watershed moment in Europe’s relationship to Jerusalem. While America continues to cherish its connection to the city, one could argue that through its vote, Europe detached its connection to it. While for America, Jerusalem is the shining city on a hill, for Europe it is a Muslim city with fewer historical Christian or Jewish ties.

France, it would turn out, later expressed regret for its actions, calling its vote on the UNESCO resolution a mistake.

Yet, when it came to Trump’s Jerusalem announcement, the French leadership chose to be at the forefront of European opposition. French President Emmanuel Macron argued that “the situation is already complicated enough without being aggravated by outside influences.”

Macron also repeatedly claimed that the announcement will have negative security repercussions well beyond Jerusalem. “The status of Jerusalem is a question of international security which concerns the entire international community,” he said.

INTERESTINGLY, Trump’s Jerusalem announcement and the European outcry occurred during the same week that the city marked the centenary of the British entering Jerusalem.

In conquering Jerusalem from the Turks, the British did something that was not done in previous conquests: they did not impose their values, culture and religion on the residents of Jerusalem. At the surrender ceremony held near Jaffa Gate, British General Edmund Allenby made the following proclamation in seven languages: “I do make known to you that every sacred building,

monument, holy spot, shrine, traditional site, endowment, pious bequest or customary place of prayer, of whatsoever form of those three religions, will be maintained and protected according to the existing customs and beliefs of those to whose faiths are sacred.”

Jerusalem today is a flourishing city where Christian, Jews and Muslims live, thrive and worship in complete freedom.

The holy city is experiencing an astonishing revival and has become a vibrant center of art, innovation, technology and interfaith dialogue.

Why did European countries insist on supporting a notion of the city that was not anchored in reality? And did the UNESCO vote to sever Jewish ties from the city bespeak the same refusal to accept the facts on the ground? The good news is that there are many in Europe who are beginning to rebel against the European obsession with Israel, and who are demanding an end to Europe’s 2,300 years of tension with Jews and Israel.

Perhaps therein lies the path to peace.



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