



Moving Embassy To Jerusalem Could Spark Peace Process

Publish Date:

October 2018

The Morrison government's announcement that it [will now consider recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel](#) is a welcome reiteration of our liberal democratic values in foreign policy.

Australia's embassy is currently in Tel Aviv, which is a fine city – it is a modern cosmopolitan commercial and cultural hub with beautiful beaches and fabulous night life. But it is not Israel's capital.

Israel's capital is Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the home of Israel's parliament, the Knesset, the administrative apparatus and the President and Prime Minister.

Israel is the only country that does not get to select its own capital and have that recognised by other nations. It would be strange for Australia's American embassy to be located in New York



and not Washington, DC, or our British high commission to be in Manchester and not London.

A decision to move the embassy would be a welcome affirmation of Israel's right to self-determination like any other nation.

A relocation would follow the lead of the United States under President Donald Trump. However, the idea is not new. American presidential candidates have promised it for decades, both Democrats and Republicans including presidents Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and George W. Bush.

In Australia, Senator James Paterson's maiden speech in 2016 declared that, "It would be a symbolic but important step for Australia to formally recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital city and to move our embassy there."

The Liberal Party's federal council also passed a motion calling for the embassy to be moved.

The Morrison government has reiterated its support for a negotiated two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In recent days, however, it has been claimed that Australia moving the embassy undermines the peace process. The sad reality is that there are currently no negotiations that moving the embassy could undermine – since the Palestinians are refusing to meet without preconditions.

A potential positive result of Australia and other countries moving their embassies to Jerusalem is that it places pressure on the Palestinians to finally return to the negotiating table. It also helps address a potential sticking point by pressuring the Palestinians to recognise Israel's right to exist and the thousands-of-years-long bond between the Jewish people and Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, it is important to not exaggerate the implications of moving the embassy. The religious and historical sites of the Old City in Jerusalem can continue to be accessed by people of all religions. The facts on the ground, that is, Israel's claim to and physical location in Jerusalem, will continue. The proof that moving the embassy does not change the reality on the ground already exists. Following initial protests, there has been no change in the situation in Israel following the US decision earlier this year.

The notion that moving the embassy undermines a future peace settlement is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of history and the peace process.

Israel's capital has been located in Jerusalem since 1950, following the events of the Independence War in which a coalition of Arab states rejected the United Nations partition plan that included both a Jewish and a Palestinian state. This is notably before the 1967 war that unified West Jerusalem with the east that includes the Old City.



Australia's embassy would inevitably be located in West Jerusalem after a peace settlement. There is no scenario in which a peace agreement would not include a recognition of Israel's capital in West Jerusalem – with an open possibility for a Palestinian capital located in the east of the city where Australia could locate a Palestinian embassy.

The international community's approach to Israel, most commonly from nations not part of the liberal democratic family, has been one of demonisation. UN Watch calculated that of the 97 United Nations resolutions criticising countries between 2012 and 2015, a whopping 83 were against Israel.

This is substantially more condemnation than of hermit state North Korea, economic basket case Venezuela, or Saudi Arabia where the big human rights breakthrough in recent months is that women will be able to drive for the first time.

There are some that will never recognise the right of the Jewish people to self-determination; there are some who will continue to target the one Jewish state for special criticism and treatment.

Australia's foreign policy should be driven by our values – not by the potential for backlash from nations that are both less liberal and less democratic than ourselves. Israel is the only functioning liberal democracy in the Middle East. It deserves our moral and symbolic support. In an increasingly polarised world, we will only be respected by our neighbours and allies if we stay true to our beliefs. Now is not the time to waver.

As Winston Churchill is often quoted as saying, "You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life."

An Australian decision to move the embassy would right a historical wrong, stay true to our liberal democratic values, and put the State of Israel on an equal footing with the rest of the international community.

Matthew Lesh is a research fellow at the Institute of Public Affairs.

Original Link:

<https://www.theage.com.au/world/middle-east/moving-embassy-to-jerusalem-could-spark-peace-process-20181017-p50a84.html?csp=ef348b7036a0082cc34aceee65dda2da>

Originally published in:

The Age