

Why Trump's Visit to Israel Was Brilliant—And Where It Fell Short

As Force One took off Wednesday from Ben Gurion Airport, ending the President's 28-hour whirlwind trip to Israel, Israelis were not sure what to make of his trip. After visiting the center of Islam, Saudi Arabia, and the heart of Judaism, Jerusalem, he headed to the Vatican to meet with the Pope.

The Trump Doctrine

With two thirds of his trip concluded, we are beginning to see what may soon be dubbed the Trump Doctrine. It is worlds apart from the Obama Doctrine. Obama's first foreign trips were nicknamed the apology tour where he apologized for U.S. arrogance in Cairo, Turkey, and France to Arabic Newspapers and before the Turkish parliament. He even apologized for the CIA to the CIA.

He shunned Egypt after the secular military overthrew the radical Islamic Muslim Brotherhood. He gave Saudi Arabia the cold shoulder. And then, the unthinkable, he made a peace deal with the notoriously dishonest, state sponsor of terrorism, Iran—a deal that was criticized by not only the right, but also by many on the left, as being short-sided and extremely naïve.

President Trump is strengthening ties with natural allies, rather than trying to make friends with those sworn to our destruction. He had an extremely successful visit in Saudi Arabia where he signed a \$350 billion arms deal with the Sunni stronghold. Not only is this good for the U.S. economy, but it sends a clear signal to Iran that they should be careful.

Symbols Over Words

Next, he flew to Israel where he prayed at the Western Wall. This was a powerfully symbolic way of saying Jerusalem is the capital of Israel without actually saying, "Jerusalem is the capital of Israel." In other words, he wasn't there to connect with the Dome of the Rock. Personally, I would have preferred him to be more vocal in his support of Israel and to have announced the move of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem as he promised. Nevertheless, he is the first sitting U.S. president to pray at the Western Wall.

Let me clear—announcing the move of the embassy would not have been a wise move politically, but it would have been the right move biblically. President Trump has never been a particularly religious man—though some claim he has had a recent conversion. No doubt, he has reached out to many Christian leaders for advice, but based on his actions this week, he sees the alliance of the United States and Israel as strategic, not covenantal.

A New Coalition

President Trump is trying to build a coalition between moderate Arab states such as Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. I must state that none of the states are free of the most radical elements within Islam, but the governments are seeking stability in the region. Saudi Arabia is hardly a secular state and could be labeled as the father of modern radical Islam (Osama Bin Laden, September 11th terrorists), but its government is not seeking (as is ISIS and Iran), a caliphate—a government led by a successor to Mohamed. Internally, they are stuck in the seventh century, but they are not aggressors to other nations.

Iran must be stopped. Syria must be stopped. Assad cannot be a long-term solution nor can ISIS. Lebanon is weak and more and more is dominated by Hezbollah. Hezbollah is both a political

party in Lebanon (with one third of parliament), and they have their own army apart from the Lebanese Army. This is extremely destabilizing. Iraq has moved closer to Iran and further from the U.S.

Under former President Obama, the U.S. abandoned Iraq, pulled out our troops too early and allowed ISIS to fill in the vacuum. President Trump's plan is to build a partnership between the Saudis, Egypt and Jordan, and the Jewish State, Israel.

Even after writing this I saw that this was indeed Trump's plan: to build good will between Israel and her historic enemies. A Trump official said, "The first step [toward peace] ... is to bring relationships that are warm and strong privately and bring them more public and also set forth a common set of principles that everyone wants to abide by."

This is most likely why, in his seven public appearances here in Israel, he did not mention Jerusalem, settlements, the embassy or a Palestinian state—all trigger issues that would cause tension in building these relationships. I get it. But when will be a good time to tell the Arabs that the U.S. is recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital? When would be a time that it would not be a possible deal breaker? And yet, Netanyahu is not going to compromise on Jerusalem. Sharing at Jerusalem Day celebrations, he declared:

"The Temple Mount and the Western Wall will forever remain under Israeli sovereignty. The correction of a historical injustice that was achieved by the heroism of our fighters 50 years ago will stand forever."

The question is, where will President Trump—who has many voices counseling him on this—ultimately land on Jerusalem.

Not All Roses

Now comes the concern. President Trump and Netanyahu clearly have two separate strategies. The U.S. President sees making peace between the Palestinians and Israelis as a first sign to these Arab nations that there could be a peace deal between them and Israel:

"I am truly hopeful that America can help Israel and the Palestinians forge peace and bring new hope to the region and its people." ()

Netanyahu, on the other hand, sees it quite oppositely. Peace can only come between Israelis and Palestinians after there is peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors. And let's be honest. How can we even talk about peace between Israel and the Palestinians while Hamas is fully in control of all of Gaza? We cannot make peace with terrorists. And the more moderate Palestinian Authority is still in the business of paying off terrorists.

In light of the U.K. terror attack on Monday night, with President Trump still in Israel, Netanyahu stated the obvious:

"If the attacker had been Palestinian and the victims had been Israeli children, the suicide bomber's family would have received a stipend from the Palestinian Authority. That's Palestinian law. That law must be changed."

How does President Trump expect Israel to even begin to establish peace with such a culture of murder that the PLO has created?

In his speech in Israel, there was lots of love for Israel but few specifics. He made no mention of moving the embassy to the "eternal capital Jerusalem," as he boldly proclaimed before he was president. For example:

“Through your hardships, you’ve created one of the most abundant lands anywhere in the world, a land that is rich not only in history, culture and opportunity, but especially in spirit. I stand in awe of the accomplishments of the Jewish people.”

Sounds great, but no meat.

Conclusion

From a political point of view, it was a brilliant visit. From a biblical point of view, it fell short. I saw many posts online where people made excuses for the President breaking his promise: “He knows what he is doing,” “he has more information than we do,” “he is taking his time.” And therein lies my fear. We all howled over how former President Obama was treated with Messiah-like reverence. Let’s not make the same mistake with President Trump. He is a man, and even if God has brought him to this moment, he is still accountable to the voters. That is how democracy works. Our voice is important.

It is up to voters to demand that politicians keep their promises. And even though I would agree that this president has been treated worse by the media than any president I can remember, he can’t blame the media for his not recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s eternal capital or for not moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv.

I will say it again—politically, it was the right move. Why upset the Saudis, Egyptians and Jordanians? But viewing this biblically, God gave President Trump an opportunity to please heaven, and he missed it. Yesterday was the 50th anniversary of Jerusalem’s reunification. No doubt his trip was originally planned with that in mind so he could recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. I think such a move would have brought favor on him and the United States. Still,

it was so much better than Obama. And his visit to the Western Wall was an enormous symbolic gesture. He hit a double, but he could have hit a home run.

You shall arise, and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favor her, indeed, the appointed time has come (Ps. 102:13).
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