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Moving the U.S. embassy

IT WAS recently reported that the sponsors of the bill for transferring the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem had complained that Israeli spokesmen were not persistent enough in their support. This criticism is surely misplaced. Jerusalem has stated its position publicly and unequivocally. Nobody can be in doubt about its stance. By repetitious exhortation Israel would only be maneuvering itself into the posture of a pleading supplicant.

The bill's sponsors, for their part however, have omitted to attack one of the central pillars of the Reagan Administration's case. Administration spokesmen have asserted repeatedly that the transfer would anger the Moslems – because of their religious claim on the city. Flaunting this bogeyman has become standard Washington practice to make up for a weak case. Bad enough is the picture of the U.S. bowing before the alleged prospect of Moslem anger, and allowing it to overwhelm all moral considerations, but the Moslem claim itself is based on a complete fiction, fabricated in our time.

The British Christian theologian and historian, Dr. James Parkes, writes in his book *Whose Land* the following:

“The common phrase that Palestine is the Holy Land of three faiths is not strictly accurate. It is not appropriate to the Islamic relationship. . . . Moreover no particular sanctity has ever been attributed to the country as a whole. Its biblical frontiers had no significance and were never used to define a Muslim administration. . . . Jerusalem also was never a Muslim capital. Even the two Ummayyad caliphs who were most closely associated with the country . . . showed no special regard for it . . .

“Jerusalem, one may add, is not mentioned even once in the Koran.”

Dr. Parkes goes on:

“From the historian's point of view there is a difficulty in the fact that the very sanctity which Islam attributes to the Haram-ash-Sharif is due to the association of the spot with the other two religions involved, and not to any comparable Muslim relationship . . .

“The nature of the ascension of Muhammed is such that it is entirely useless as historical evidence. The association of the Jews with the land is a historical fact, whether one believes the association to be the result of a divine decision or not. The association of the Founder of Christianity with Galilee and Judea is a historical fact, whether or not one accepts the Christian theological claim as to His nature, or even the ecclesiastical claim of authenticity for the Holy Places. But the association of Muhammed with the country rests on willingness to believe that on a single night, and on a winged horse, Muhammed flew to and from Arabia in order that he might then mount by a ladder for a personal view of the heavens . . .

“What is true of Jerusalem turns out also to be true of the other sites in the country on the basis of which the claim is made that Palestine is the ‘Holy Land of three faiths.’ The shrines are either Jewish or Christian . . .” (pages 166-168, Pelican edition).

MOHAMMED recognized the sanctity of Jerusalem to the Jews and indeed to the Christians; and at the outset of his career, hoping to attract Jewish and Christian adherents to the new faith, he ordered his supporters to turn their faces towards Jerusalem when praying. When this measure failed in its purpose, he restored the

direction of prayer to Mecca. So it has remained ever since; and the annual pilgrimage to Mecca is moreover an impressive event in Moslem life.

No less impressive (in the light of the Moslem "claim") is the absence of any such pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The fact has been given recent emphasis by the Saudi royal family. They decided, some years ago, by what revelation it has not been disclosed, that they, of all people, had a special passion for, and a special relationship with, Jerusalem. American spokesmen, with reverent intonation, have unblinkingly echoed this tale. They hope, no doubt, thus to give political clout to the Saudis' plaint that they cannot possibly agree to visit "their" holy city as long as it is in infidel Jewish hands. Unfortunately, the 19 years of Jordan's pure Moslem control of Jerusalem, no Saudi prince ever set foot in it, not even on his way to or from the nightclubs of Europe.

WASHINGTON's pretence that Jerusalem is an "international" entity is not merely childish; it is also hypocritical. It has found expression only insofar as it has operated against Israel. Throughout the Jordanian occupation the U.S. (like the UN) failed even to protest at Jordan's breaches of the Armistice agreement, notably its obligation to protect all the Holy Places and to facilitate access to them. If that was not enough, Washington, forgetting altogether the "international responsibility" it claimed, turned a blind eye and deaf ear (together with the rest of the "Christian world") to the Jordanians' systematic destruction of Jewish synagogues and desecration of Jewish graves. The only discernible manifestation of Washington's concept of "international status" has been its refusal to recognize even western Jerusalem as Israel's capital – and thus to go on maintaining its embassy in Tel Aviv.

To emphasize the absence of any principle in its behaviour – the U.S. maintains an embassy in East Berlin even though it does not recognize East Berlin as the capital of the East German Republic. What could be a more demonstrative exhibition of a double standard?

INDEED A CLOSE examination of U.S. policy since 1947 suggests that its willingness to go to absurd extremes against a Jewish sovereign presence in Jerusalem derives from a deeper passion. There can be little doubt that one of the strands of State Department doctrine on Jewish national restoration has been the historic "religious" prejudice, which cannot tolerate the notion of Jewish statehood at all and which recoils from the very idea of Jews actually ruling over the Holy City.

Only the persistence of that prejudice can possibly explain the *reversal* of U.S. policy after the Six Day War. When Israel actually established and maintained its sovereignty over a reunited Jerusalem, Washington, after 19 years of obstinate clinging to the dreamed-up doctrine that Jerusalem was an "international" city, suddenly decided that the eastern part of the city was *not* international and, because it was now in Jewish hands, that it had become "occupied *Arab* territory." Henceforth, then, only western Jerusalem is "international."

THE EFFORT of Senator Daniel Moynihan and his colleagues in promoting the bill for transferring the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem has been warmly welcomed in Israel. It should be welcomed by every rational and far-minded American disturbed by the present anomaly and its implications. If, however, their purpose should be frustrated by the administration's counter-pressures, there is another manifestation of Washington's discriminatory policy that Israel can itself eliminate.

Secretary of State George Shultz said recently that the president is constitutionally entitled to decide where to place U.S. embassies. But Israel has an absolute right to put an end to the intolerable anomaly of the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem. The consulate, contrary to all diplomatic practice, operates independently of the U.S. embassy and is not accredited to the Israeli government. Its activities are an irritant and offence to Israel and the Jewish citizens of Jerusalem. No less than 13 of its sins were listed in a recent illuminating, if restrained, article by David Clayman and Peretz Levine ("Consular Contravention," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 1, 1984).

If the U.S. government wishes to maintain an office to fulfill acceptable consular functions, Israel should, in all friendliness, make clear that that office must conform to the accepted norms of international behaviour. In territory governed by Israel it can be allowed to operate only as an arm of the U.S. ambassador accredited to Israel.