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OPINION | REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Trump's Capital of Israel Idea

A U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem won't hurt the chances for peace.

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As the Donald Trump era approaches, the political establishment could help its credibility if it didn't portray every change of policy as the end of days. A case in point is the panic over the prospect that the President-elect might follow through on his campaign pledge to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Israel's capital, Jerusalem.

Mr. Trump's nomination last week of longtime adviser David Friedman as America's next envoy to the Jewish state has triggered a media and diplomatic meltdown. Headlines describe Mr. Friedman, an Orthodox Jewish bankruptcy lawyer, as "hostile to the two-state solution" and an "extremist." Yet his main offense seems to be that he is unapologetically pro-Israel—a novelty after eight years of an Obama Administration that has mistreated traditional U.S. allies in the Middle East and Europe.

"I intend to work tirelessly to strengthen the unbreakable bond between our two countries and advance the cause of peace within the region," Mr. Friedman said in a statement, "and look forward to doing this from the U.S. Embassy in Israel's eternal capital, Jerusalem."



David Friedman is President-elect Donald Trump's choice for U.S. ambassador to Israel. PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

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ed as candidates to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem only to renege once in office. In 1995 Congress enacted a law requiring the State Department to relocate the embassy, but successive Administrations have deferred the move. Mr. Trump seems determined to honor his campaign promise, which would end this political and diplomatic charade.

Opponents say moving the embassy would poison chances for an Israel-Palestinian compromise over Jerusalem. But the relocation would merely acknowledge the reality that Israel will never give up Jerusalem in any negotiated settlement. It might even help by sending a useful message to the Palestinians that their maximalist claims to Israeli territory are an obstacle to peace.

Neighboring Arab states might protest for public show, but they have been getting closer to Israel for their own shared strategic reasons—i.e., the common enemies of jihadists and Iran. The symbolism of the U.S. Embassy location won't stop that cooperation.

If the location of an embassy is enough to block peace talks, then there must not be much of an underlying basis for peace. Mr. Trump says he still wants to revive talks, and if moving the U.S. Embassy reassures Israelis of U.S. support, so much the better.

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