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## Trump, Jerusalem and Turkish position

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The Arab and Islamic countries expressed their rejection of the U.S. president's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the occupying state, in blatant disregard of the Palestinian right and relevant international resolutions and even the official American position since 1995.

However, interest has focused on the Turkish position for several reasons, including:

**First:** Because Turkey is a Muslim-majority country and a prominent regional actor,

**Second:** Because Turkey is now the periodic president of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC),

**Third:** Because of the striking remarks of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan,

**Fourth:** Because of the special status of Jerusalem from the perspective of the Turkish foreign policy.

While it is possible to talk about a clear-cut Turkish approach to the Palestinian issue, however, Jerusalem is the most prominent and most sensitive headline in this approach for religious, historical, intellectual and cultural reasons. This is mainly related to Turkey's view on its role as the heir to the last empire (Ottoman Empire) that had sovereignty over Jerusalem before it (Jerusalem) was later occupied by Israel. This was expressed by the spokesman of the Turkish presidency, Ibrahim Kalin, when he spoke about the "historical responsibility" that the Turkish people feel about "Jerusalem", which they protected and served for about 400 years.

For this specificity, the Turkish reaction was general, including all official, partisan, elitist and popular levels. Statements were made from various official levels of Turkey from the President of the Republic through the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the spokesmen of the presidency and the government, to a large number of



ministers and members of parliament. In fact, they all focused on the fact that Trump's decision was wrong and called for reversing it, most notably Erdogan's statement that "Jerusalem is a red line for Muslims."

This stance was not restricted to the Turkish government and the Justice and Development Party (AKP); as various Turkish parties adopted advanced positions in rejecting Trump's decision. Also, the four parties represented in parliament signed a joint statement, something which has rarely occurred in Turkey recently. The popular level was the most prominent of all, with demonstrations and events organized by civil society institutions in a large number of Turkish provinces, most notably Ankara and Istanbul. In one of these events, about twenty MPs participated.

Some believe that the ceiling of the Turkish position is affected by the crisis of Turkish-American relations recently, which is certainly normal in international relations. However, this is not the main reason for the Turkish position, but the specificity of 'Jerusalem' to Ankara and the fact that Turkey is the periodic president of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) are among the significant reasons.

The Turkish position was expressed by President Erdogan in his speech on Tuesday to the AKP parliamentary bloc, rejecting the resolution and condemning it. He also threatened to take important steps if the decision was issued by Trump. Practically, the Turkish president pointed to three tracks that his country would resort to in this case, namely: inviting the leaders of the OIC member states to an emergency meeting, mobilizing the street in all the Islamic world, in addition to a possibility for severing diplomatic relations with Israel.

Turkey has already called for an OIC emergency summit next Wednesday; and the capitals and cities of the Islamic world appeared to interact with the event; does severing Turkey's relations with Tel Aviv seem a possible option?

Theoretically, this could be possible; as the resumption of relations between Tel Aviv and Ankara was a necessity agreement with the minimal level of relations in a context that has been far from the strategic alliance that characterized the Turkish-Israeli relations of the two countries in the 1990s. The Turkish-Israeli agreement on normalization of relations signed in June 2016 did not bridge the gap of confidence between them. The agreement has not prevented hostile and negative statements on both sides, including statements made by many Israeli politicians commenting on Erdogan's remarks and Ankara's positions. Most prominent among these statements was the comment of the Knesset speaker a few weeks ago that "Erdogan will remain an enemy despite the resumption of relations", and the comment of the Israeli culture minister a few days ago that he - Erdogan - "is an Islamic extremist who will never change," adding that the apology presented to Turkey by Israel in 2013 was a mistake. This tension in the Turkish-Israeli relations which is already troubled ,and the high ceiling of the Turkish position suggest that Turkey can sever its relations with the occupation state, but in fact, this is really difficult. The relations between the two countries were cut off in 2010 after a direct attack on the Mavi Marmara flotilla, killing ten Turkish activists, and they (relations) were resumed only last year after pressures from the United States and many other factors. This means that the severing of the Turkish-Israeli relations may be more difficult than it was in 2010. Moreover, Ankara is unlikely to go to the option of freezing relations with Tel Aviv for protesting against a basically American position.

What seems more predictable is taking diplomatic steps such as recalling the Turkish ambassador to Tel Aviv for consultation or summoning the Israeli ambassador in Ankara to hand him a protest letter without resorting to freezing the bilateral relations at present.

However, such decision (severing relations) depends to a large extent on three important factors set by the Turkish decision-maker:

- 1) The ceiling of the Turkish popular position,
- 2) The developments on the ground in occupied Palestine, and
- 3) The official Arab-Islamic position towards the American decision.

This means that two thirds of the influencing factors on the Turkish decision are not basically Turkish, but rather Palestinian and Arab.

A stance taken in this regard by Turkey alone will be much weaker than a joint Arab-Islamic stance emanating from the emergency meeting of the Organization of Islamic Conference on Wednesday, (preceded by the Arab League's meeting of foreign ministers on Saturday). Perhaps the Turkish signal was very clear that Jerusalem is a "red line for all Muslims", not only for Turkey, which holds everyone responsible for the issue. Therefore, the outcome of the OIC summit next Wednesday will be very determining and influential on the ceiling of the Turkey's expected decision and the rhetoric emanating from it. Perhaps the first indication will be the level of representation of member states in the sommit