



American Chutzpah

By projecting its own image of the future arrangements for Jerusalem, the U.S. Congress has opened Pandora's box. Public Law 104-45 of 1995 (which mandates the relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem and punishes the State Department for delaying the move) was introduced after the Madrid peace conference and after the Oslo Agreement, of which the U.S. was a sponsor and a facilitator. It calls on the U.S. Government to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to "united Jerusalem"—Israel's "Eternal Capital." Not to be outbid on matters Israeli, the New York City Council adopted a resolution on 10 May of this year

unanimously commemorating the "reunification" of Jerusalem—that is, its annexation to Israeli hegemony.

The American lawmakers perhaps assumed that since the land so generously donated by the Israeli government lies in the western part of the city, relocation there might reinforce Israel's consolidation over the city without provoking opposition. Or perhaps they **did** not assume at all—geography of the Holy Land has never been a strong point among American politicians. Fearing an outcry against the U.S. for preempting the results of negotiations over the city's future, the U.S. State Department tried to contain the damage by using presidential prerogative in order to postpone the move.

As it happens, the bulk of the land in dispute is absentee property, legally owned by the descendants of Palestinian Jerusalem refugees from the 1948 war, many of them today citizens of the very country that has decided to set up "their" embassy on land forcefully appropriated from their parents and grandparents.

In this issue of *JQF*, historian Walid Khalidi, based on several years of scholarly detective work, traces the evolution of this problem and documents the outstanding features of this disputed land. British writer and journalist Graham Usher, in an exclusive for our journal, investigates the reverberations of the embassy issue in the wider context of Jerusalem negotiations and monitors the reactions of Israeli, Palestinian, U.S. and British sources.

Inadvertently, these moves by the U.S. Congress and other American bodies, coming as they do at the commencement of

final status negotiations, have helped to focus on the core issues at question: the determination of forms of shared sovereignty over the city, the fate of refugees from the war of 1948, and the fate of absentee property—including the disposition of the Allenby Barracks, the property slated for the embassy move. Let us hope the Congress will also help in resolving the issue by aggravating it. Thus by pushing an ideological Zionist agenda and adopting a position more royal than that of the current Israeli government, the Americans have actually made their own modest contribution to pressing to the fore dormant issues (such as Jerusalem refugees and refugee property in Israel) which are now the subject of bilateral negotiation between Palestinians and Israelis.

Ultimately, however, it would not help resolve the issue to make use of the muddles of one's adversary. The Americans can only make amends to these mistakes by putting their considerable weight on the Israelis to suspend all measures taken on Jerusalem that are likely to prejudice the outcome of the negotiations. A good start would be to clarify the jargon on the unity of the city and call it for what it is: annexation against the will of its native population.