

Trump and the return of the imperial code

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"Trump did not break into a solid system; he merely filled the void left by leaders who no longer knew how to speak the moral language of their time." - Jon Meacham

Donald Trump's October 13, 2025, address in Jerusalem should not be mistaken for campaign theatrics or ceremonial diplomacy. It marked the crystallization of a political language that has been gathering force for years—a language that fuses faith, force, and commerce into a singular promise of destiny. It is no longer content with the vocabulary of strategic alliances. It speaks instead of a transnational moral community, bound less by geography than by spiritual allegiance.

Trump did not stand before his audience as a statesman reciting past achievements. He spoke as one anointed with a civilizational mission. His thanks were not reserved for political allies but for "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob". He did not invoke policy frameworks but miracles. He did not weigh trade-offs; he proclaimed victories. To liberal sensibilities, such language may sound theatrical—even dangerous. Yet the power of the speech was not in its style but in what it revealed: a widespread hunger to re-enchant politics with meaning and grandeur, in an age when technocratic speech no longer stirs devotion.

This is a politics built not on argument, but affiliation. Trump does not seek to persuade—he seeks to enlist. He does not present a platform—he offers a belonging. There is no contractual tone, no institutional detachment. There is only epic narrative. Enemies become not adversaries but "forces of evil" defeated by "lions" and "miracles in the desert". Allies become not partners but spiritual brothers. In this worldview, peace is not the absence of conflict—it is the reward of victory. War becomes purification, commerce becomes sacrament.

Observers steeped in the norms of governance tend to read such rhetoric as populist excess. But it may be more accurate to frame it as a response—radical, yes, but coherent—to the failure of the liberal order to satisfy the emotional needs of its citizens. Integration delivered isolation. Consensus delivered apathy. While Europe crafts directives, Trump promises destiny. While the United Nations issues statements no one recalls, he offers an identity one can sing like an anthem. And his approach is not uniquely American. Leaders as different as Narendra Modi and Javier Milei are drawing from the same symbolic well.

There is an older doctrine beneath the spectacle: peace is not negotiated among equals—it is imposed from strength. In Trump's framing, Israel "has already won". The United States "has

already risen”. Iran “has already been contained”. The message follows: prosperity is possible—under the design of the victorious. This is not horizontal peace but hierarchical order.

There are dangers in such a creed. A peace rooted in supremacy can curdle into vengeance if strength falters. Economic integration conditioned on ideological loyalty can become exclusion. And when authority rests more in a man than in institutions, stability becomes hostage to charisma.

Yet dismissal would be shortsighted. Trump has grasped something many democracies have forgotten: people do not want managers; they want meaning. They do not want efficiency; they want destiny. They do not want to be governed; they want to belong.

The real question is not whether this “imperial code”—wrapped in religious or civilizational language—is valid or threatening. The question is whether there is another capable of inspiring equal allegiance without sliding into zealotry. For as long as liberal democracies speak only in rational terms, others will win the future with symbols, anthems, and redemption.

Jerusalem was not an address to one nation. It was a declaration to all: the age of calculation is giving way to an age of conviction. Those who fail to recognize it will not merely lose elections—they will lose civilizations.