You think you have a rough commute?

Consider my friend “Sally.” Sally is a Palestinian Christian living with her aged parents in Bethlehem. She works in Jerusalem, about 10 miles from their apartment. After boarding a bus at 6:30 a.m., she arrives at the wall separating the two cities by 7. At the checkpoint, everyone disembarks and stands in line to be individually frisked. This happens outside -- in the cold winter rain or the hot summer sun.

If it is a good day, the searches go without incident, and she boards a bus and reaches work by 8. If the guards are suspicious, the searches take longer, and she arrives wet and exasperated at 9. If there is a security alert, she does not arrive at all; the Israeli Border Patrol closes the checkpoint.

Security has been quite tight in the past two months due to Palestinian protests against the USA’s announced plan to move its embassy to Jerusalem.

Why does Sally put up with this difficulty? Because she has a job. It may not be a high-paying job, but it is steady work with a regular paycheck. And, it’s better than anything she could get staying in Bethlehem.

What does Sally have to do with the Israeli-Palestinian peace process? She is a bellwether for how well it is going. The worse her commute gets, the less likely the prospects for peace. Those prospects have plummeted in recent weeks and will probably continue to drop.

The USA’s announcement Dec. 6 that it will recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital has resulted in regular demonstrations by Palestinians against the decision. (Given the lack of election in the occupied territories, demonstrations are the only form of political expression left.) The United Nations General Assembly condemned the USA’s decision by more than 93 percent.

If the USA carries through its plans to move the embassy by the end of 2019, then protests will continue for the next two years and probably beyond.

The answer is that both Israel and the Palestinians claim Jerusalem as their capital. After the 1967 war in which Israel took control of the Palestinian territories, sovereignty over Jerusalem -- meaning Palestinian “East Jerusalem” -- was seen by the United Nations and most of the world’s nations as a matter of dispute and, therefore, a problem to be settled through peace negotiations.

Israel annexed East Jerusalem a few years later and declared the city to be a single, united entity. This move was roundly condemned by the U.N. and by the world’s nations. The USA, along with every other nation, left their embassies in Tel Aviv, with the intention of seeking a negotiated settlement on Jerusalem’s status. Despite the peace agreements negotiated by U.S. President Jimmy Carter in 1979 and the Oslo peace process in the 1990s, that settlement has not happened.

The USA has been generally perceived as an honest broker between Israel and the Palestinians since 1967. President Donald Trump’s sudden shift by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital makes it clear that the USA now supports Israel over the Palestinians.

It is not surprising that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas understands this action as a rejection of Palestinian claims to Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestine. In protest, he has ceased talking with the USA and did not meet with Vice President Mike Pence during his recent trip.

Trump has responded by threatening to cut off U.S. aid to the Palestinians. Given that Israel and the Palestinian-occupied territories have been the top-two per-capita recipients of U.S. foreign aid since 1979, this is a significant blow. But, Abbas has no choice. If he negotiated any sort of peace settlement under current circumstances, the Palestinian people would reject it.

One ray of hope for the peace process comes from Russia, of all places. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Russian President Vladimir Putin in January, and Abbas will visit Russia in February. The possibility of peace talks being hosted in Moscow or in Paris is on the agenda.

How will such developments affect Sally? They will continue to engender Palestinian protests, both to object to the American embassy transfer and to pressure Abbas not to give away too much to Israel over the bargaining table, should talks actually take place. That means Sally will commute through heightened security and more stringent scrutiny, and more frequent border closures.