

Trump Speech on Jerusalem: “Irresponsible and Reckless”

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Avi Shlaim, a Jewish scholar now based at Oxford's St. Anthony's College, was interviewed on BBC after President Donald Trump's announcement that he was designating Jerusalem as Israel's capital city.

Shlaim, who left Israel for a more open academic environment, calls the announcement by the President, “irresponsible and reckless”. *(See full interview below.)*

Trump has no right to set himself up as The Namer of capitals. But to him, he can do whatever he wants. Bibi Netanyahu knows that. Bibi got the Gift he has long coveted, his very own special electric train he can now send running around the floor, as he shouts, “Mine, mine, my precious Jerusalem is My capital.”

Standing in front of a Christmas tree as he gave Israel its capital, the President gave no indication he had considered, or cared, that Jerusalem is packed with meaning to Christians and Muslims, as well as Jews.

Palestinian American scholar Rashid Khalidi described this common connection to Jerusalem in [The Guardian](#):

Jerusalem is undoubtedly the most important aspect of the entire Palestine question. It has been central to the identity of Palestinian Muslims and Christians as far back as the founding moments of both religions, and has become even more so as the conflict over Palestine has become fiercer.

The rivalry over this holy city is exacerbated by the fact that the same site – the Haram al-Sharif to Muslims, the Temple Mount to Jews – is sacred to both. Because of its explosive nature, this is an issue that no Palestinian politician, and few Arab leaders, would dare to trifle with.

For someone such as me, whose family has lived in Jerusalem for hundreds of years, Trump's announcement does not just mean that the US has adopted the Israeli position that Jerusalem belongs exclusively to Israel.

He has also retroactively legitimised Israel's seizure and military occupation of Arab East Jerusalem during the 1967 war, and its imposition of discriminatory laws on hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living there. The damage he has done will be permanent: the US cannot undo this recognition.

This act completely disqualifies the US from its longstanding role as broker, a position that Washington has monopolised for itself. So much for the pitiful

“peace plan” that Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner was cooking up and hoping to impose on the Palestinians.

Khalidi is right, the “pitiful peace plan” was never serious. It was a holding pattern of pretension.

The Prime Minister and his predecessors, have had their way for decades with the city Trump thinks he just gave to Israel. Balderdash! Israel has treated Jerusalem as its kept capital since 1967. For six decades, IDF soldiers have roamed the city at will, arresting citizens like so many wayward children who skipped school to throw rocks.

Netanyahu and his right-wing government got what they wanted, a recognition that covers crimes of oppression.

What Trump has just done is far more significant than Naming. He has announced that Jerusalem is not open to negotiations. It is not a “contested” city in which Muslims, Christians and Jews live by an agreed-upon understanding.

It is now, named as such by the [Grand Poobah](#) across the great ocean, a Jewish city that is the capital of a Jewish nation.

It was this Grand Poobah who was given authority by voters of the United States, to not only give away electric trains, but to set up an oligarchy in the land of the free and the home of the brave, where freedom is defined by the Grand Poobah and bravery can be a ticket to jail.

Israel got more from the Namer than a new title for the Holy City. That new title is “capital”, which gives a permanent American blessing to a nation which has now been rewarded for its decades of occupation.

The Namer could care less what the world thinks. He is now the Man, who runs a nation through tweets. What are you gonna do about it? Wait until the next election to start cleaning up what’s left after the storms?

Our current U.S. Congress, created by gerrymandering, prepared for this theft of a Name by the Namer, with votes of its own, votes that revealed nothing more than the puppet strings that, when pulled in Tel Aviv, make Congress dance the Israeli way.

Stephen Zunes responded to Trump’s “big give away” in a piece for [The Progressive](#).

Zunes, a professor of politics and coordinator of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of San Francisco, describes the strings:

Trump’s announcement is actually the culmination of years of pressure by a large bipartisan majority of Congress and leaders of both political parties towards the White House. It represents the fulfillment of the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, which mandates that the United States move its embassy to Jerusalem, though the bill allows a president to waive that requirement every six months if deemed in the national interest.

In the Senate, the bill was cosponsored by such prominent Senate Democrats as Joe Biden and John Kerry and only one Democrat (the late Robert Byrd) voted no. On the House side, just thirty out of 204 Democrats voted no, along

with the independent then-Congressman Bernie Sanders.

Since then, every President has taken advantage of the waiver to prevent such a provocative move, despite continued bipartisan pressure from Congress. As recently as this past June, just days after Trump issued his first waiver of the requirement, the Senate voted 90-0 in favor of a resolution re-affirming the 1995 law and calling on President Trump “to abide by its provisions.” Co-sponsors included such leading Democrats as minority leader Chuck Schumer and Ben Cardin, ranking Democrat on the Foreign Affairs Committee, as well as Tammy Baldwin, Kirsten Gillibrand, Cory Booker, and Ron Wyden.

Schumer has openly encouraged Trump to move the embassy and previously criticized his “indecisiveness” on the issue.

Support by Congressional Democrats and party leaders for moving the embassy is not due to demand from their constituents. A recent poll shows that 81 percent of Democrats oppose moving the embassy while only 15 percent approve.

The Congress and the President are co-conspirators in the gift of Jerusalem to Israel. The blame is theirs to share. The response to the gift in the region and in the world will be far-reaching. The American public is not with them. Elections in 2018 and 2020 are near-at-hand.

Voters in those elections will need education. A good place to start is to listen to the quiet voice of Avi Shlaim in this seven-minute BBC interview. [Click here](#).

From 1972 through 1999, James M. Wall was editor and publisher of the Christian Century magazine, based in Chicago, Illinois. He was a Contributing Editor of the Century from 1999 until July, 2017. He has written this blog, wallwritings.me, since it was launched April 27, 2008.

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