

Jerusalem, Trump and the San Antonio Connection



Nadine Saliba

On December 6, 2017, US president Donald Trump announced that the United States would recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and move the US embassy there. Like several Democratic and Republican presidential candidates before him, Trump had made this a major campaign promise. After all, a pro-Israel US foreign policy has always enjoyed bipartisan support. For example, the democratic leader in the Senate, Chuck Schumer, endorsed the move. Even liberal comedian, Trump critic and known Islamophobe, Bill Maher announced his support for the Jerusalem decision premising his position with the disclaimer: "I hate to agree with Donald Trump, but..."

The US congress had already passed, with strong bipartisan support, a law in 1995 called the Jerusalem Embassy Act, which declared Jerusalem the capital of Israel and required the US to move its embassy there by 1999. Since then, however, every six months, the president in office signs a waiver to keep the embassy in Tel Aviv, citing national security concerns.

The Arab-Israeli war of 1948 and the establishment of the state of Israel led to the division of Jerusalem. West Jerusalem fell under Israeli control and

East Jerusalem fell under Jordanian control. During the 1967 war, Israel occupied East Jerusalem and later annexed it. This annexation however was deemed null and void by the United Nations because it was in violation of international law.

Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is considered a break from what is seen as a more balanced, long-held US position that the status of Jerusalem should be determined through negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. But it's important to remember that it was under this decades-old US policy that Israel continued to occupy and colonize East Jerusalem with impunity. It was under this so-called more balanced US position that Israel worked diligently to change the city's demographic character, creating a Jewish majority through policies that constitute a clear violation of international law such as home evictions, home demolitions, residency revocations, land confiscation, building Jewish-only settlements and the list goes on.

Trump's decision on Jerusalem allows him to show his supporters that, unlike past presidents, he is delivering on an issue that is popular among Republicans in general, but especially among the party's Evangelical Christian



Trump's decision caused world wide protests. Nearly every former U.S. ambassador to Israel disagrees with Trump's Jerusalem decision. Its implementation remains to be seen.

base. Many within this base adhere to Christian Zionism, a belief that the return of Jews to Palestine and the creation of the state of Israel comes in fulfillment of God's will and biblical prophecy.

Zionism is a modern Jewish nationalist movement that emerged in Europe in the late 19th Century calling for the immigration of European Jews to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish homeland. While Zionism developed in response to European anti-Semitism, it followed the model of other exclusionary nationalist movements that were ascendant in Europe at the time and that played no small part in feeding anti-Semitism. It is important to note that the Zionist movement was opposed

controlled Palestine, was getting increasingly weaker, British politicians saw in the creation of a Zionist state in Palestine under British sponsorship potential for extending the reach of the British empire and securing passage through the Suez Canal.

Informed by racism and anti-Semitism, the idea of Jewish immigration to Palestine was meant to divert the immigration of Eastern European Jews, fleeing poverty and deadly pogroms in Russia, away from Western Europe. Arthur Balfour is best known as the British foreign secretary who signed in 1917 the infamous colonial document the Balfour Declaration, pledging Palestine to the Zionist project. The declaration stated: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in

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by most Jews of all stripes—secular and religious, socialist and liberal—because they realized that it meant the expulsion of Jews from Europe, a goal that coincided with the desires of the anti-Semites.

Three hundred years prior to that history, proto-Zionist ideas had already existed among certain Protestant sects that emerged after the Protestant Reformation of 16th-century Europe. These sects believed in two parallel ideas, the return of the Jewish people to Palestine as a precursor to the second coming of Jesus Christ and the conversion of Jews to Christianity as fulfillment of biblical prophecy. These views came to America with European settlers and eventually spread with the growth of Evangelical Protestantism in the US. In the current administration, Vice President Mike Pence, a zealous believer in this ideology associated with political conservatives and the Christian Right, has served as the Christian Zionists' main channel to the White House.

But religious beliefs were not the sole motivation behind these ideas. Advocates for the return of Jews to Palestine in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, especially among Western European elites and government circles were motivated by imperial and colonial interests. As the Ottoman Empire, which

Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object..." However, the same Balfour presided, as British prime minister in 1905, over the passage of the Aliens Act, whose main purpose was to impose immigration controls specifically targeting Eastern European Jews. Some might see this as a paradox. Was the man a supporter of the Jews or was he an anti-Semite? Certainly, Balfour and the government he represented supported colonialism and Zionism but that does not necessarily mean they supported the Jewish people.

In its contemporary manifestation, Christian Zionism has an especially odious connection in San Antonio through the figure of John Hagee, a millionaire televangelist and pastor of Cornerstone megachurch. Hagee founded the organization Christians United for Israel (CUFI) in 2006, which claims to be the largest pro-Israel group in the US and whose goal is to provide political and financial support for Israel. The organization lobbies US politicians and raises millions of dollars to bankroll illegal Jewish-only settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem in addition to disseminating propaganda about the political situation in Palestine and Israel.

Hagee and his organization spread anti-Arab and anti-

Muslim rhetoric and incitement and engage in the vilification, dehumanization and erasure of Palestinians. He claims that the US is in a religious war against Islam. In his book, *Jerusalem Countdown - A Warning to the World*, Hagee writes: "This is a religious war that Islam cannot and must not win," adding: "The end of the world as we know it is rapidly approaching... Rejoice and be exceedingly glad the best is yet to be."

Believing that the creation of Israel is a prerequisite for the battle of Armageddon, the pastor opposes any measures that could end the conflict such as an Israeli military withdrawal from the West Bank. This follower of Jesus advocates for war with Iran just as he was an ardent advocate for the US war in

said enough, Hagee goes on to accuse Jews of not being spiritually alive, preaching "Today Israel is back in the land and... they [the Jews] are physically alive but they're not spiritually alive." A video of this sermon that surfaced during the 2008 presidential campaign is credited with prompting then Republican presidential candidate John McCain to renounce Hagee's political endorsement.

According to this ideology, therefore, everything that happens, every political event, every historical development, including the suffering and persecution of Jews, is part of a divine plan to drive the Jewish people to Palestine. As for the Palestinians, the indigenous people who were slaughtered and

and Hitler a hunter sent by God to persecute them to go to the holy land because of the Zionist call to live in Palestine.

Iraq. In a 2003 video of a "prayer" broadcast that aired before the US invasion of Iraq, Hagee pleaded with God for war: "Father, in the name of the lord Jesus, I pray for our president tonight, I pray that you would give him the wisdom of Solomon to lead this nation into war..."

Guided by a literalist interpretation of the bible, Hagee, like many Evangelical Christians, believes that the end-time prophecies hastened by the ingathering of the Jews in the holy land include the rapture (true believers of Christ will be removed from earth), the Great Tribulation (a time of wars, famine and disease), the conversion of Jews to Christianity and the battle of Armageddon whereby unconverted Jews die. The end game for this apocalyptic theology is the destruction of Judaism and it comes from a group always eager to express affection and friendship towards the Jewish people.

In an infamous sermon, Hagee called Hitler a hunter sent by God to persecute European Jews and thus force them to go to the holy land because "so few" of them heeded the Zionist call to live in Palestine. He said God allowed the holocaust to happen because God's "top priority for the Jewish people is to get them to come back to the land of Israel." As though he hadn't

ethnically cleansed to make room for an ethno/religious pure settler state, their suffering does not even register on his radar screen. In this scenario, Jews are valued not as human beings but as characters needed for the development of a plot. That, too, is a form of dehumanization. And yet this man is embraced by Israeli leaders like Benjamin Netanyahu and Jewish American organizations like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a leading pro-Israel lobby.



Indigenous Palestinian Christians, members of the oldest Christian community in the world, who, like all Palestinians, are directly harmed by the ideology and actions carried out by Christian Zionists in the name of their faith, have not stood idly by. They have taken several initiatives to challenge the false and dangerous teachings of Christian Zionism.

In a statement called the Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism, Palestinian clergy representing several churches, lament Christian Zionists' narrow and dangerous worldview that associates Christian teachings with the ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism and focuses on apocalyptic events in the future rather than living the message of love and justice that Christ taught today. They declare their opposition to the

false teachings of Christian Zionist doctrines that advance racial exclusivity and war and endanger the lives of the people living in the region. The statement emphasizes that security is not possible without a foundation of justice.

There is also a strong current of Palestinian liberation theology, the doctrine originating from Latin America that offers an interpretation of Christianity focused on the liberation of the oppressed. Its principal organization in Palestine is the Sabeel Ecu- menical Liberation Theology Center.

Historically, the Palestinian Christian community is made up of the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and smaller mainline Protestant churches. But a Palestinian Evangelical community, that has tried to challenge the Christian Zionist influence within the Evangelical movement, has recently emerged. The Bethlehem Bible College, which serves as the intellectual and spiritual center for this community, organizes conferences called "Christ at the Checkpoint." They invite evangelical leaders from around the world including the United States to meet with the local Palestinian church and provide guided tours in the occupied territories. Their mission is to "reclaim the prophetic role in bringing peace, justice, and reconciliation in Palestine and Israel." Alex Awad, pastor of the East Jerusalem Baptist Church and a professor at the Bethlehem Bible College told the Electronic Intifada in 2012: "We want people to come, see the wall, see the checkpoints, see the reality on the ground, and

then open the Bible."

Many Palestinians have been killed and injured as Israel has cracked down on the protests that have come out against Trump's decision. I'm not sure the US recognition of Jerusalem

as Israel's capital makes the already perilous conditions of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation any worse? It does however provide Israel with diplomatic support for its exclusivist claims and de facto control over both West and East Jerusalem.

Analysts have warned of the consequences of the Jerusalem decision on the peace process and the two-state solution. But the peace process has not been a serious thing for a very long time, if it ever

was. Israel's refusal to end its illegal occupation of Palestinian lands is proof that it never approached peace negotiations with good faith and is not interested in resolving this conflict. The two-state solution, for its part, has been preempted by Israel's building of settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel's plan is to maintain its occupation and rule over Palestinians while refusing to give them human, political and civil rights. Trump's decision adds yet another US brick to this edifice of injustice.

Bio: Nadine Saliba, born in Lebanon, immigrated with her family to San Antonio. She has an MA in Political Theory and International Relations. She will be a contributing writer to La Voz de Esperanza on a bi-monthly basis.



A Palestinian woman sits next to the remains of her home after it was demolished by Israeli bulldozers, not an uncommon experience for Palestinians.

Kiss 1986

Bipolar disorder
Rare unknown blood disorder
Broken inside his head
Unable to leave the hospital bed
She comes to him unafraid
Nothing said
AIDS decimating loving men
Her romantic love for women
Just the sight of fresh fruit in her hand
Injecting life in a dying man
Showing no fear

She comes near

Faith, hope, love, and peace
Softer than the brush of a
fuzzy peach

On the cheek she
plants a gentle kiss

To live becomes his wish
2018
Happy to be seen
Life is better than great
Praying gratitude is not too late

Dedicated to Deborah Myers and Nickie Valdez

—Tom Noonan, Minot, ND

The Esperanza staff, board & buena gente congratulate Nickie and Deb on thirty-two years of partnership. Wishing you the best in the coming years. You continue to lead and inspire our community of activists.

