

Bernie Sanders' "Horrrifying" Comment On Jerusalem

by Hugh Fitzgerald



During his appearance with the other Democratic candidates in South Carolina, Bernie Sanders was asked if he would “move the American Embassy back to Tel Aviv from Jerusalem”; he did not find that an outrageous idea. In fact, he said he would think about it, that it would be “under consideration.” Those who know that among Sanders’ most enthusiastic supporters are Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, and Linda Sarsour, that Sanders refuses – and has always refused – to attend a meeting of AIPAC, an organization which he regards as suffused with “bigotry,” and that he has repeatedly called Prime Minister Netanyahu a “racist” were not surprised. In Israel, Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz expressed the horror that many, in Israel, America, and around the world, felt at Sanders’ remark.

The story is [here](#):

Israeli Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz denounced US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders on Wednesday [February 26] for what he described as a “horrificing” comment made by the Vermont senator at the Democratic debate in South Carolina the previous night.

Asked by a moderator whether, as president, he would move the US Embassy in Israel back to Tel Aviv from Jerusalem, Sanders replied noncommittally, but noted it would “be under consideration.”

“I’m very proud of being Jewish,” Sanders went on to say. “I actually lived in Israel for some months. But what I happen to believe is that right now, sadly, tragically, in Israel, through Bibi Netanyahu, you have a reactionary racist who is now running that country.”

Sanders’ statement came only two days after he announced he would not attend the upcoming annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference in Washington, DC, accusing the lobby group of providing a platform for “leaders who express bigotry and oppose basic Palestinian rights.”

In an Army Radio interview on Wednesday, Katz said, “The remark by Sanders, who is of Jewish background, is his second against the State of Israel on topics that are at the core of Jewish belief, Jewish history and Israel’s security” – a reference to a declaration by Sanders at a J Street conference last fall that he would condition US military aid to Israel.

“The last time he talked about Gaza – without understanding at all the reality and the threat and the rockets and everything we face as those who are being attacked by radical Islam and defending ourselves,” Katz recalled. “He in effect wanted to deny us the right to self-defense.”

“And now, Jerusalem,” the Israeli foreign minister – a veteran member of the ruling Likud party – continued. “There

is no Jew who hasn't dreamed of Jerusalem for thousands of years, to return, and we returned and I think President [Donald] Trump did an important thing, without connection to internal disagreements within the US. He recognized the reality that Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish people, the capital of the State of Israel."

"Now, in the new peace plan, the deal of the century, he recognizes Jerusalem in its entirety as Israel's capital," Katz added. "And we will stick to that and insist on that, and, of course, act to persuade [people] in the US regarding those things. And whoever comes out against that – naturally, people who very much support Israel will not tend to support him."

Sanders likes to tell the world, even as – or especially as – he denounces Israel and its leadership (that “reactionary racist” Prime Minister Netanyahu) that he is “proud of being Jewish,” and furthermore, he once spent a few months living in Israel as a young man. This is supposed to shield him from criticism of his clear antipathy toward Israel, an antipathy which is likely based on his ignorance. He may indeed be “proud of being Jewish,” but a little less emphasis on that pride, and a little more attention on his part to actually learning about the history of the Jews, and their connection to the Land of Israel that Sanders appears not to comprehend, would be welcome. It would also be useful if Sanders would learn about the history of the Arab wars against the Jewish state, and the Islamic basis for that hostility.

As to Jerusalem, does Sanders think that the Jewish claim to the city is no greater than that of the “Palestinians”? Jerusalem is mentioned 669 times in the Hebrew Bible, and not once in the Qur’an. Jerusalem has been at the center of Jewish life and longing for several thousand years. “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget my cunning”(Psalm 137:5), and for mourners throughout the period of sitting

Shiva to be comforted with the phrase “May The Omnipresent (One) comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

It is not the entire city of Jerusalem that is holy to Muslims, but a particular site in that city – the Temple Mount, where the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock are situated. In the Qur’an, Muhammad is described as going from the Great Mosque in Mecca to “the farthest mosque” (al-masjid al-aqsa), on his strange winged creature Buraq, where he tethered him, and then ascended, with the angel Gabriel, up through the seven stages of Heaven, before returning to earth, all in a 24-hour period. The place of the “farthest mosque” was assigned by the Muslims to the Temple Mount precisely because it is the holiest place for the Jews. There was no mosque in Jerusalem until long after Muhammad’s death; it is an act of faith, not a dictate of history, that nonetheless places the “Farthest Mosque” on the Temple Mount. By claiming the Temple Mount as the site of the “farthest mosque” where Muhammad landed when he arrived from Mecca, and from which he then ascended into Heaven, the Muslims were deliberately appropriating that holiest Jewish site for themselves.

The claims of the Jews to Jerusalem is based on thousands of years of recorded history. You do not have to be Jewish to learn about, and believe in, that history. It’s a matter of record. But the claims of the Muslims to Jerusalem are based not on history but on belief. The Muslim claim to Jerusalem is based on a story in the Qur’an about Muhammad, who supposedly flies on a strange winged creature, from Mecca to the “farthest mosque” and then accompanied by Gabriel, ascends up into the Seventh Heaven and back, all within 24 hours.

One claim to Jerusalem – that of the Jews – is based on history. The other claim – that of the Muslims – is based on a desire to appropriate part of that same history. It is one more example of how Muslims have appropriated the holy sites of others. Think, for example, of how many of Hinduism’s most important temples were destroyed, and at the very same spot,

mosques – making use of the building material of the ruined temples – were built, as the Babri Masjid was built over the site where the Hindu God Rama was said to have been born, and where a Hindu temple existed before the Muslims destroyed it. Think, too, of how many Christian churches were turned into mosques – the most famous such transformation was that of the Church of John the Baptist which was turned into a celebrated Umayyad Mosque.

This information about the comparative significance of Jerusalem to Jews and to Muslims might make Sanders a bit more understanding of why moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem, which has been regarded by Jews as the center of their political and religious life since the 10th century B.C.E., that is, for 3000 years, made sense. He need only take the time for a few days of sustained study of Jerusalem's – and Israel's – history. When the Trump Administration moved the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, it finally did what the last three presidents – Obama, G. W. Bush, and Clinton – had all promised to do, but were too fearful of offending the Arabs that they never got around to fulfilling that promise. Trump, on the other hand, did.

Moving the Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem makes moral, historical, and political sense. It makes moral sense because it recognizes, at long last, the central role of Jerusalem in Jewish history, and does not make a specious equivalence between the profound claim of the Jews, based on that history, and the claim of the "Palestinians" which originates in the Muslim desire to appropriate the holy sites of other faiths. It makes historical sense because no other people have claimed Jerusalem as their capital. No other people can claim a 3000-year attachment to, and presence in the city. The Arabs turn toward Mecca, not Jerusalem, when they prostrate themselves in prayer. Their holy cities are Mecca and Medina, with Jerusalem a very distant third. No Arab leader or dignitary – save Sadat when he addressed the Knesset – has visited Jerusalem since

King Abdullah of Jordan, who was assassinated there in 1951. That is some indication of how little importance has actually been given to the Old City of Jerusalem, where Temple Mount is located, by the Muslim Arabs. But in 1967, when Israel captured the Old City, and East Jerusalem, and suddenly all of Jerusalem was in the hands of Jews, the city suddenly Jerusalem became very precious to the Muslim Palestinians, for whom the city had become their own "eternal capital."

Although the Palestinians threatened that if Trump moved the embassy to Jerusalem all hell would break loose, nothing much happened. A handful of very brief protests in the streets of Arab capitals. No cutting off of diplomatic relations. There was, of course, the expected pro-forma condemnation by the Arab League and the O.I.C. (Office of the Islamic Cooperation). Trump's firmness was enough to discourage the Muslim Arabs from their usual displays of fury; they knew they would get nowhere and might increase his antipathy toward them. Still more disheartening for the Palestinians, the Arab states, having issued those pro forma condemnations of the move, did nothing concrete to support the Palestinians. The other Arabs, especially Egypt and the Gulf Arabs, have shown a growing weariness with the Palestinians; their cause, which was once at the center of Arab concerns, has been pushed to the side. That is entirely understandable, given the many different threats so many Arab states now must deal with, including domestic effect of the civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, the threats to national security from the Muslim Brotherhood and from remnants of both Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, and above all, the major danger from Iran, that has made the Gulf Arabs now see Israel as their most important ally against the Islamic Republic.

The deed is done. The Embassy has been functioning smoothly in Jerusalem for almost two years, since May 14, 2018. Guatemala has followed suit. Brazil and Australia have both opened trade offices in Jerusalem, which some believe presages moves of

their embassies. Other countries – Honduras, Hungary, Moldova, and Romania – have spoken about moving their embassies. A historic injustice is, little by little, thanks to the Trump Administration's willingness to act, being rectified.

If Sanders were President, and if he were to put "under consideration" moving the American Embassy back to Tel Aviv, this would have disastrous consequences. It is because the Arabs were convinced that they would get nowhere in persuading Trump to move the Embassy back, that their protests were so feeble. But if a President Sanders says he would be willing to consider moving the Embassy back, that would provide the impetus needed for the Arab street to start protesting, and demanding – with a President Sanders in the White House – that the Embassy be moved back. It is enough for the Palestinians to know that Sanders has shown his antipathy for Israel, so much so that he would even be willing to undo the Embassy move, for them to seize the opportunity and once again explode in protest, this time for an American President likely – he's not Trump – to be swayed by such demonstrations.

If Sanders were to be willing to "consider" moving the Embassy back, this would signal to all the Israel-haters that their moment had come round again at last, after four years of the most pro-Israel President in American history. Led by the likes of Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, and Linda Sarsour, they would organize the BDS-ers and the Muslim American community, and the far-left which is convinced of Israel's wickedness as a "colonial-settler state," to go all out to persuade Bernie Sanders to undo the "terrible decision of Donald Trump" and return the Embassy to Tel Aviv. All the "progressives" who have been Sanders' solid supporters will be for that move. Why would Bernie Sanders let them down?

If a President Sanders were to move the Embassy back to Tel Aviv, the consequences would be severe. It would be a huge diplomatic defeat for the Israelis, devastating to their sense of security, for if even their closest ally, the United

States, reneges on a matter that goes to the very heart of their national and religious identity – Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel and of the Jewish people – who or what can they count on? It was hard during all those decades that have passed since the Six-Day War to see successive administrations promise to move the embassy and never do so; it would be much worse, having finally achieved that goal, to see it undone by a man who claims to be “proud of being Jewish” but surrounds himself with the “Squad” of Israel-haters.

Meanwhile, the Palestinians will be gleeful at what they will rightly assume is a terrific defeat for the Zionists. If even Israel’s friend, the United States, feels compelled to undo “the great wrong” of the Embassy move, that shows the Palestinians that if they keep refusing to negotiate it is Israel, not the Palestinians, who will be pushed about by a Sanders presidency. For Sanders keeps expressing his sympathy for the Palestinians who, in his view, have never received a fair shake. He has apparently failed to notice all the negotiations arranged by Washington where it was the Palestinians who refused, and refused, and refused, every offer made to them, for 97% of the West Bank, and then for 95% of the West Bank, and now, for a Palestinian state that would have the exact same acreage as the Palestinian territories do today, with some of the territory reassigned to Israel made up for by the two large chunks of Israeli territory on the border with the Sinai that would, as recompense, be given to the Palestinians as part of their state. This move of the Embassy back to Tel Aviv will tell the Palestinians that their strategy of not engaging in substantive negotiations is working; that they must be patient, waiting for the Sanders administration to pressure Israel on the issue of settlements – that is, what they formulaically call “illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land,” as Sanders and his supporters would have it – and even, one suspects, Sanders might support a modified form of the so-called “Right of Return,” where not

five million, but "only" a million or two of the "Palestinians," would move to the West Bank.

Undoing the Embassy move would be a signal to the rest of the world that even the United States is abandoning Israel's "right-wing" demands. Those countries which have been on the brink of moving their own embassies to Jerusalem will be stopped cold. Why should Brazil, or Australia, go out on a limb for Israel if even the Americans found it necessary to renege on their Jerusalem move? They cannot be certain why the Americans would do this, but they will assume that economic pressure from the Arabs proved decisive, and they would rather not take the risk of being subject to such pressure themselves. If America moves its Embassy back, that will put an end to any talk from other countries about moving their own embassies to Jerusalem.

In Iowa, Bernie Sanders called Prime Minister Netanyahu a "racist." He received some criticism for that absurd charge, but instead of dropping the epithet, he doubled down in South Carolina, where he described Netanyahu as a "reactionary racist." His statement about how he would "consider" moving the Embassy back to Tel Aviv was unexpected. It has already gotten Palestinian hopes up and, among the Israelis, caused a furor, for what Israel's Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz described as a "horrible" comment.

It would be highly desirable if Sanders would put in the effort to learn much more about the very great significance of Jerusalem to Jews, and the very different significance of that city to Muslims, before making his pronouncements. He needs to read more, study more, to be in a position to judge what his "progressive" supporters tell him. He needs to find out more about the history of Israel, the wars of survival that the Israelis have had to fight, the invention of the Palestinian people, and the way Jihad will, in one form or another, continue to be waged against Israel. There is no "solution" to this, for Jihad has no end until the whole world has succumbed

to the rule of Islam, but there is a way to “manage” the situation – a very different way of looking at the matter. If Israel keeps the territories it needs in the West Bank in order to have strategic depth, which will be of critical help in slowing down an invasion from the east, buying time so that Israel’s reservists can be called up, it Indeed will, through deterrence, manage to keep the peace. And in fact, that’s the only sure way to keep the peace between Israel and the Arabs.

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