UNESCO’s Jerusalem Lies

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Earlier this month, coinciding with Israel’s 69th Independence Day, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) passed a resolution entitled “Occupied Palestine.” The resolution denies Israel any sovereign claim to its own capital city, Jerusalem, and falsely describes Israel as the city’s “occupying power.” The anti-Israel measure also speaks of the “cultural heritage of Palestine and the distinctive character of East Jerusalem.”

Clearly, the intention of the UNESCO resolution is to repudiate Israel’s Jewish history and sovereignty in favor of Arab claims.

Lying behind this Arab diplomatic offensive is an Arab street and Muslim world, neither of which have reconciled themselves to Israel’s existence nor even the peoplehood of the Jews — and thus the Jewish immemorial association and claim to Jerusalem.

This clamor and fixation on Jerusalem, quite recent in Muslim history, has led many in the international community to conclude that Jerusalem is holy to Islam and central to Palestinian Arab consciousness. This is, however, a propaganda fiction.

Though possessing important Muslim shrines, such as the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosques, Jerusalem holds no great significance for Islam, as [history](http://www.danielpipes.org/84/the-muslim-claim-to-jerusalem) shows.

Jerusalem rates not a single mention in the Quran, and it is not the direction in which Muslims turn to pray. References in the Quran and hadith to the ‘farthest mosque,’ which has sometimes been invoked to connect Islam to Jerusalem, clearly doesn’t refer to a mosque that didn’t exist in Muhammad’s day.

Indeed, the site of the biblical temples is called the Temple Mount, not the Mosque Mount, and — in contrast to [innumerable Palestinian Authority statements today](http://zoa.org/2014/04/10238476-zoa-pal-lies-denial-about-jewish-connection-rights-in-jlem-must-stop-now/) — was acknowledged as such for decades by Jerusalem’s Muslims.

Throughout the British Mandate period, the Jerusalem Muslim Supreme Council’s publication, [*A Brief Guide to the Haram Al-Sharif*](http://www.bibleplaces.com/guide.pdf), stated of Jerusalem’s Temple Mount on page 4 that, “Its identity with the site of Solomon’s Temple is beyond dispute.” (After 1954, all such references to the biblical temples were excised from this publication).

During the illegal annexation and rule of the historic eastern half of Jerusalem by Jordan (1948-67), Amman remained Jordan’s country’s capital, not Jerusalem, even as Jews were driven out of the territory, and their property and sanctuaries were laid to waste. During this time the Old City’s 58 synagogues were destroyed, and Jewish gravestones were used to pave roads and latrines. Jewish access to the Western Wall was also forbidden during this time, in contravention of Article 8 of the [1949 Israeli/Jordanian armistice](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-jordan-armistice-agreement-1949).

Historically, Jerusalem under Muslim control was no more a capital city than Mecca or Medina in Saudi Arabia, or Qom in Iran. Jordanian-controlled Jerusalem enjoyed neither the attention nor affection of the Arab world or its rulers. Quite the contrary: the eastern half of the city became a backwater, with infrastructure like water and sewerage scanty or non-existent, and its Christian population, which was denied the right to purchase church property, also declined. No Arab ruler, other than Jordan’s King Hussein, ever visited the city. As Israeli elder statesman Abba Eban put it: “the secular delights of Beirut held more attraction.”

Significantly, neither the PLO’s [National Charter](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/plocov.asp) nor the [Fatah Constitution](http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=68&x_article=1704), the latter drafted during Jordanian rule, even mention Jerusalem, let alone call for its establishment as a Palestinian capital.

Yet all this would never be obvious from the tenor and content of Palestinian, Arab and Muslim pronouncements about the city today.

Conversely, Jerusalem, the capital of the biblical Jewish kingdoms, is the site of three millennia of Jewish habitation — hence the ‘Jerusalem 3000’ celebrations initiated in by the government of Yitzhak Rabin.

The holiest of Judaism’s four holy cities, Jerusalem is mentioned 669 times in the Hebrew Bible and alluded to in countless prayers. Major Jewish rituals, including the conclusion of the Passover Seder and Yom Kippur service, end with the age-old affirmation, “Next year in Jerusalem.”

Jerusalem is the only city in the world in which Jews have formed a majority since the 1880s. Today, Jerusalem, in addition to being home to Judaism’s greatest sanctuaries, is the seat of Israel’s government, the Knesset, the Supreme Court, the National Library and the Hebrew University. Its population is two-thirds Jewish.

It is only under unified Israeli rule that the city as a whole has been revitalized, enjoyed stunning growth and also, at last, full freedom of religion for its mosaic of faiths — precisely what would be threatened by its redivision, as is already obvious in the Christian exodus from Palestinian-controlled [Gaza Strip](http://raymondibrahim.com/2016/11/01/forced-conversion-christians-gaza/) and Bethlehem.

Whatever form a final peace settlement might one day take, there is no morally just or legally sound reason to inflate or fabricate Muslim claims on Jerusalem, while denying the city’s Jewish primacy and history.

The Trump administration rightly condemned the UNESCO resolution. It should now defund UN bodies that practice this form of delegitimizing political warfare against Israel — starting with UNESCO.