



AL-QUDS

HISTORY, RELIGION,
AND POLITICS

ABD AL-FATTAH EL-AWAISI
MUHİTTİN ATAMAN

SETA

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	7
PROLOGUE	11

PART ONE

HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

CHAPTER I	
Whose Holy Land? The Meanings and Origins of the Names of Bayt al-Maqdis	19
Khalid El-Awaisi	
CHAPTER II	
Jerusalem, The Eternal Capital of Faith	37
Stephen Sizer	
CHAPTER III	
Bayt al-Maqdis: A Short History from Ancient to Modern Times	43
Sharif Amin Abu Shammalah	

PART TWO

THEORETICAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER IV	
Bayt al-Maqdis: A Muslim Model for Aman	71
Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi	
CHAPTER V	
An International Legal Analysis of the Status of al-Quds (Jerusalem)	93
Berdal Aral	
CHAPTER VI	
The Status of al-Quds in the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process	111
Abdulsalam Muala	

PART THREE
**POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS
AND CURRENT PROBLEMS**

CHAPTER VII	
Official Arab Positions on the Trump Administration's Jerusalem Decision	133
Hossam Shaker	
CHAPTER VIII	
The Stances of Global Powers on the Relocation of the United States Embassy to al-Quds (Jerusalem)	163
Mohammad Makram Balawi	
CHAPTER IX	175
Understanding Turkey's Position on al-Quds, The Noble City	175
Helin Sari Ertem	
CHAPTER X	193
Malaysia's Stance towards Trump's Decision Regarding Bayt al-Maqdis	193
Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor and Muhammad Khalis Ibrahim	
AUTHORS	212

CHAPTER X

MALAYSIA'S STANCE TOWARDS TRUMP'S DECISION REGARDING BAYT AL-MAQDIS

MOHD ROSLAN MOHD NOR* AND
MUHAMMAD KHALIS IBRAHIM**

INTRODUCTION

Bayt al-Maqdis is a territory that has always been in dispute due to the prolonged crisis of the land ownership between Palestine and Israel. From an Islamic perspective, Bayt al-Maqdis is an important territory due to its status as a Holy Land to the Muslims as therein lies the al-Aqsa Mosque, which is the third holiest mosque after Masjid al-Haram and Masjid al-Nabawi.²⁶⁹ This warrants much attention from Muslim countries specifically towards Bayt al-Maqdis.²⁷⁰

Malaysia, even though being geographically far away from Palestine, pays close attention and shows its attentiveness to the tur-

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²⁶⁹ Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, "Konflik Israel-Palestin dari Aspek Sejarah Moden dan Langkah Pembebasan dari Cengkaman Zionis", *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol: 5, (2010), p. 83.

²⁷⁰ Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor and Ruzanah Mohd Rozi, (2016). "Penglibatan Liga Arab dalam Konflik Palestin-Israel", *Journal of al-Tamaddun*, Vol: 11, No: 2, (2016), pp. 39-48.

bulent state. Malaysia is a sovereign state and is always seen as an example for other Muslim countries. This is due to it being a free country that does not side with any world superpower as well as being a competent nation in terms of development and progress. Malaysia's uniqueness also shines in its diversity in culture and religion and the ability to sustain balance and national harmony.

Even though Malaysia is small in size as compared to other Muslim nations, it is not lagging behind in playing its own role in the international arena, especially when it comes to turbulent countries. For example, Malaysia's membership in the UN and the OIC has become a place to show its official stance on international issues. The statement of Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad at the UN Conference in September 2018 clearly stated Malaysia's principles and attitudes regarding the issues of Palestine, the Rohingya ethnic group, and other humanitarian issues.²⁷¹ Other than stating its stance firmly, Malaysia's role in the international arena can also be seen through its material contributions from the nation's government. As an example, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development through the National Welfare Foundation established the Palestine Donation Fund to help Palestinians who are in dire need of assistance to continue their daily lives.²⁷²

In essence, Malaysia's stance or initiatives at the international level is not subject to the government or the state actors only. Instead, non-state actors such as political parties, non-governmental organizations, and individuals also play a role, especially through donations in many forms to nations that are in need. If seen in

²⁷¹ Manathir Mohamad, "Teks Ucapan Penuh Dr Mahathir di UNGA ke-73", *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2018/09/479255/teks-ucapan-penuh-dr-mahathir-di-unga-ke-73>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

²⁷² Oleh Zanariah Abd Mutalib, "YKN tubuh Tabung Derma Palestin", *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2018/07/447438/ykn-tubuh-tabung-derma-palestin>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

general, a government's official stance on important issues at a global level will be followed suit with the utmost support from non-state actors.²⁷³ This scenario shows that there is a balance between state actors and non-state actors in Malaysia which complements the nation's role in the international stage, especially with humanitarian issues.

Based on this premise, the symbiotic role taken by state and non-state actors in Malaysia can be observed on international issues, specifically like the crisis in Palestine. Therefore, this article tries to discuss Malaysia's stance towards the recent developments in the region by focusing on the discussion of the decisions made by the United States (U.S.) with regards to Jerusalem. This article will look into Malaysia's stance which is represented by state and non-state actors towards the United States' decisions during President Donald Trump's administration, specifically after President Trump announced the united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

1. STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS IN MALAYSIA

As with other nations, there are entities in Malaysia that could be categorized as state and non-state actors. Before discussing any deeper, it is vital to state beforehand the operational definition of the two terms. Principally, state actors refer to an individual or a group of individuals which have power in determining policies for a nation. It also refers to whichever entity is supported directly by the government. In contrast, non-state actors are individuals and structured organizations that are free and are not bound by the government.²⁷⁴ They include entities such as civil organizations, individuals, the media, private companies, and private entities.

²⁷³ Tarikh Kemaskini, "PAS Sarawak sokong pendirian tegas kerajaan terhadap atlet Israel", *BH Online*, <http://www.bernama.com/state-news/beritabm.php?id=1688944>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

²⁷⁴ "Non-State Actors", ESCR-Net, <https://www.escri-net.org/resources/non-state-actors>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

Different from state actors, non-state actors do not have the authority to determine the state's policies directly. This is because non-state actors do not have the political authority and legitimacy, unlike state actors. Having said that, non-state actors have a role to play as instigators that are able to influence policy-making, which is controlled by state actors, at certain levels. Function-wise, non-state actors, especially NGOs and civil bodies, are mostly seen as playing their role as agents of check and balance, and as instigators towards a particular issue. As a result, non-state actors are more prone to taking a vocal and radical stance in voicing an issue as compared to state actors who take a more diplomatic and protocol-based approach.

As anywhere else, both state and non-state actors in Malaysia have their roles to play according to their capacities. In this matter, the area of contribution for state actors is more focused on the nation's stance and policies. For instance, the Malaysian government through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs has the power to put in place foreign policies according to the national principles and interests. This includes Malaysia's policy of not recognizing the Israeli state as a nation since it was established in 1948.²⁷⁵ The effects of not recognizing Israel can be seen through recent developments relating to Malaysia's stance towards Israel like in the rejection of Bayt al-Maqdis as the capital city of Israel and not allowing Israeli athletes to compete in the World Para Swimming Championship in Kuching, Sarawak.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Oleh Mohd Anwar Patho Rohman et al., "Malaysia tetap tak iktiraf Israel", *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2018/04/407127/malaysia-tetap-tak-iktiraf-israel>, (Accessed on February 24, 2019).

²⁷⁶ Daripada Ahmad Zaini Kamaruzzaman, "Malaysia iktiraf Baitulmaqdis ibu kota Palestin", *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2017/12/363093/malaysia-iktiraf-baitulmaqdis-ibu-kota-palestin>, (Accessed on February 24, 2019). See also: Sofian Baharom, "Tetap tidak benarkan atlet Israel masuk -PM", *Utusan Online*, <http://www.utusan.com.my/berita/nasional/tetap-tidak-benarkan-atlet-israel-masuk-pm-1.819589>, (Accessed on February 24, 2019).

2. THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S DECISIONS RELATING TO BAYT AL-MAQDIS

President Trump promised the Jewish and pro-Israeli lobbies and ultra-nationalist power circles during his election campaign that he would take significant steps if he became president. As soon as he came to power, Trump made two decisions regarding the Palestinian-Israeli issue, namely declaring the united Bayt al-Maqdis as the capital of Israel and moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Bayt al-Maqdis.

DECLARING BAYT AL-MAQDIS AS THE CAPITAL OF ISRAEL

On December 6, 2017, Trump made a declaration that caused global dispute and turmoil. Through his statement issued by the White House, Trump officially declared the united Bayt al-Maqdis as the capital for Israel. In his statement, Trump emphasized, “But today, we finally acknowledge the obvious: that Jerusalem is Israel’s capital. This is nothing more, or less, than a recognition of reality. It is also the right thing to do. It’s something that has to be done.”²⁷⁷

Trump’s official statement regarding the declaration of Bayt al-Maqdis as the state capital of Israel can be seen from several points of view. First, what is the rationale that drove Trump to state something that would surely cause polemic and turmoil especially among the Muslim communities? In his statement, he stated that the declaration of Bayt al-Maqdis as under the ownership of Israel is a step towards a resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Trump tried to provide the rationale behind his decision in the following words, “I’ve judged this course of action to be in the best interests of the United States of America and the pursuit of peace

²⁷⁷ “Statement by President Trump on Jerusalem”, *The White House Press Statements & Releases*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-trump-jerusalem/>, (Accessed on February 24, 2019).

between Israel and the Palestinians. This is a long-overdue step to advance the peace process and to work towards a lasting agreement. Israel is a sovereign nation with the right like every other sovereign nation to determine its own capital. Acknowledging this as a fact is a necessary condition for achieving peace.”²⁷⁸

It is here that the authors see that there lies a fallacy in the rationale that drives Trump to make such a declaration. The justification of declaring Israel’s ownership over Bayt al-Maqdis is against the logic of “reaching a peace between Israel and Palestine.” For seven decades, the conflict between the two nations revolves around land ownership, even more so the ownership of Bayt al-Maqdis. Recognizing Bayt al-Maqdis as the state capital of Israel will only bring victory to one side, which is Israel, and in turn deny the interests of Palestine.

Second, Trump’s declaration can be seen in relation to its background aspects. If looked at in detail, the sudden decision announced by Trump is plagued by internal U.S. factors. According to Farrell,²⁷⁹ it is actually driven by promises made by Trump to pro-Israeli politicians and lobbies if he were to win in the U.S. presidential elections back in 2016. Trump’s decision was also taken to fulfil popular demands from conservatives and evangelical Republicans who are Trump’s strong supporters, thus holding on to the principle of being inclined towards Israel in the dispute of Bayt al-Maqdis’s status. Other than that, Trump’s controversial step was to win the hearts of lobbyists and the Jewish elites in the U.S. who contributed a lot to the Republican Party during the electoral campaign in 2016. Among them is Sheldon Adelson, a millionaire from Las Vegas, who contributed 82 million dollars to ensure the victory of the Republicans.²⁸⁰ Therefore, Trump’s recognition is a pragmatic

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Stephen Farrell, “Why Is the U.S. Moving Its Embassy to Jerusalem?”, *Reuters*, May 7, 2018.

²⁸⁰ Chris McGreal, “Sheldon Adelson: The Casio Mogul Driving Trump’s Middle East Policy”, *The Guardian*, June 8, 2018.

act to fulfil his promises during the electoral campaign and to win the hearts of those with interests.

Aside from that, the declaration of Bayt al-Maqdis as being owned by Israel can be analyzed from a standpoint of its implications. In essence, the implications of such a declaration can be divided into two: implications for the stability of West Asia, and towards the U.S. itself. From the first aspect, Trump's decision in general will bring a negative impact on the stability of Palestine and Israel. It is well-known that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been prolonged for seven decades due to Israel's constant breach of the peace treaties. Declaring Bayt al-Maqdis as the state capital of Israel will not only make the process of peace slower, it has also added fuel to the flame that is already burning. It has raised people's anger and discontentment especially for the people of Palestine. Protests have been rallied up, and there are possibilities of war between Palestine and Israel which destabilizes the relations between the two sides.

From the second aspect, the implications of Trump's declaration open up a possibility of changing the orientation of U.S. foreign policy, especially towards the Middle East and Palestine. According to Trump, "In 1995, Congress adopted the Jerusalem Embassy Act, urging the federal government to relocate the American embassy to Jerusalem and to recognize that that city - and so importantly - is Israel's capital... Yet, for over 20 years, every previous American president has exercised the law's waiver, refusing to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem or to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital city... Therefore, I have determined that it is time to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel."²⁸¹

If referring to the statement above, it is understood that the decision to acknowledge Bayt al-Maqdis as the state capital of Israel shows the difference in the attitude of the U.S. during the Trump's

²⁸¹ "Statement by President Trump on Jerusalem", The White House Press Statements & Releases.

administration as compared to previous administrations. One can say that what Trump has declared is just a continuation of policies and stances which were already observed by the U.S. leadership since the early stages of Israel's existence. But what is clear from the above statement is that Trump has taken a more drastic approach and blatantly declared Israel's ownership over Bayt al-Maqdis, which is different from previous leaders who did not take the confrontational road when it came to Bayt al-Maqdis. However, the biggest implication of Trump's declaration is the moving of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Bayt al-Maqdis, which will be discussed in more detail in the next part.

THE MOVE OF THE U.S. EMBASSY FROM TEL AVIV TO BAYT AL-MAQDIS

Starting from the declaration of Bayt al-Maqdis's status, Trump stated his wish to move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Bayt al-Maqdis. In the same statement he said "consistent with the Jerusalem Embassy Act, I am also directing the State Department to begin preparation to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This will immediately begin the process of hiring architects, engineers, and planners, so that a new embassy, when completed, will be a magnificent tribute to peace."²⁸² The moving of the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Bayt al-Maqdis signaled that there is a special relationship between Trump and Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu. On another aspect, this has raised a question regarding the future prospects of peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel.²⁸³

The relocation of the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Bayt al-Maqdis was ordered to be executed on May 14, 2018.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ David M. Halbfinger, Isabel Kershner and Declan Walsh, "Israel Kills Dozens at Gaza Border as U.S. Embassy Opens in Jerusalem", *NY Times*, May 14, 2018.

Trump's decision on that date was very controversial as it signaled the 70th anniversary of the official establishment of the modern Israeli state (May 14, 1948.) The choice of this particular date looks to be a symbolic celebration of the 70th anniversary of the nation's establishment, which to this day is still disputed. This makes the perspective of the people of Israel and Palestine towards the relocation of the U.S. embassy to Bayt al-Maqdis different. If Israelis see the relocation as only a matter of relocating to another location, the Palestinians see it as a form of denial towards the seven-decade-long hope for Palestine's freedom.²⁸⁴

In discussing the move of the U.S. embassy in Israel, it is important to look at the scenarios that accompany the move as well. If the Israelis celebrate May 14, 2018 as the day of their nation's establishment, Palestinians, on the other hand, consider the date as the "Day of Disaster" because it signified the start of the land ownership conflict between the two sides. Consequently, Palestinians, especially those who live in the Gaza Strip, have held a peaceful campaign to commemorate 70 years of sadness known as the "Great Return March" (GRM). The GRM refers to a campaign or a massive movement of Palestinians returning to their homeland peacefully, demanding their land back which was taken away 70 years ago. Starting on March 30, 2018 and targeting the important date of May 15, 2018, the campaign was joined by thousands of Palestinians marching to the Gaza Strip-Israeli border. Throughout the GRM campaign, there were many attacks from the Israelis towards the Palestinian protesters. For instance, Israeli soldiers were reported to be attacking Palestinians randomly using live ammunition, hand grenades, and tear gas.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ "Gaza Protests: All the Latest Updates", *AlJazeera*, November 12, 2018.

Looking at the above scene, it is understood that the process of moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Bayt al-Maqdis is plagued with conflict between the Palestinians and the Israeli security forces. Other than commemorating the “Day of Disaster,” the GRM movement is also motivated by opposing the opening of the U.S. embassy in Bayt al-Maqdis as ordered by Trump.²⁸⁶ This matter has prolonged the Palestinian protest towards Israel and the U.S. to another phase. Harsh reactions from the Israelis made the conflict between the two sides even more tense; to this day it is nearly a year since the protest began. As of January 2019, attacks are still being carried out by Israelis towards protesting Palestinians. From the beginning of the Gaza-Israel conflict, Trump’s cabinet did not respond positively in controlling the tensions in the area. Instead, the U.S. used its veto power to reject the UN Security Council’s draft which urged restraint in the conflict and investigations regarding the dispute between Palestine and Israel at the Gaza-Israel border.²⁸⁷

3. MALAYSIA’S STANCE TOWARDS TRUMP’S DECISION

As one of the leading non-Arab Muslim countries in South East Asia, Malaysia has been very sensitive towards the Palestinian-Israeli issue and the position and the future of Bayt al-Maqdis. Accordingly, Malaysia became one of the first states condemning Trump’s decisions. Both official institutions and non-state actors strongly criticized Trump’s decisions. All actors warned the U.S. administration that its decisions will threaten the global peace and stability due to its violation of the main principles of international law.

²⁸⁶ David M. Halbfinger, Isabel Kershner and Declan Walsh, “Israel Kills Dozens at Gaza Border”.

²⁸⁷ AFP and Khaled Abu Toameh, “US Blocks UN Resolution Condemning Israel for Deaths in Gaza Clashes”, *Times of Israel*, April 1, 2018.

MALAYSIAN STATE'S STANCE TOWARDS TRUMP'S DECISION

The American recognition of Bayt al-Maqdis as the capital city of Israel is clearly rejected by Malaysia's premier. Malaysia's sixth Prime Minister Najib Razak made his rejection clear not long after the declaration. He emphasized, "This week when we are shocked by the U.S. decision to recognize one of the Muslim Holy Lands, Baitulmaqdis (Jerusalem), as the capital city of Israel, I am certain that as Muslims we will never be able to accept this... We will forever harshly condemn the proposal of making Baitulmaqdis the state capital of Israel."²⁸⁸

In general, Trump's decision to recognize Bayt al-Maqdis as the state capital of Israel not only caused criticism from Muslim countries, it also garnered criticism from the UN Security Council three days after the declaration. It then was followed by support from 128 members out of the 193 UN members that voted to reject the U.S. decision to recognize Israel's ownership over Bayt al-Maqdis.²⁸⁹ In this matter, Malaysia is one of the nations that rejected the American decision on the status of Bayt al-Maqdis.

Trump's polemic was met with Malaysia's stance that is clearly not in favor of anything that can threaten peace and stability in Palestine. As an example, then Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi gave a stern response to the threats given by the U.S. even before the voting at the UN. According to Zahid, Malaysia will not budge from protecting Bayt al-Maqdis even though the U.S. has made several threats including to retract its finan-

²⁸⁸ Oleh Irwan Shafrizan Ismail, "Malaysia tolak Baitulmaqdis jadi ibu negara Israel-Najib", *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2017/12/360084/malaysia-tolak-baitulmaqdis-jadi-ibu-negara-israel-najib>, (Accessed on February 24, 2019).

²⁸⁹ "128 undi tolak AS iktiraf Baitulmaqdis", *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/dunia/amerika/2017/12/366279/128-undi-tolak-iktiraf-baitulmaqdis>, (Accessed on February 24, 2019).

cial assistance from nations which supported the UN's resolution draft regarding the status of the city. In this case, Malaysia showed its objectivity on the Palestinian-Israeli issue even though it is exposed to the possibility of creating tensions in its relations with the U.S.: "...we have to differentiate diplomatic relations and trade relations with other relations, because this case (Jerusalem) is a specific stance."²⁹⁰ Through another statement, Zahid also stressed that "Malaysia has to move collectively with support from other nations and the international community. It is certain that many reject this action from the U.S. and Israel. It is time that the international community joined together to put pressure on the U.S. and Israel, so they know that they cannot oppress Palestinians anymore."²⁹¹

In regard to the conflict between Palestine and Israel, generally Malaysia holds on to the stance that a negotiation based on the framework of settlement of the two nations is the best way to achieve peace. The former Deputy Foreign Minister of Malaysia Reezal Merican Naina Merican stresses, "The U.S. decision was condemned by the international community; therefore, we do not want to give the image of the same decision, the best way is to give an opportunity for negotiations through a bilateral settlement framework between the Palestine and Israel."²⁹² Based on this premise, Malaysia rejects the United States' decision which acknowledges Bayt al-Maqdis as being under the ownership of Israel because

²⁹⁰ Oleh Rohaniza Idris, "Malaysia tidak berganjak pertahankan Baitulmaqdis", *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2017/12/366200/malaysia-tidak-berganjak-pertahankan-baitulmaqdis>, (Accessed on February 24, 2019).

²⁹¹ Oleh Zanariah Abd Mutalib, "Palestin tetap dibela -TPM", *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2017/12/365691/palestin-tetap-dibela-tpm>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

²⁹² Oleh Nazura Ngah et al., "Parlimen: Malaysia tak terburu-buru isu Baitulmaqdis", *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2018/03/396751/parlimen-malaysia-tak-terburu-buru-isu-baitulmaqdis>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

it is a form of deviation from the peace plan based on a two-state solution framework.

The consistency of state actors toward Israel is very clear with the latest decision under the new government in Malaysia lead by the *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) coalition. As mentioned before, the seventh (current) Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad stressed that the government will not allow athletes from Israel to compete in the 2019 World Para Swimming Championships in Kuching that will take place from July 29 to August 4. In this regard, Mahathir stressed that “we will not allow them... If they come, then it is an offence.”²⁹³ As a result of this, Malaysia has been withdrawn from the championships’ hosting rights. Nevertheless, this has shown that Malaysia has a very clear foreign policy when it comes to Israel. He also said that the government will maintain its firm stance on this issue as protest over the continued oppression of the Palestinian people which have been denied their rights for many years.

MALAYSIAN NON-STATE ACTORS’ STANCE TOWARDS TRUMP’S DECISION

In Malaysia, the U.S. decision to acknowledge Bayt al-Maqdis as the state capital of Israel and the relocation of the U.S. embassy has warranted reactions from non-state actors. In general, non-state actors are in agreement regarding the U.S. decision on Bayt al-Maqdis. On this matter, civil bodies and NGOs were the most vocal in voicing their protest. For example, on December 8, 2017, the Malaysian Youth Council made an official statement condemning the declaration of Bayt al-Maqdis as the state capital of Israel. According to its president Mua’amar Ghadafi Jamal Wira Jamaludin, Trump’s declaration clearly shows that the U.S. is behind

²⁹³ “Malaysia Will Not Allow Israeli Athletes to Compete Locally”, *New Strait Times*, January 10, 2019.

the prolonged conflict between Palestine and Israel. According to Jamaludin,

The announcement of Baitulmaqdis (Jerusalem) as the state capital of Israel by the United States President Donald J. Trump showed America's true colors as the mastermind behind the prolonged conflict. His announcement not only made the peace process more complicated between Palestine and Israel, but also created tensions in the Arab region and Muslim countries...The relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Baitulmaqdis (Jerusalem) is an act of provocation because it deliberately fueled dispute towards Palestinians.²⁹⁴

Several humanitarian NGOs, especially those involved in voluntarism work in Palestine, also showed their protest towards Trump's decision on the status of Bayt al-Maqdis. On December 15, 2017, a peaceful rally was held after Friday prayers by over 20 organizations including Citizens International, Aman Palestine, Malaysia al-Quds Foundation, Malaysia Amal Foundation, and Penang Muslim League. The director of Citizens International, Mohideen Abdul Kader, said the fight to oppose Israeli occupation is an obligation for Muslims and it must be opposed to the very last bit. "Trump's declaration is nonsensical and is against international decisions which are with us in opposing Israel. The Palestinian issue is not only about Islam, but it is a humanitarian issue and we cannot even once compromise with the U.S. or Israel."²⁹⁵

On December 22, 13 Islamic NGOs, which are based in Kelantan, held a solidarity rally at a mosque in Kubang Kerian, Kelantan to oppose the U.S decision of making Bayt al-Maqdis the state capital of Israel. Among the NGOs involved were *Persatuan*

²⁹⁴ Mua'amar Ghadafi Jamal Datuk Wire Jamaludin, "Kenyataan Media: Majlis Belia Malaysia (MBM) Menolak Sekeras-Kerasnya Pengumuman BaitulMaqdis Sebagai Ibu Negara Israel", *Belia.Org*, <http://belia.org.my/wp/2017/12/08/kenyataan-mbm-pengumuman-baitul-maqdis-sebagai-ibu-negara-israel/>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

²⁹⁵ Oleh Siti Sofia Md Nasir, "Bantahan terhadap Israel di Masjid Kapitan Keling", *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/wilayah/2017/12/363850/bantahan-terhadap-israel-di-masjid-kapitan-keling>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

Pengguna Islam Kelantan (PPIK), Pertubuhan Permuafakatan Majlis Ayahanda Malaysia, Persatuan Sukan Boksing Negeri Kelantan, Persatuan Orang Kota Bharu, and Biro Aduan Masyarakat Malaysia. The rally gathered more than 500 people to show their full support towards the Palestinians. The President of the PPIK Mohd Fared Abdul Ghani said the U.S. decision is uncalled for since other than being against the UN resolution, it ensues anger from Muslims all over the world.

This rally is a symbol of solidarity among Muslims towards the fate of our brothers and sisters in Islam who are being oppressed in Palestine. Baitulmaqdis (Jerusalem) is the place where the third most important mosque of Muslims is. However, Trump's actions are seemingly more vicious in wanting to take away Baitulmaqdis (Jerusalem) as the right of Palestinians. I believe that this rally is a form of unity of Muslims in defending Palestine.²⁹⁶

Other than NGOs, several political parties in Malaysia also voiced protests specifically towards the relocation of the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Bayt al-Maqdis. The Youth Chief of Malaysian Islamic Party (*Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*, PAS) Muhammad Khalil Abdul Hadi in an official statement explained that the official relocation of the U.S. embassy to Bayt al-Maqdis is a “starting switch” to dispute and international clashes which are potentials for war. “Baitulmaqdis (Jerusalem) is not only violated as a right of the Muslims and its peoples, the actions of the Uncle Sam state are also violating the rights of the Palestinian people. Provocations like this will only ensue tensions and instability in the Middle East and worsen the conflicts that are already in place.”²⁹⁷ At the same time, People Justice Party (*Parti Keadilan Rakyat*, PKR) leader, Saifud-

²⁹⁶ “Pemuda UMNO berkumpul bantah Trump”, Utusan Online, <http://www.utusan.com.my/berita/nasional/ngo-pemuda-umno-berkumpul-bantah-trump-1.578118>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

²⁹⁷ Ustaz Muhammad Khalil Abdul Hadi, “Kecam Pemindahan Amerika ke Baitulmaqdis”, *BeritaPas.Org*, <https://berita.pas.org.my/kecam-pemindahan-kedutaan-amerika-ke-baitulmaqdis/>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

din Nasution Ismail, is also on the same page in giving a response regarding the relocation of the U.S. embassy to Bayt al-Maqdis by saying that the act brings potential bad implications to the stability of the region, its security, and in reaching a solution towards the Palestine-Israel conflict.²⁹⁸

4. UNDERSTANDING MALAYSIA'S STANCE TOWARDS TRUMP'S DECISION

If observed closely, state and non-state actors in Malaysia have displayed unison in their stance towards Trump's decision regarding Bayt al-Maqdis. Both state and non-state actors rejected the decision acknowledging Bayt al-Maqdis as the state capital of Israel and the relocation of the U.S. embassy.

In general, the basis of the rejection of both state and non-state actors towards the decision regarding Bayt al-Maqdis is based on the premise that the decision is against what is agreed by the UN. The rejection of Trump's decision and the UN's decision can be understood on two dimensions. First, Bayt al-Maqdis is a heritage city under the protection of UNESCO based on its immensely important standing in the three religious traditions, namely Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.²⁹⁹ With that, the whole of Bayt al-Maqdis must be protected, and its security cannot be jeopardized just to meet one party's preferences. Second, the majority of the UN members that voted on December 22, 2017, rejected the U.S. decision to acknowledge Bayt al-Maqdis as the state capital of Israel. The UN, as stated by Sani,³⁰⁰ is like a 'world government' based on

²⁹⁸ "PKR kecam kekejaman Israel ke atas rakyat Palestin", *Malaysiakini*, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/425033>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

²⁹⁹ "Statement by the Director-General of UNESCO on the Old City of Jerusalem and Its Walls, A UNESCO World Heritage Site", *UNESCO*, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1568>, (Accessed on February 23, 2019).

³⁰⁰ Sani, M. A. M. (2012), *Amerika Syarikat dan Keseimbangan Kuasa Global pada Era Pasca-Perang Dingin, 1989-2000*, (Penerbit Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah: 2012).

its role that centralizes and gathers nations from all over the world. In its function, the UN is the most legitimate entity in determining a decision which includes the interests of its member nations. In other words, the U.S. continuing its acknowledgement of Israel's ownership of Bayt al-Maqdis even though it is rejected by the majority of the UN members lays the groundwork for a rift between the U.S. and the UN.

Other than that, both state and non-state Malaysian actors see Bayt al-Maqdis as not only a district which should be governed by the Palestinians geographically, but also see that the city is very important and meaningful to the Muslims in general. This is because Bayt al-Maqdis is a stopping place for the Prophet (pbuh) in his travel *Isra' wa al-Mi'raj* (Ascension and Night Journey).³⁰¹ Other than that, the city hosts Masjid al-Aqsa which is the third holiest mosque after Masjid al-Haram and Masjid al-Nabawi. Based on the statements and stances of state and non-state actors, it can be said that Malaysia's defense of Palestine and its opposition to the declaration of Bayt al-Maqdis as being under the ownership of Israel is based on religious reasons and humanitarian and regional security purposes.

If compared, we can understand that non-state actors are more vocal and radical in voicing their opposition towards Trump's decision regarding Bayt al-Maqdis. This is clear through the NGOs who organized rallies, marches, and submitted memorandums to the U.S. embassy. State actors, on the other hand, are more moderate and softer in their intonation even when opposing the U.S. decision. This can be understood when looking at the characteristics of both actors. According to what has been discussed, state actors have the legitimacy to form policies and represent the nation in discussing any matters on a global lev-

³⁰¹ Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, "The Significance of Islamic Jerusalem in Islam: An Islamic Reference", *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies*, Vol: 1, No: 2, (1998), pp. 47-71.

el. If seen through its foreign policies perspective, Malaysia has good relations with the U.S. in terms of trade. The attitude of Malaysia or the statements it has made towards the U.S. decision have to take into account the balance between stating its stance objectively and its need to maintain a good relationship with the United States. Here lies the rationality of why a state actor, or the Malaysian government specifically, is not seen to be as vocal as non-state actors in voicing their rejection. Meanwhile, non-state actors do not attach any importance on preserving a good relationship with the U.S. This gives them a bigger stage for them to be vocal in voicing their objection.

CONCLUSION

Malaysia is one of the countries which is very close to the aspirations of the fight for Palestine and its freedom. Relating to the issue of Bayt al-Maqdis's status and the relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Bayt al-Maqdis, state and non-state actors in Malaysia have shown their uncompromised attitude and stance based on their own capacities. Hence, the decision from the U.S. to acknowledge Bayt al-Maqdis as the state capital of Israel has led to criticism and condemnation from many Malaysian political parties. The authors are of the opinion that this seems to portray the U.S., which has been seen as the mediator for peace between Palestine and Israel, as no longer being capable of playing the mediating role because it has shown that it prefers one side to the other – namely Israel. Therefore, it is vital that coalitions of Muslim countries such as the OIC and the Arab League take their own stance in coming up with solutions in the disputes and conflicts that carry the fate of Arab countries, in general, and Bayt al-Maqdis, in specific, for the sake of the eventual future freedom of the Holy Land.

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The controversial decision of U.S. President Donald Trump to formally recognize the Holy City of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of Israel overturned decades of official U.S. policy. This decision resulted in moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on the eve of the Palestinian commemoration of 70 years of the *Nakbah* (Catastrophe) on May 15, 2018, during which Palestinians have been suffering persecutions, massacres, and ethnic cleansing. Not only is this decision against international law, but it is also in direct conflict with a number of resolutions by the UN Security Council. It brings an end to the two-state solution, which the international community has been trying to achieve for a long time. Moreover, this action is a practical step of the “Deal of the Century” which the Trump administration is trying to impose in the region.

These developments require urgent publications to address different dimensions of this delicate issue, which lies at the heart of most of the regional problems. In order to develop a better understanding of this issue and other related regional problems, it is necessary to produce inclusive materials about the city. Accordingly, at this critical time, we have designed this edited book to provide a better understanding of this core issue to intellectuals, academics, politicians, and the wider public interested in the Holy Land.

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