

TRUMP AND KUSHNER BROKE THE LAW IN MEETINGS WITH PUTIN AND SAUDIS



Washington — President Trump and White House officials appear to have violated the Presidential Records Act and the Federal Records Act by intentionally failing to create and preserve records related to meetings with Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong-Un and other foreign government officials, according to a lawsuit filed by **Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), National Security Archive (the Archive) and Society for**

Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR).

The lawsuit details numerous instances, including five meetings between President Trump and Vladimir Putin, when no note takers were present and no official U.S. record of the meetings exists. The administration's record keeping failures extend to Senior White House Adviser Jared Kushner, who in a recent meeting with top Saudi officials excluded State Department officials, thereby avoiding the creation of a record of his conversations.

"It is clear that President Trump and White House officials have gone to great lengths to hold high-level meetings with foreign governments and carry out foreign policy objectives while blatantly ignoring record keeping laws and preventing national security officials and the American people from understanding what they are doing," said CREW Executive Director Noah Bookbinder. *"The absence of records in these circumstances causes real, incalculable harm to our national security and poses a direct threat to transparency for the American public. We're asking the court to compel White House officials to make and maintain these important records that let the public know what the government is up to and provide a safeguard to our history."*

"The Archive went to court to preserve presidential records when President Reagan tried to junk his email backup tapes in 1989. We have sued every president ever since, Democratic and Republican, to make sure the White House obeyed the records laws," said National Security Archive director Tom Blanton. *"Today, the problem goes beyond improperly shredding records, to the deliberate failure to create the records in the first place."*

"Keeping records of top-level meetings has been part of common-sense diplomatic practice for centuries. Failing to make or keep records damages not only the capacity of history to render judgment in the future, but also of government to pursue the country's interests in the present," said SHAFR President Barbara Keys. *"It also*



undermines the principle of government accountability that is the very bedrock of democracy."

The PRA was enacted to establish public ownership of presidential and vice presidential records, to impose record-keeping requirements on the president and vice president, and to authorize the National Archives and Records Administration to preserve and make publicly available presidential records. In a previous letter to White House Counsel, CREW flagged potential PRA violations coming from the White House and called the administration's record keeping practices a significant departure from accepted archival preservation.

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
CITIZENS FOR RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICS IN WASHINGTON,
NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE,
SOCIETY FOR HISTORIANS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS,**

**v.
DONALD J. TRUMP, in his official capacity as President of the United States
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**

1. This is a civil action for declaratory, injunctive, and mandamus relief to address a policy and practice of violating the Presidential Records Act... which imposes on the President a duty to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed." Plaintiffs challenge: (1) the failure of President Donald J. Trump and the Executive Office of the President to comply with their mandatory, non-discretionary duties under the PRA, including their failure to create and preserve records of the meetings and discussions the President and other senior White House staff have with foreign leaders; (2) the classification of the notes of an interpreter employed by the State Department as well as all other information shared in the President's meetings and discussions with foreign leaders as presidential records beyond the reach of the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), in violation of the PRA and FRA; (3) the failure of President Trump, his staff, to solicit the views of the Archivist of the United States in writing and to transmit to Congress a disposal schedule prior to disposing of presidential records; and (4) President Trump's violation of his constitutional obligation to take care that the laws—including the PRA and the FRA—are faithfully executed...

And it continues for 39 pages...

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) uses aggressive legal action, in-depth research, and bold communications to reduce the influence of money in politics and help foster a government that is ethical and accountable.

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"Mosque in Gaza"

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Hundreds of Palestinian houses of worship were targeted by the Israeli military in previous wars, most notably in 2008-9 and 2012. But the 2014 war was the **most brutal and most destructive** yet. Thousands were killed and more injured. Nothing was immune to Israeli bombs. According to Palestine Liberation Organization records, 63 mosques were completely destroyed and 150 damaged in that war alone, oftentimes with people seeking shelter inside. In the case of my mosque, two bodies were recovered after a long, agonizing search. They had no chance of being rescued. If they survived the deadly explosives, they were crushed by the massive slabs of concrete.

Concrete, cement, bricks and physical structures don't carry much meaning on their own; we give them meaning. Our collective experiences, our pains, joys, hopes and faith make a house of worship what it is. Palestine still is only a microcosm of the whole region. Many of us are familiar with the horrific destruction carried out by fringe militant groups against world cultural heritage in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Most memorable among these are the destruction of Palmyra in Syria, Buddhas of Bamyan in Afghanistan and the Great Mosque of al-Nuri in Mosul.

Nothing, however, can be compared to what the invading U.S. army has done to Iraq. Not only did the invaders desecrate a sovereign country and brutalize

her people, they also devastated her culture, the beginning of human civilization. Just the immediate aftermath of the invasion alone resulted in the looting of over 15,000 Iraqi antiquities, including the Lady of Warka, also known as the Mona Lisa of Mesopotamia, a Sumerian artifact dated back to 3100 BC.

I had the privilege of seeing many of these artifacts in a visit to the Iraq Museum only a few years before it was looted by U.S. soldiers. At the time, Iraqi curators had all precious pieces hidden in a fortified basement in anticipation of a U.S. bombing campaign. But nothing could prepare the museum for the savagery unleashed by the ground invasion. Since then, Iraqi culture has largely been reduced to items on the black market of the very western invaders that have torn that country apart. The valiant work of Iraqi cultural warriors and their colleagues around the world has managed to restore some of that stolen dignity, but it will take many years for the cradle of human civilization to redeem its vanquished honor.

Every mosque, every church, every graveyard,

every piece of art and every artifact is significant because it is laden with meaning, this meaning bestowed by those who have built or sought in them an escape - a moment of solace, hope, faith and peace. As Notre Dame burned, I thought of Al-Omari, too. Though the fire at the French cathedral was likely accidental, the destroyed Palestinian houses of worship were intentionally targeted. The Israeli culprits are yet to be held accountable.

- **Ramzy Baroud**

editor of *Palestine Chronicle*.
ramzybaroud.net

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