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Mamdani's Inauguration Speech Rife With Radical Rhetoric



By Casey Harper/The Washington Stand January 03, 2026

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A common crime of American politics occurs when a politician jazzes up the base with partisan rhetoric only to transform into a muddled centrist after Election Day. At least for now, New York City's smiling socialist mayor Zohran Mamdani is not guilty of that crime. But if he keeps on this track, he'll be guilty of much worse.

Mamdani's January 1 inauguration ushers in what the wet-behind-the-ears mayor calls a "new era" of Democratic Socialist leadership for the largest city in the nation -- the same nation that defeated the Soviets, by the way.

He was sworn in twice, first just after midnight at a private ceremony in a defunct subway station and then again at a block party in the afternoon.

"We will govern without shame and insecurity, making no apology for what we believe," Mamdani said during remarks at his second ceremony. "I was elected as a Democratic Socialist, and I will govern as a Democratic Socialist. I will not abandon my principles for fear of being deemed radical."

Aside from the fiery rhetoric, the symbolism of Mamdani's inaugural proceedings is striking.

Mamdani forsook the traditional Bible and instead was sworn in on a Quran. Muslim mayors governing non-Muslim populations is a picture that has become increasingly common in Western Europe and has finally reached the shores of

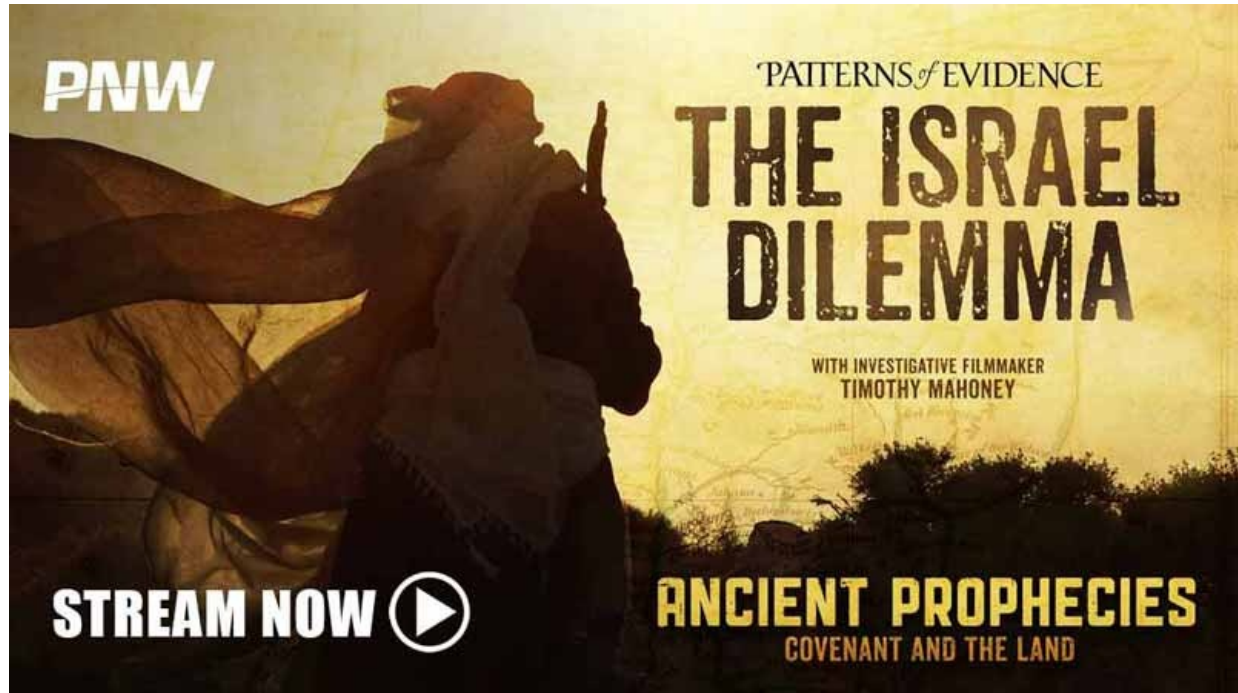
the U.S.

The first swearing-in was conducted by avowed anti-Trump New York Attorney General Letitia James (D). The second time, Mamdani was sworn in by fellow Democratic Socialist Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who was born in Brooklyn but has represented a different state, Vermont, since 2007. Despite hailing from a different state, Mamdani couldn't resist having the leader of his Democratic-Socialist party put to rest any thought that Mamdani might revert to traditional Democratic politics upon taking office.

Mamdani also sworn in at midnight. Perhaps the hour is late for the city.

In his speech, Mamdani not only doubled down on the lofty promises of socialist utopia, but he also took shots at the foundation of America's identity.

"We will replace the fragility of rugged individualism with the warmth of collectivism."



Socialist leaders are known for lying, for making promises they cannot fulfill. But with his opening line of the inauguration speech, Mamdani likely told the truth:

"My fellow New Yorkers," he said. "Today begins a new era."

Mamdani continued his speech, unafraid of embracing terms once considered landmines in American politics.

"Beginning today, we will govern expansively and audaciously," he said. "We may not always succeed, but never will we be accused of lacking the courage to try. To those who insist that the era of big government is over. Hear me when I say this. No longer will City Hall hesitate to use its power to improve New Yorkers' lives."

Practically, Mamdani promised a mental health department that takes certain 911 calls out of the hands of police, which is a top prescriptive takeaway from the "Defund the Police" movement. Mamdani also emphasized property tax reform and cracking down on crooked landlords.

"We will transform the culture of City Hall from one of no to one of how we will answer to all New Yorkers, not to any billionaire or oligarch who thinks they can buy our democracy," he continued.

Mamdani, born in Africa, raised in New York, and recently naturalized, appealed not to the U.S. Constitution or Declaration of Independence in his speech, but to Nelson Mandela.

"... We will provide our own answer to that age-old question: who does New York belong to?" Mamdani said. "Well, my friends, we can look to Madiba and the South African Freedom Charter."

With eloquence reminiscent of Barack Obama in 2008, Mamdani welcomed even former Trump voters into his coalition.

"For too long, those fluent in the good grammar of civility have deployed decorum to mask agendas of cruelty," he said.

Mamdani's appearance comes at a relative high point for socialism in the U.S. Now, socialism has a chance to flounder or fulfill the big government pledges where so many liberal college graduates in New York City have set their hope.

Normally rhetoric like Mamdani's comes from the kind of places where the cigars are famous but the food is rationed. For now, though, his supporters will have their fill of lofty promises.

Lastly, and maybe the most striking of the symbolism for the trained eye... it's interesting that Mamdani chose to receive the mayor's authority in a ceremony underground. From below the city, he may drag his fellow residents into a socialist hell.

Or at least into the sewers.

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