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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Thursday, December 7*

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# News Excerpts

December 7, 2017

The New York Times

## **Trump Hails Jerusalem Plan, but Mideast Put on Edge**

Palestinians burned photos of President Donald Trump in Gaza, and the walls of the Old City were illuminated with the American and Israeli flags on Wednesday, as Trump made good on his campaign pledge to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. In a much-anticipated speech from the White House, Trump argued that it was "the right thing to do" to acknowledge the reality that Jerusalem is the seat of Israel's government. Decades of avoiding that fact, he said, has done little to resolve the protracted feud between Israelis and Palestinians. Trump's recognition drew a storm of criticism from some of America's closest allies, many saying the move was destabilizing, that risked setting off violence and make achieving peace even more difficult.

See also, [\*"Text of Trump's official proclamation of Jerusalem as capital of Israel"\* \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Ha'aretz

## **At Least 8 Palestinians Wounded in Clashes With Israel**

At least eight Palestinians were wounded on Thursday in Gaza and the West Bank during clashes with Israeli soldiers following Trump's recognition of Jerusalem. Demonstrations in Ramallah, Tul Karm, Nablus and the Gaza Strip were attended by many hundreds of demonstrators, some of whom burned pictures of Trump. Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh on Thursday called for a new uprising against Israel following the announcement.

Jerusalem Post

## **PM: There is No Peace Without Jerusalem as Israel's Capital**

The U.S. Jerusalem decision is a "genuine milestone" in the storied and "glorious history" of the city, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday. Netanyahu said the move was an important step toward peace because "there is no peace that doesn't include Jerusalem as the capital of Israel." Education Minister Naftali Bennett said that "when I see [Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei condemning Israel, I know we are doing something right... When you do the right thing, there ought not to be a price."

Ha'aretz

## **Abbas: US Can No Longer Mediate Between Parties**

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said America's decision encourages the occupation and construction of Israeli settlements. Saeb Erekat, chief Palestinian peace negotiator, said that "Trump has delivered a message to the Palestinian people: The two-state solution is over. Now is the time to transform the struggle to one of one state with equal rights for everyone living in historic Palestine, from the river to the sea."

Associated Press

## **US Embassies Warn Americans to Exercise Caution**

US embassies in the Middle East and Europe issued warnings to Americans traveling or living there of the potential for violent protests. Within minutes of Trump's announcement, the embassies in Turkey, Jordan, Germany and Britain issued security alerts urging Americans to exercise vigilance and caution. The US Embassy in Amman, Jordan, said it would close to the public on Thursday and has banned employees from leaving the capital. The children of embassy employees have been told to stay home from school and all Americans there are advised to keep a low profile.

Reuters

## **US Asks Israel to Restrain Response to Jerusalem Move**

The United States is reportedly asking Israel to temper its response to the U.S. recognition because Washington expects a backlash and is weighing the potential threat to U.S. facilities and people. "While I recognize that you will publicly welcome this news, I ask that you restrain your official response," the document dated Dec. 6 said in talking points for diplomats at the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv to convey to Israeli officials. A second State Department document seen by Reuters, which was also dated Dec. 6, said the agency had formed an internal task force "to track worldwide developments" following the U.S. decision on Jerusalem.

Washington Post

## **Trump Move on Jerusalem Highlights Arab Divisions**

Muslims across the Middle East warned Wednesday of disastrous consequences after President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, but in a region more divided than ever, many asked what leaders can do beyond the vehement rhetoric. Arab powerhouses are mired in their own internal troubles, their populations tired of wars, and the days when Arab leaders could challenge the United States in a meaningful way are long gone. Beyond the eruption of protests and potential explosion of violence, there is little the Arab world can do to challenge Trump's move, unanimously decried by leaders.

See also, [\*"In the Arab World, the Rallying Cry of Jerusalem May Have Lost Its Force" \(The New York Times\)\*](#)

Times of Israel

## **Iraq Militia Threatens US Forces After Trump Move**

An Iranian-backed militia in Iraq threatened on Thursday to attack US forces in the country in retaliation for Trump recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. "The decision by Trump on Al-Quds (Jerusalem) makes it legitimate to strike the American forces in Iraq," Al-Nojaba militia chief Akram al-Kaabi said in a statement. The group, established in 2013 and supported by Iran's Revolutionary Guards, numbers around 1,500 fighters and is part of the Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization) auxiliary force that has fought alongside the army against the Islamic State terror group.

## **Trump's Jerusalem Move is a Big Risk**

By Washington Post Editorial Board

- President Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital has a certain amount of common sense on its side. As a practical matter, West Jerusalem has been the seat of Israeli government since 1949, and no conceivable formula for Palestinian statehood would change that. Political leaders and diplomats from around the world already visit government offices there, even if their embassies remain in Tel Aviv. As Mr. Trump put it, for the United States finally to accept that the Jewish state has its capital in Jerusalem is "nothing more or less than a recognition of reality."
- At the same time, Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama had good reasons for holding back on such a move, even though they, like Mr. Trump, had promised while on the campaign trail to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. They calculated that what amounted to a mostly symbolic step could undermine U.S. policy across the Middle East as well as their hopes of brokering an Israeli-Palestinian settlement — and possibly trigger violence, including against Americans. Mr. Trump cast himself as setting aside failed conventional wisdom — he pointed out there has been no peace deal — and of offering a fresh approach. That's a stance that may play well with his domestic political base and with many Israelis. But Mr. Trump is implicitly betting that previous presidents were wrong to worry about blowback in the Middle East and beyond. That's a big risk to take for the scoring of political points.
- So far, the president's decision has been rejected by every major U.S. ally in Europe and the Middle East, including Britain, France, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It will put considerable pressure on Jordan, Israel's fragile neighbor, whose King Abdullah II sees himself as a protector of Jerusalem's holy Muslim sites. It will probably make it harder to promote a tacit alliance between Israel and Sunni Arab states against Iran, as Tehran will surely exploit the Jerusalem issue. It will also virtually ensure that Palestinian leaders respond unfavorably to the peace initiative the Trump administration says it is preparing. If violence erupts in Jerusalem or elsewhere in the Middle East — and extremists will do their best to make that happen — Mr. Trump will be blamed.
- Mr. Trump made some effort to mitigate such damage. He said his administration was "not taking a position [on] any final status issues, including the specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem," words that leave room for an eventual settlement in which a Palestinian state would have its capital on Jerusalem's eastern side. He did not refer to the "united Jerusalem" promoted by Israeli leaders, who aspire to maintain permanent control over neighborhoods where some 300,000 Palestinians live. He called for maintenance of the status quo at the city's holy sites, including Muslim holy places that are currently controlled by Muslim authorities. Nevertheless, those caveats had the ring of boilerplate inserted by the president's advisers. The heart of Mr. Trump's speech was his boast that "while previous presidents . . . failed to deliver" on their campaign promises about Jerusalem, "I am delivering." Those who

genuinely hope for peace in the Middle East can only hope that this preening display will, as the president predicted, produce positive rather than negative results.

## **Trump Offered Talk. Does Kushner's Plan Offer Substance?**

By Daniel Shapiro

- Let's dispense with the heavy breathing. President Donald Trump's announcement Wednesday recognizing the reality that Jerusalem is Israel's capital is neither the end of efforts to achieve Middle East peace nor the second coming of Harry Truman's recognition of the newly-declared State of Israel. But it was a missed opportunity in two respects.
- First, President Trump stopped at a merely rhetorical change. True, recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital is new, something no U.S. Administration of either party had yet articulated. It helps combat the insidious fiction, trafficked by some Palestinians and prominent in UNESCO resolutions and the like, that there are no legitimate Jewish and Israeli claims to Jerusalem. Myth-busting has its merits. But the decision at hand was about the location of the U.S. embassy. Having made the rhetorical shift, Trump passed up on its more substantive manifestation by delaying transferring the embassy to Jerusalem. Indeed, he punctuated his speech by signing the waiver of the law that requires the move - just like his predecessors. My views on the embassy's location are informed by my experience as U.S. Ambassador. I worked at the U.S. embassy on HaYarkon Street in Tel Aviv for over five years. I had a beautiful view of the Mediterranean from my office. It will be hard for any Ambassador to give that up. But nearly every day, I got in my armored SUV and traveled to Jerusalem where I conducted affairs of state in the offices of the Israeli government - the Prime Minister's office, the President's residence, the Knesset.
- When President Obama visited Israel in 2013, he stayed at the King David Hotel and visited the same government sites. Secretaries of State routinely base their visits in Jerusalem as well. So the location of our embassy in West Jerusalem - about which there is, or should not be, any controversy about Israel's past and future sovereignty - is logical and right. The United States has consular facilities in West Jerusalem that could easily house an embassy on a temporary basis, starting tomorrow, even while many functions remain in Tel Aviv. But President Trump limited himself to announcing plans to begin preparations for an embassy move, suggesting it will take at least 3-4 years to complete a new embassy. That's an extremely optimistic estimate. Constructing a new embassy is a complex undertaking. It is far more likely to take 5-10 years, and tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars, to locate a suitable property, plan and build an embassy to security standards, and arrange for the housing and schooling of hundreds of U.S. diplomats and their families. The strong implication of Trump's announcement is that he will continue issuing waivers every six months for years to come. His successor may well be the one to preside at its dedication.
- The second missed opportunity was in failing to frame this announcement in the context of efforts to advance the broader strategic U.S. objective of a two-state solution. In addition to recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the embassy to West Jerusalem, Trump should have made clear that East Jerusalem has a different status, will need to be negotiated,

and the United States expects that the results will include the capital of a Palestinian state in at least parts of its Arab neighborhoods. We don't need to define the exact dimensions of the shared city. Acceptable arrangements on holy sites, such as Israeli sovereignty at the Western Wall and maintenance of the status quo at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, are necessary. And the city must remain unified, never again redivided by checkpoints and barbed wire. But such clarity about the future of Jerusalem as a shared, unified city containing the capitals of both Israel and Palestine would usefully bust another myth - that a two-state solution to end the conflict can be achieved without such an arrangement. Recognition of this reality is useful as well.

- Trump also could have helped himself by planning this decision well in advance, not in the frantic, hurried fashion in which it was taken and rolled out. Adequate preparations, like detailed consultations with Arab and Palestinian leaders, would have made it easier for them to absorb, and more likely for them to be able to support a U.S. peace plan when it is revealed. That support is now in jeopardy. Violence as a means of protest is unacceptable, as is incitement to violence, and we cannot be blackmailed by it. But preparation and clarity would have made it easier for our Arab partners to effectively resist such calls.
- It's not too late to improve on this announcement. In his speech, Trump teased his openness to a two-state solution for the first time, albeit with the caveat that it must be agreed to by both sides. But the U.S. interest lies squarely in an end-of-conflict agreement, which can only be achieved with two states. It may take many years, and it may await the emergence of new leaders who can take decisions the current crop cannot. But if we fail to use this period to keep the two-state solution alive, Trump will go down as the president who did nothing while Israelis and Palestinians drifted into the morass of a binational state. In his interview at the Saban Forum this week, Trump's senior adviser Jared Kushner gave nothing away about the plan he and Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt have been preparing. They have no obligation to do so before they are ready, and discretion has its virtues.
- But the time is coming for them to present their approach. They should build off Trump's Jerusalem announcement this week with a plan that is as explicit as possible about the goal of a two-state solution on a realistic basis. Negotiations may be impossible in the near term, even with the presentation of such a plan. But it will serve as an anchor to keep the U.S., Israeli, Palestinian, and regional interest of a two-state solution alive until such time as improved leadership dynamics permit such negotiations to proceed. And it will provide a framework for Israelis, Palestinians and Arab states to take the practical economic, security, and political steps on the ground that require no negotiations but are consistent with a two-state solution.