




Israel Braces for Possible Violence as U.S. Moves Israel's Embassy to Jerusalem

"A toxic witches' brew of political instability and further potential violence is stewing in the Middle East," warned Ilan Goldenberg, an American diplomat with experience in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, in an essay for the Israeli paper *Haaretz*. Goldenberg, who was part of the U.S. team in the Obama administration during negotiations between Israel and Palestinian Arabs in 2013-14, predicted that the relocation of the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem this week could pass without much violence. 

"Or it could explode," Goldenberg added. "We could find ourselves in the middle of a new war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Nobody knows, but it is irresponsible for the U.S. to be dumping gasoline on this potential fire."

The "gasoline" is, in Goldberg's view, the decision of President Donald Trump to relocate the American embassy to Israel in Jerusalem, rather than Tel Aviv.

Israel announced its recreation as an independent nation in the Middle East on May 14, 1948, and placed its capital at Tel Aviv. However, after Israel won its stunning victory in the 1967 "Six-Day War," it moved its capital to Jerusalem. Today, Israel's Knesset (parliament), president, prime minister, and almost all other governmental offices are in Jerusalem, so it makes perfect sense for the embassies of other nations to also locate there.

The Trump administration is making the move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem on May 14, the 70th anniversary of the reestablishment of a Jewish state. The next day, Palestinians have chosen to designate as the "catastrophe" or Nakba, the day they argue marks their "displacement."

Jerusalem has a long and volatile history. After the war with Rome in A.D. 70, most Jews were expelled from the city that had been the capital of Israel, beginning in 1001 B.C., under King David. Jerusalem was conquered by various non-Jewish peoples until the Ottoman Turks (who were Muslims), took it from what had been the Christian Byzantine Empire. The Turks controlled Jerusalem from 1517 until they were on the losing side of World War I. Beginning in the 1800s, Jews began purchasing land in Palestine (the name the Romans gave for what the Jews called Judea and Samaria), joining with the small number of Jews still living there. Since about 1890, Jews have been the majority in Jerusalem. When the Turks lost the First World War, European nations took some of the Ottoman Empire, with the British obtaining a "mandate" over Palestine.

In 1948, Israel declared its independence, precipitating the first of several wars with its Arab neighbors. In 1967, as a result of the Six-Day War, Israel took over the eastern part of Jerusalem. In 1980, Israel declared the city as its capital. The U.S. Congress later passed a law recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, but gave presidents the authority to waive that recognition, declaring the waiver



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every six months. Trump finally announced in early December of last year that he would move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, which Israel has controlled for 50 years.

At the time, Trump's announcement was met with stiff opposition — from the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt. While such reactions were not unexpected from the Arabs and the Turks, European political leaders were also displeased. Federica Mogherini, the foreign policy leader for the European Union (EU), cautioned that such a move would undermine the “two-state solution” (the state of Israel and an Arab Palestinian state). The United Nations Security Council also voted to condemn the move, an action vetoed by the United States. U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley responded sharply: “What we have witnessed here in the Security Council is an insult. It won't be forgotten.”

Now, with the move about to become a reality, Israeli police have stepped up patrols and security sweeps in the southern Jerusalem neighborhood, in where the current U.S. consulate is being remodeled to become the official embassy. “We're still waiting to see if the U.S. president will come here for the opening move,” said Micky Rosefeld, a spokesman for the Israeli police. “The level of security will be raised accordingly.” If Trump does not attend, it is speculated that his daughter, Ivanka, will attend along with her husband, Jared Kushner. (They are both adherents of the Jewish faith.)

It is quite clear that the status of Jerusalem — indeed of the very state of Israel itself — is controversial. The reality of the situation, however, is that Jerusalem is the *de facto* capital of Israel. Moreover, Israel is a sovereign nation, and as such it should have the authority to locate its capital in any city in its country it wishes — regardless of what other nations think, or what the UN thinks.

During his 2012 presidential effort, Texas Congressman Ron Paul stressed the issue of national sovereignty when he was asked about the Jerusalem question. He replied, “The real issue here is not what America wants, but what does Israel want. If Israel wants their capital to be Jerusalem, then the United States should honor that.”

Others argue that “the international community” rejects Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967. But, whether they accept it or reject it, Israel has ruled Jerusalem for a half-century. Mexico did not like it when Texas won its independence from Mexico in 1836. When the United States annexed Texas over a decade later, it even led to war between the United States and Mexico. How ludicrous would it have been for Mexico to insist that the United States not have consulates in, say, Houston, Texas, 50 years after the end of the Mexican War?

One thing is for certain. As a sovereign nation, it is up to Israel to decide where to put its capital. It is not any business of the United States, the EU, or the UN to butt in and dictate the internal politics of sovereign nations. For that matter, this is yet another good example of why it is unwise for the United States to continue its membership in the UN, for they might someday dictate to our country where we should put our capital.

The lesson for Americans, then, is to get the U.S. out of the UN, and get the UN out of the U.S.

Photo at top shows Jerusalem mayor Nir Barkat posing with a new road sign to the new U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem: AP Images



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