

A year after US Embassy move to Jerusalem, where do things stand?

Author:

Sun, 2019-05-12 23:08

JERUSALEM: The US moved its Israel Embassy to Jerusalem nearly a year ago in the culmination of a diplomatic rupture that coincided with a bloodbath on the Gaza border. As President Donald Trump's administration prepares to present its long-promised plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, what has changed?

Ignoring global outcry, the US inaugurated its embassy in Jerusalem with much pomp on May 14, 2018, using the move from Tel Aviv to manifest one of Trump's most controversial promises – the recognition of the holy city as Israel's capital.

To Israel, the process was a “historic” recognition of the 3,000-year connection between the Jewish people and Jerusalem.

The Palestinians, who envision East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, were livid.

The status of Jerusalem has been disputed since the war surrounding Israel's inception in 1948, when Israeli forces took control of the western sector of the city.

Israel occupied mainly Palestinian East Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it in a move never recognized by the international community.

Other foreign capitals have resolved to maintain embassies in Israel outside of Jerusalem until the city's status is resolved through negotiations.

Great March of Return

In March 2018, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip launched the “Great March of Return” to claim land in Israel which they fled or were expelled from during the 1948 war.

A seemingly insoluble rift, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been absent from any real diplomatic process since 2014.

Trump entered the White House with the promise to be the most pro-Israel president in US history, with his administration increasing its pledges to Israel.

Two days after the US moved its embassy to Jerusalem, Guatemala did the same. Paraguay followed suit, but backtracked after less than four months.

They also rallied against the US embassy move and called on Israel to lift its crippling decade-long blockade of Gaza, which Israel says is a security necessity.

The border fence has since become the scene of weekly clashes, which Israel says are orchestrated by Gaza's rulers Hamas but which activists argue are led by a peaceful grassroots civilian movement.

At least 62 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire during border clashes on the day of the embassy's inauguration.

That day's clashes also coincided with the annual commemoration of the Nakba, or "catastrophe," which marks the 1948 displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

Hamas refuses to accept Israel's existence and has fought three wars with the Jewish state since 2008.

Israel has continued its blockade of Gaza, along with its occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and expanded its settlement enterprise.

The unrest on Gaza's border has since continued alongside rounds of rocket attacks aimed at Israel and retaliatory strikes on the enclave, most recently this month, with each seeming to bring the sides closer to a full-blown confrontation.

Nearly 300 Palestinians and six Israelis have been killed in the violence in and around Gaza since March 2018.

Other countries declared similar intentions to move their embassies, but none have yet followed through.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon has nevertheless been optimistic.

He noted "a dynamic never before seen" of visits by foreign leaders and openings of missions – albeit lacking the rank of embassies.

The chaos which threatened to follow the US move has not materialized, Nahshon said, brushing off its effect on diplomacy.

"For years there has been no peace process," he said.

The Palestinians, on the other hand, are experiencing "the worst period" ever in terms of relations with the US, said Ahmed Majdalani, adviser to President Mahmoud Abbas.

The US initiatives on Jerusalem have had "a major impact," he said, adding that in the past year the Trump administration moved from "partial intermediary status to defending the Israeli occupation."

The Palestinian leadership suspended official contact with the US government in December 2017, and has rejected the moves of Trump's adviser and son-in-

law Jared Kushner to craft the “ultimate” peace deal long-flaunted by the US president.

The plan is expected to be unveiled in June, giving Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu time after winning last month’s snap elections to form a new government possibly even further to the right than the current one.

The US administration has consistently said the plan will break with traditional efforts, and this month Kushner indicated it would ditch longstanding mentions of a two-state solution.

The Jerusalem move “probably did what it needed to do in terms of domestic politics or calculations” for the US, said Hugh Lovatt, an analyst at the European Council for Foreign Relations, but it has “negatively impacted their peace plan.”

“It made it more difficult for Gulf states to come out and support it,” he said, “because Jerusalem is one real red line that remains for them in terms of the Palestinian issue.”

The US State Department this month repeated the embassy move was merely a recognition of “the reality that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.”

The promised peace plan, it said, was “fair, realistic, implementable, and offers a brighter future for all.”



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Palestinians want Jerusalem cut from Eurovision videosIn Jerusalem’s Old

Sudan tribal clashes leave 7 dead, 22 wounded

Author:

Sun, 2019-05-12 22:54

KHARTOUM: Clashes between members of two Sudanese tribes in an eastern town have left seven people dead and 22 wounded over the past two days, a local official told AFP Sunday.

The violence erupted on Saturday between members of the Nuba and Bani Amer tribes in the town of Gadaref, said Mohieddine Ahmed, governor of Gadaref province.

"It all started when a woman from the Nuba tribe and a water vendor from the Bani Amer tribe quarrelled over the price of water" on Saturday, Ahmed said.

"The verbal dispute ended with the vendor killing the woman, which triggered anger among her tribe members." Members of the two groups then set fire to homes and shops belonging to each other's kin, Ahmed added.

"In the ensuing clashes seven people have been killed and 22 wounded," Ahmed said, adding that the two groups have clashed in the past. The wounded included seven policemen, he said, as officers sought to separate the groups with tear gas and by firing shots in the air. Ahmed said the fighting that erupted on Saturday continued until Sunday morning.

Tribal clashes are often reported in several regions of Sudan, especially in the war-torn western Darfur provinces.

Fresh talks

Sudan's army rulers and protesters are to hold fresh talks over handing power to a civilian administration on Monday, a spokesman for the protest movement told AFP.

On Saturday, the Alliance for Freedom and Change – an umbrella for the protest movement – said the generals had invited it for a new round of talks after several days of deadlock.

"The meeting was planned for today but it has now been postponed to Monday," alliance spokesman Rashid Al-Sayed said.

Sayed did not explain why the talks were postponed, but sources in the

alliance said that more time was needed for consultations within the leadership.

The latest planned round of talks come as thousands of protesters remain camped outside army headquarters in central Khartoum. They say they are determined to force the ruling military council to cede power – just as they pushed the military into deposing veteran President Omar Al-Bashir on April 11.

The army generals and protesters are at loggerheads over who will sit on a new ruling body that would replace the existing military council.

The generals have proposed that the new council be military led, while the protest leaders want a majority civilian body.

Late last month, the alliance – which brings together protest organizers, opposition parties and rebel groups – handed the generals its proposals for a civilian-led transitional government.

But the generals have pointed to what they call “many reservations” over the alliance’s roadmap.

They have singled out its silence on the constitutional position of sharia law, which was the guiding principle of all legislation under Bashir’s rule but is anathema to secular groups like the Sudanese Communist Party and some rebel factions in the alliance.

“We want to hold the talks quickly and sort out all these points in 72 hours,” the alliance said on Saturday.

Sudan, an ethnically diverse country, has been rocked by nationwide protests since December.

Thousands of protesters still remain camped outside the military headquarters in central Khartoum, calling on the army generals who deposed Bashir to hand power over to civilians.



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Month after Bashir ouster, Sudan far from civilian rule
Cash crisis tops Sudan's economic woes

[Egypt sentences two to death over church attack in 2017](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-05-12 22:47

CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Sunday sentenced two men to death and eight others to between three years and life in prison over an attack on a church and Christian-owned shop in Cairo that killed 10 people.

A gunman opened fire in December 2017 on Christians in a shop in the southern Cairo suburb of Helwan, killing two people, before firing on the entrance to the nearby Mar Mina church, where he killed seven Christian worshippers and a policeman.

The emergency state security court sentenced the main suspect, who is in custody, and another suspect, who is on the run, to death.

Two defendants were handed life sentences, four were given four years in prison and two were handed three years in jail. One suspect was acquitted and two others are still at large.

The authorities had said the gunman was wounded by security forces during the attack. Daesh claimed responsibility.

The main suspect appeared in court on Sunday wearing death row prison clothes, having also been handed two death sentences in military trials after being convicted of attacking military buildings.

The main suspect embraced the other defendants in the court after the verdict. Under Egypt's state of emergency law, the defendants can appeal to have the sentence by the security court reduced.

In November, militants killed seven people when they attacked a bus returning from a baptism in the governorate of Minya.

Egypt's Coptic Christians, who make up about 10 percent of the population, have been targeted by militants in recent years.

A gunman killed at least 11 people on Dec. 29 in attacks on a Coptic Orthodox church and a Christian-owned shop near Cairo before he was wounded and arrested, the Egyptian Interior Ministry and church officials said.

Daesh claimed responsibility for the attacks, in a statement carried out by its Amaq news agency, though it provided no evidence for the claim.

Police have stepped up security measures around churches ahead of Coptic Christmas celebrations on Jan. 7, deploying officers outside Christian places of worship and setting up metal detectors at some of the bigger churches.

Islamist militants have claimed several attacks on Egypt's large Christian minority in recent years, including two bombings on Palm Sunday in April and a blast at Cairo's largest Coptic cathedral in December 2016 that killed 28 people.

Earlier reports by security sources and state media said at least two attackers were involved in Friday's attack, and that one was shot dead and another fled the scene. The Interior Ministry did not explain the reason for the different accounts.

The Coptic Church said the gunman first shot at a Christian-owned shop 4 km away, killing two people, before proceeding to the Mar Mina church in the southern Cairo suburb of Helwan. The Interior Ministry said he opened fire at the entrance to the site and tried to throw an explosive device.

The gunman killed at least nine people, including a policeman, at the church, according to Interior Ministry and Coptic Church accounts. The Church said a young woman had died later from her wounds, bringing the civilian death toll

at the church to eight.

The ministry said security forces had “immediately dealt with the (attacker) and arrested him after he was wounded.” It added, “Legal measures have been taken,” without elaborating.



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Egyptian actress faces backlash after appearing in blackface
Debate rages in Egypt as priest tells Christian women to cover up

[Debate rages in Egypt as priest tells Christian women to cover up](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-05-11 23:32

CAIRO: “Why are women and girls coming to church if they’re wearing revealing and inappropriate clothes?” That was the message of the sermon delivered by

Father Daoud Lamei whilst presiding over an Orthodox Easter mass, celebrated by the Coptic Christian community in Egypt.

"I personally think any man, who agrees to his wife leaving her home in that way will be judged before God," Lamei added. "At least during Christmas, we don't have to worry because it is cold ... We want it to be cold always."

The priest's comments about revealing clothing have sparked a heated debate in the Coptic community. Some have criticized Lamei, while others supported his call for modesty in religious buildings.

"He is specifically attacking Christian women, not explaining the appropriate dress code and attitude for a church in general," said Maryan Youssef, a 19-year-old student. "Egyptian Christians wear decent clothes, and if some are not dressed properly they should be given guidance, but there aren't that many."

Hani Abdo, a religious teacher, said: "I fully agree with Lamei. I am a Christian man, and feel uncomfortable when I see Christian girls wearing inappropriate clothes in church. They are harassed in the streets." He said: "Christian girls must learn from nuns. The Church is a sacred house that must be respected."

Father Luke Rady of the Church of Marmina in Assiut, said: "We trust in our daughters and in their commitment to proper clothing."

Dr. Nabil William, a psychology teacher at the University of Assiut, said Christianity does not impose uniforms on anyone, but always calls for decency.

Following Lamei's comments, an online campaign called "Cover Up" was set up by Orthodox Copts, calling on women to wear more conservative clothes when in church. In addition, a group of worshippers at a church in Upper Egypt started a separate online campaign urging young women to dress modestly, which was vehemently criticized by Facebook users for its conservative language.

These campaigns have raised fears among some Christian women that they will be subjected to harassment for their outfits, restrictions on their personal freedom or forced to wear a prescribed uniform.

Lamei's remarks were dubbed "Christian Salafism" by Ishak Ibrahim, a researcher with the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. Ibrahim said such rhetoric hardened attitudes that would "justify harassment" of women simply for their attire. "There is a crisis in clerical education, and many clergymen end up tying piety to modesty," he said.



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Muslims, Copts rebuild church destroyed in sectarian clashes in Egypt

[Palestinians want Jerusalem cut from Eurovision videos](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-05-11 22:36

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority called Saturday for Jerusalem to be cut from videos promoting Eurovision, accusing Israel of “propaganda” ahead of Tel Aviv hosting the song contest.

Israel’s public broadcaster KAN aired a clip Friday aimed at tourists traveling to the country for Eurovision, which features a shot of east Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa mosque compound.

It also refers to Jerusalem as “our beloved capital,” despite Palestinians claiming the eastern sector as the capital of their future state.

East Jerusalem was occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed.

The PA’s foreign ministry said Israel was using the song competition to

“entrench its colonial occupation by effectively normalizing the global acceptance of its unlawful conduct.”

“The promotional material published in the context of the Eurovision contest and approved by EBU, is unacceptable,” the ministry said, in reference to the European Broadcasting Union.

Writing on Facebook, the ministry said it had contacted the EBU about what it termed Israeli “propaganda material” which “wipes... the State of Palestine from the map.”

KAN’s promotional video was also criticized by some Israelis for its portrayal of stereotypes, prompting the broadcaster to issue a statement stressing its take was satirical.

Eurovision will take place from Tuesday to Saturday in Tel Aviv, picked to host the event after Israeli singer Netta Barzilai won last year’s contest. Efforts by activists calling for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) of Israel over its occupation of Palestinian territories have failed to move the competition.



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Gaza artists call on Eurovision singers to boycott Israel
Prankster who streaked across Eurovision stage could face 5-year jail term