

Two tales of a city: Jerusalem tour guided by a Palestinian and an Israeli

Author:

Tue, 2019-02-12 21:21

JERUSALEM: On a Jerusalem plaza looking up at the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock, a crowd gathers in front of two guides, listening attentively, a common sight in a city packed with pilgrims and tourists visiting its religious landmarks.

What is unusual is that one of the guides is Palestinian, one is Israeli, and they are taking turns to give their perspectives on the city known to Jews as Yerushalayim and to Arabs as Al-Quds.

"We are in Jerusalem, which is the capital of the Jewish state. We are in one of the holiest places in the world for Christianity. And the keys are held by Muslim families," said Israeli guide Lana Zilberman Soloway, who spoke first as the group reached the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where Jesus is believed to be buried. "And all three coexist at the same time."

Her counterpart, Noor Awad, from Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank just a few kilometers away, took a different view of the status quo, noting that Muslims and Christians from the West Bank or Gaza need Israeli travel permits to worship here.

"For Palestinians, this is the capital of Palestine and the capital of their country," said Awad, 28. "If you don't get that permission, you can't come actually here to pray. So the place is being used, and plays a lot into the two narratives and the conflict we have today."

The two guides heard each other out politely, with the occasional quip or raised eyebrow. Two dozen tourists, mainly foreigners living in the city, peppered them with questions.

The tour operator said its "Dual Narrative" tour was "created in partnership by Israelis, Palestinians, Arabs, and Jews." The weekly tours have been under way since last October.

Israel considers all of Jerusalem its capital. The Old City and holy sites lie in the mainly Arab eastern half, captured by Israel in a 1967 war and annexed in a move not recognized internationally. Palestinians say the eastern half is occupied land and must become the capital of a future Palestinian state.

At the heart of Old City, the tour came to the hill known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary.

"Where the Dome of the Rock today is standing, Prophet Muhammad ascended to Heaven to talk to God," Awad told the tour party, describing what Muslims consider the holiest spot on earth outside of the two Arabian cities Prophet

Muhammad called home.

“That’s a very central event, somehow similar to the story of Moses talking to God from Mount Sinai.”

For Jews, it is the site of the biblical temple, destroyed by Babylonian conquerors, rebuilt and razed again under the Romans. The Western Wall, a restraint for the foundations built by Herod the Great 2,000 years ago, is a sacred place of prayer.

“All the way down deep underground, underneath the golden dome, 5,779 years ago, God created the world. 4,000 years ago, we believe Abraham came to bind Isaac on that exact spot,” Zilberman Soloway said.

Dave Yedid, 26, a Jewish seminary student from Long Island, New York who came on the tour, said: “Exactly what differs in the sort of Jewish Zionist narrative versus the Palestinian narrative is something I’ll take home with me.”

“I wanted to see those two side by side.”



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In Jerusalem's Old City, conflict means buyer and seller beware
Palestinians, Israeli police scuffle at Jerusalem holy site

Israel warns Iran that its missiles can travel 'very far'

Author:

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Tue, 2019-02-12 17:24

HAIFA: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Iran Tuesday that Israeli missiles can travel "very far," on the eve of a conference in Poland about peace and security in the Middle East.

Speaking during a visit to a naval base in the northern port of Haifa, Netanyahu said: "The missiles you see behind me can go very far, against any enemy, including Iran's proxies in our region" – an apparent reference to Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah movement.

"We are constantly working according to our understanding and the need to prevent Iran and its proxies from entrenching on our northern border and in our region in general," Netanyahu added.

"We are doing everything necessary," said Netanyahu, as he inspected Israel's Iron Dome aerial defense system.

Netanyahu has repeatedly said Israel would not allow Iran and its ally Hezbollah to entrench themselves in neighboring Syria where they are backing the Damascus regime against rebels and some extremists.

Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes in Syria in the past few years against Iranian and Hezbollah targets.

On Wednesday the Israeli prime minister is set to take part in an international conference in Warsaw co-organized by the United States and Poland.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last month announced the two-day conference saying it would focus on the "destabilising influence" of Iran in the Middle East.

But with few RSVPs coming, Poland and the US have toned down the agenda to focus on ways of promoting peace and security in the Middle East.

During the conference US President Donald Trump son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner, who has been putting final touches on a "deal of the century" for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, will make a rare speaking appearance.

Kushner may offer hints of the US peace proposal but is not expected to unveil the full deal until after the April 9 election in Israel.



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Syrian state media says Israel artillery strikes Quneitra province US blocks UN statement on Hebron monitors ejected by Israel

[UN warns Daesh losses should not lead to complacency](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-02-12 20:37

NEW YORK: The UN counterterrorism chief warned on Monday that recent losses by Daesh extremists “should not lead to complacency at any level,” saying the extremist group remains a global threat with up to 18,000 militants in Iraq and Syria.

Vladimir Voronkov also told the Security Council that Daesh is reported to have created a network of cells in various cities in Afghanistan, including the capital Kabul, and is closely linked to its leaders in Syria and Iraq.

He said Daesh’s “center of gravity” remains in Iraq and Syria, where it reportedly controls between 14,000 and 18,000 militants, and its central leadership maintains “an intent to generate internationally directed attacks.”

His briefing on the latest UN report on extremist threats from Daesh and Al-Qaeda comes as President Donald Trump has ordered a US troop withdrawal in Syria, saying Daesh has been defeated, and a potential troop pullout in Afghanistan.

Voronkov, the undersecretary-general of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, said the threat from Daesh has increased because of combatants who fought with the group returning home, relocating or being released.

Michele Coninx, head of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, said Daesh’s dramatic loss of territory “has driven its evolution into a covert and more locally focused network in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere.”

She told the council Daesh aims to undermine stabilization and rebuilding in its former strongholds in Iraq and Syria.

The extremist group “remains one of the international terrorist groups most likely to carry out a large-scale, complex attack in the future,” Coninx

said.

US Deputy Ambassador Jonathan Cohen said the significant military setbacks Daesh has suffered, notably in Iraq, Syria and the southern Philippines, are “a testament” to the work of a global coalition to defeat the extremist group.

But he said: “Much more work remains to be done to defeat Daesh.”

“Daesh is also coordinating with affiliates to plan attacks elsewhere, including Afghanistan, southeast Asia and west Africa,” he said.

Cohen encouraged all countries to adapt to the changing threat from Daesh, praising the coalition for severely degrading its ability to raise funds and finance its operations “through destroying Daesh-controlled energy assets and removing key Daesh commanders responsible for finance.”

The UN’s Coninx stressed that Daesh, along with other extremist groups and their affiliates, have “consistently demonstrated their intent and ability to exploit new technologies and seek innovative ways to circumvent obstacles to its financial, technical and recruitment capabilities.”

As examples, she said her experts noted “an increased use of mobile payment services by terrorist groups” in west Africa, and “the misuse of cryptocurrencies for malicious, criminal and terrorist purposes.”

Russia’s UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said that while Daesh’s income from contraband fuel continues to fall, the extremist group seized a number of oil fields in Syria’s eastern province of Deir Ezzour last autumn which enabled it to sell oil at \$30-\$35 a barrel for a number of months through intermediaries.



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Hundreds flee US-backed Syria battle for last Daesh holdout
Russia jails Daesh pair for 15 years over planned attacks

[Arab League chief: No consensus yet for Syria return](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-02-11 22:14

BEIRUT: The Arab League said on Monday there was no consensus yet among member states that may allow the reinstatement of Syria's membership which was suspended in 2011 over its crackdown on protesters at the start of the civil war.

In a big diplomatic boost for Assad, the UAE reopened its embassy in Damascus in December, saying it aimed to normalize ties and curb risks of regional interference in "Arab, Syrian affairs" – an apparent reference to Iran and Turkey.

But Arab League Secretary-General and former Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, speaking during a visit to Beirut, said there was no consensus yet on Syria being allowed back into the League.

"I follow this subject very closely and I do not yet observe conclusions that lead to the consensus that we are talking about and that may lead to an (Arab) foreign ministers meeting in which they announce the end of the difference and therefore call for Syria to return to occupy the seat," he said.

The Arab League is due to hold a summit meeting at the end of March in Tunisia.

Asked about the prospects for Syria's readmission, Aboul Gheit noted that Arab League foreign ministers were due to hold two meetings before the summit.

"But the matter is not time, the matter is will. The matter is consensus

among the states,” he said.

“For Syria to return, there must be consensus.”



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Arab League chief: Combat hate by teaching children inclusivityArab League calls for agenda to meet media objectives

[Syrian state media says Israel artillery strikes Quneitra province](#)

Mon, 2019-02-11 21:38

AMMAN: Israeli tank artillery hit a demolished hospital and an observation post in Syria's southern Quneitra province near the border with Israel, Syrian state media said on Monday, adding there had been only material damage.

The two sites were hit by several tank artillery rounds, state media reported.

Asked about the reported Quneitra strikes, an Israeli military spokeswoman declined comment.

Israel has mounted attacks in Syria as part of its effort to counter the influence carved out there by Iran, which has supported Syrian President Bashar Assad in the war that erupted in 2011.

A senior Israeli official said in September Israel had carried out more than 200 attacks against Iranian targets in Syria in the last two years. Iranian and Iran-backed groups including Lebanon's Hezbollah have deployed into Syria in support of President Bashar Assad's rule during the war.



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