

Press Releases: Briefing With Acting Assistant Secretary David M. Satterfield

Special Briefing
David M. Satterfield

Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs

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MS NAUERT: Good afternoon, everybody. Hope you are all doing well. As you can see, I brought a guest with me today. The President's decision on Jerusalem has been briefed to you all by the White House, the NSC, and also the State Department, so we won't repeat that today, but we've brought our Acting Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs David Satterfield, who has served here at the State Department for just about 40 years, first as a civil servant and then as a Foreign Service officer. And so he's going to start out taking some of your questions.

I know all of you. He does not, so I'll help facilitate and call on people. And then after he's done with the Q&A, I will gladly take your questions on any other issues.

So Acting Assistant Secretary David Satterfield, thank you so much, sir.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Thanks, Heather. I'll take your questions.

QUESTION: Sure.

QUESTION: Yes. I have –

QUESTION: All right. Yeah, so I've got –

MS NAUERT: Oh, I'm sorry. Matt, you can go ahead.

QUESTION: I've got what are going to sound like a couple softballs, but they were questions that your predecessors and Heather's predecessors weren't able to answer very easily. So just bear with me. They're two very brief ones.

What is the capital of Israel?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The President announced yesterday, issued a proclamation declaring the United States recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Israel.

QUESTION: So the answer to the question is Jerusalem, correct?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: That's exactly right.

QUESTION: What country is Jerusalem in?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The President recognized Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Israel.

QUESTION: Does that mean then that the U.S. Government officially recognizes that Jerusalem municipality lies within the state of Israel?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: There has been no change in our policy with respect to consular practice or passport issuance at this time, which is what I think you are raising.

QUESTION: Well, that's what – I wanted to know what the practical implications of this decision are not in terms of necessarily broad policy, the peace process, whatever, but things like maps. Will they be withdrawn? Will the passport issue – will passports now identify Jerusalem as being within Israel if the person was born there? What about official documents? Will they say Jerusalem, comma, Israel? What about the mailing address of the consulate or the street address of the consulate?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I've already commented that on consular practice there is no change at this time. With respect to maps, we are, of course, examining that issue, and when we have a decision we will announce it with respect to how we will treat Jerusalem for official USG-produced mapping

purposes.

QUESTION: Okay. So that sounds to me like within these areas there is no practical impact.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Well, in consular practice there is no impact.

QUESTION: Right. Okay. Thank you.

QUESTION: So on –

MS NAUERT: Hold on, hold on.

QUESTION: On the issue of East Jerusalem –

MS NAUERT: Excuse me, Said.

QUESTION: On being from East Jerusalem –

MS NAUERT: Excuse me, Said. I'll just call on the questions, okay, since he doesn't know anybody. Elise, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, Assistant Secretary. Could I just put a finer point on it? The President said and you just said that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. But he also said that the borders are yet – that there's no change in the –

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The boundaries of sovereignty.

QUESTION: The boundaries of sovereignty.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Border questions have not been addressed.

QUESTION: So what he's – so you're essentially saying that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, but you're not saying that the entire municipality of Jerusalem falls into that capital?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I will restate what the President said, which is we recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Israel. We are not changing or taking a position on the boundaries of sovereignty in Jerusalem –

QUESTION: Well, could you explain what that –

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: – including geographic boundaries. And I will not elaborate beyond that –

QUESTION: Well –

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: – except to note a further comment which the President made. Which is that we regard those issues – the specifics, the boundaries of sovereignty, borders – as a matter for permanent status or final status negotiations between the party. And I think that addresses just about everything that could fall in the basket you're raising.

QUESTION: If I might, if I might. I think that's very parse language and kind

of a very legal – kind of diplomatese definition.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.) (Laughter.)

QUESTION: And if you could –

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Thank you.

QUESTION: – kind of put it into a – which you're very good at, by the way, after many years. If you could put it into layman's terms what does that mean that you call Jerusalem the capital of Israel but then you say that the boundaries of sovereignty – I think that people would like a little bit more of a layman's definition.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I think the way the President presented it yesterday in his remarks and in the proclamation does a pretty good job of that, which is to say we're acknowledging a reality, something practical; Jerusalem is currently, historically, capital of Israel. That's the decision he announced.

With respect to boundaries of sovereignty, borders, geography, those are matters for final status negotiations between the party, and we're not going to touch on those at this time. And I think that speaks for itself. And I'll use –

QUESTION: So there's –

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: – his words rather than my own diplomatese.

QUESTION: Yes. My –

MS NAUERT: Said, go right ahead.

QUESTION: My name is Said Arikat. I just want to follow up on East Jerusalem because it is really – it's not clear at all. Not in my mind. So what happens to the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem? Do they now become automatically Israeli citizens, would have full rights, and so on? What happens to 300,000 Palestinians?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Said, the President's proclamation yesterday, his decision, have no impact on those issues. He is recognizing a practical reality. Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. And all of the other aspects – boundaries of sovereignty – we're not taking a position. It's for the sides to resolve.

QUESTION: So if you'll just bear with me for a second. So why not say West Jerusalem? I mean, the Russians have done that. It did not cause any problem and so on. Or why don't you say that this part, East Jerusalem, as been negotiated as you yourself have been involved for so many years, this portion is designated to become the capital of the Palestinian state?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Said, the President's decision speaks for itself. There are many words that are in his statement, in his remarks; there are words that aren't. We recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the state of

Israel. He didn't go beyond that, and I'm not going to go beyond that.

QUESTION: Can you – can you share with us –

MS NAUERT: We need to move on (inaudible).

QUESTION: – just one last thing?

MS NAUERT: Said, (inaudible).

QUESTION: Could you share with us, sir –

MS NAUERT: Said, (inaudible).

QUESTION: – one national security interest of the United States that this recognition has served? Can you identify one national security interest of the United States that this recognition has identified?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The President is committed to advancing a peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. In his view upon reflection, this step, he believes, assists in that process. Full stop.

MS NAUERT: Nick, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Can you explain that further, because –

QUESTION: Can I just ask, Mr. –

QUESTION: – that's exactly what we're trying to – or what I'm trying to figure out is –

MS NAUERT: Nick, go right ahead. Hold on, Dave.

QUESTION: Can you – just to Matt's point, can you explain why a decision-making process needs to be made about maps and things like that, and consular services? I mean, you said yourself, the President declared Jerusalem the capital of Israel. Why does there need to be a further decision-making process on those other issues?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: It's a very simple answer, and it's wholly technical. What phrasing do you place upon government-issued maps? There are different word choices that can be used. To be clear, there will be a decision made. When the decision is made, you'll have it and you'll have the maps.

QUESTION: And can you just explain why now? Why did he make this decision now?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Because December 4th was the trigger date for the next waiver required under the Jerusalem Act of '95. That was the proximate timing issue. Full stop.

QUESTION: So there was no strategic – this – it was solely based on –

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The President had to make a decision. He did. But

he's –

QUESTION: Why didn't he do it on the 4th?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: That's the legal requirement of the act. Every six months –

QUESTION: No, but he –

QUESTION: But he didn't.

QUESTION: But he didn't.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: – a waiver has to be issued.

QUESTION: He didn't do it on the 4th. He did it on the 6th.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: We believe – and I believe the White House has spoken to this – technically, we were in compliance. We'll leave it to the Hill on whether 48 hours constituted a problem or not. But the 4th was the trigger date.

QUESTION: Wow. I wish my editors had your sense of deadline. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Michelle with CNN. Thanks. Can you just say how – how this furthers the peace process?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The President believes taking this issue – that is the fact of U.S. recognition, acknowledgement of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel – an issue that's been pending out there since '95, since the act was initially passed – was appropriate to make and that it helps in the process to no longer have that issue, which is the U.S. acknowledgement of the simple fact that Jerusalem is the location of the supreme court, the Knesset, the president and the prime minister's residences, that that is a useful clearing of an issue that has been part of, grown as part of, this process for many decades.

QUESTION: So it's setting us up for what? To – if you're saying that that gets that out of the way and it's been a reality, how does that set the stage?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The President and his peace team have been engaged, as you all know, for many months now in discussions with the two parties, with regional states, with other key actors, to try to advance a peace. This is not an easy process; it's a difficult one. But he believes this step assists in that process. I am not going to elaborate on that further.

QUESTION: And how would you –

MS NAUERT: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: The Palestinians said that the U.S. cannot anymore be a mediator in this peace process, so how do you think this presidential team can go forward

and broker a deal with – if one of the two main actors doesn't want him as a mediator?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: It will not surprise you to hear after all these years, my response is we will judge parties by their actions rather than by statements.

MS NAUERT: All right. (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Thanks.

MS NAUERT: Sorry. Rich. Thanks.

QUESTION: As a veteran diplomat and representative of NEA, do you personally agree with the President's decision?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Oh, now. I am an employee of the U.S. Government. I am a Foreign Service officer. We all – and I speak of my boss, the Secretary, and the other principals in the U.S. Government – we are all part of this team. This is a decision which we will work our best to execute and advance.

QUESTION: How long did NEA consult with the administration on this?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I'm not going to get into a tick-tock on this.

MS NAUERT: Arshad.

QUESTION: Do you believe that this decision in any way impairs the pursuit of peace by the United States?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: We've made clear, the President has made clear, that he hopes it helps advance this process, helps move it forward.

QUESTION: But, that's not my question.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: But it was an issue.

QUESTION: My question is: Do you think it in any way impairs the pursuit of peace? I know what you hope; I want to know if you think it has impaired your efforts.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I can't make that judgment at this point.

QUESTION: Not even given the negative reactions that you have seen in Arab capitals among some of your allies, let alone the Palestinians?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: No. Again, we will judge by what actually happens with those parties as we deal with this process, as we carry on discussions with them. Again, we're not going to be driven by statements.

QUESTION: And one other question. Do you regard those portions of East Jerusalem that were occupied by Israel in 1967 as occupied territory?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The decision of the President is to recognize

Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Israel. The President has stated that that decision does not touch upon issues of boundaries, of sovereignty, or geographic borders. Full stop.

QUESTION: So it is still occupied territory, in your view?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I have stated what the President's decision does and does not do.

MS NAUERT: Kylie from CBS.

QUESTION: Thank you. What is the current policy of the U.S. administration towards Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: As – this decision had no impact on any issue other than the recognition or acknowledgment of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

QUESTION: No. But so could you –

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I've answered your question.

QUESTION: Could you follow up what the policy therefore is, even though it has not been enacted?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I'm not going to restate the policy at this point.

QUESTION: Well, can I just ask you then are you accepting the premise of the question that construction in East Jerusalem is settlement activity? I don't believe that it's (inaudible).

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: What I am stating is an affirmative. The President's decision was a recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The President made clear issues that touch upon the boundaries of sovereignty or final status issues are not addressed by his decision.

QUESTION: I get it. The question is one of terminology.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Fine.

QUESTION: You called construction in the West Bank settlement activity, but not necessarily construction in East Jerusalem. That's just construction. It hasn't traditionally –

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The President's decision did not touch on those issues.

QUESTION: I have just –

MS NAUERT: Final question. Elise.

QUESTION: Could you explain the distinction between recognizing the capital and it not – and not deciding anything on borders as it refers to a deal? Because if you're saying that this is a final status issue to be negotiated at the table, how does either (a), this not prejudice a deal when Jerusalem

is a final status issue, or (b), how is it not a meaningless declaration that could be negotiated at the table? It has to be one or the other.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Elise, final status negotiations are going to deal with those boundaries of sovereignty, border questions that the President spoke to as not addressed by his recognition. The President thought it was the right thing to do for the United States, after all these years, to acknowledge the fact, the reality, that Jerusalem is the seat of government of the state of Israel, the capital of the state of Israel. That's it.

QUESTION: But it's – respectfully, it's inconsistent with the idea that you would also be negotiating at the table unless you can acknowledge what we're all trying to get you to say, which you artfully are not –

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Thank you, Elise. You may well think that. Thank you.

QUESTION: Well – but the idea that it may – that is – that Jerusalem is the capital, but perhaps in final status negotiations that it might be not the united capital.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Elise, I will only address one more point on this. What were the words the President used? It was a very simple statement: recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. There are words you might want to put in there; he didn't. There are words you might want to take out; he didn't. That statement was very carefully made, as was the comment we are not prejudicing addressing by this decision final status issue.

MS NAUERT: All right. Thank you, everybody.

QUESTION: Thank you.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Acting Assistant Secretary David Satterfield, appreciate it, and your expertise, sir. Thank you.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Thank you. Thanks.

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