



News Analysis: Trump recognition of Jerusalem as Israeli capital would raise regional tensions

Source: Xinhua | 2017-12-05 04:03:34 | Editor: Zhou Xin

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Palestinians say the U.S. will set off "ticking bomb" if it recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moves US embassy to Jerusalem. (AFP Photo)

By Keren Setton

JERUSALEM, Dec. 4 (Xinhua) -- In a welcome move to some and a controversial move to others, U.S. President Donald Trump is reportedly expected to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital later this week.

Any such announcement has inflammatory potential in an already volatile region.

Israel has controlled the western part of Jerusalem since its inception in 1948. In 1967, after the Mideast war, Israel captured the eastern part of Jerusalem from Jordan and declared both parts its united capital.

The move was never recognized by the international community, including Israel's closest ally, the U.S..

The Palestinians see eastern Jerusalem as the future capital of their state.

the Israeli government are done largely in Jerusalem, the capital that no one recognizes.

Jerusalem is home to sites holy to Islam, Judaism and Christianity, making it a focal point for many people around the globe.

Now, in what seems to be an attempt to appease both Israel and his constituents on the evangelical right, Trump may recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital in order to cushion the blow on an undelivered election promise, transferring the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, another controversial move.

It is still unclear, however, whether the U.S. will make such a move, and if so, will it recognize both sides of Jerusalem as Israel's capital? Or just the western side?

"Trump is a friend of Israel and he thinks that recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and recognizing the historic links between the Jews and the city is the right thing to do," Prof. Efraim Inbar, President of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies, told Xinhua.

Inbar believed Trump will be "ambiguous" about what part of Jerusalem the U.S. will recognize.

"Nobody really disputes Israeli sovereignty over west Jerusalem," Inbar added. While there is a de-facto recognition of western Jerusalem as Israel's capital, this sovereignty remains unrecognized by the whole of the international community.

Up until now, both Israelis and Americans have repeatedly said that the status of Jerusalem needs to be determined in bilateral negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis.

American media has quoted U.S. Defense officials saying a new policy on Jerusalem would endanger American diplomatic missions worldwide, further highlighting how delicate the matter is.

On Sunday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas warned that such a move would jeopardize renewed American efforts to promote a deal between Palestinians and Israelis. These efforts come years after stalemate between the sides and have yet to materialize into anything meaningful or concrete.

The Palestinians have also warned of violence in response to any American move.

"The Palestinians...have always been threatening that it will be the end of the world and the end of the peace process and the beginning of war, but there is no peace process and the Middle East is a war zone anyway...so those threats don't really make any sense," Prof. Emmanuel Navon told Xinhua.

Navon is a professor of international relations at the Tel Aviv University and a fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies.

"I really do not believe a symbolic declaration from the U.S. government will make any difference in a region that is already falling apart," said Navon, referring to the political instability surrounding Israel, mainly in Syria and Lebanon. "This might be used as an excuse by Hamas (a Gaza-based Palestinian militant organization) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) for a surge in violence as it has done in the past," Navon added.

"Even if there will be some kind of wave of violence as a result of an American decision, it will eventually die down, it will not continue for long," said Prof. Inbar.

But any wave of violence, lengthy or not, will result in loss of life on both sides.

A group of about 25 Israeli activists who have held senior positions in the Israeli government in the past sent an urgent letter on Monday to Trump's senior advisor, Jason Greenblatt.

"(This) will further deepen the asymmetry between the two sides, severely harm the prospects for peace and could ignite the entire region. It could severely harm the prospects for peace for generations to come," the letter signed by former Israeli Ambassador Ilan Baruch, read.

In a statement released by PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) Secretary General ahead of an expected announcement, Saeb Erekat said the move would promote "international anarchy."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has remained silent on the issue in recent days.

While Israel enjoys improved relations with Egypt recently, Egyptian officials have reportedly also warned of the American move. The flurry of warnings from the Arab world mean they are taking the reports of Trump's intent seriously.

But it is highly unlikely that an American move will result in a severing of ties between the few Arab countries that currently maintain relations, official or not, with Israel.

"These relations are primarily based on interests...this will continue," Prof. Inbar told Xinhua.

In a region accustomed to the cyclical nature of waves of violence, an announcement by the American president may in fact lead to a temporary upsurge. It will add more fuel into an already boiling cauldron.

But with Israel and much of the world treating Jerusalem as its de facto capital, there will unlikely be significant change on the ground.

KEY WORDS: *Israel*

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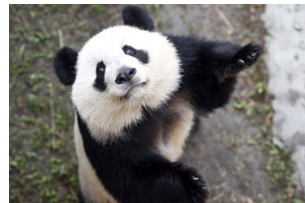
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