

## ICYMI: Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Jerusalem

- **2 Components to POTUS Announcement – At 1pm ET, Dec 6<sup>th</sup>**
  - 1) The President will recognize/say that the United States government recognizes that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.
    - Jerusalem has historical importance, both to the Jewish faith and to the location of majority of government import.
    - “In taking this action, President Trump fulfills a major campaign promise that had been made by a number of previous presidential candidates.”
    - There has been a lot of bipartisan support in Congress for this action.
      - “Including a 90 to 0 vote in the Senate last summer after the last waiver.”
    - The President is being an “honest-broker” by being honest about the fact that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.
      - “Also, bringing U.S. policy fundamentally in line with the will of the American people as expressed by the U.S. Congress.”
    - “The President came to the judgement that this was both the right time and the right step to take, specifically with respect to his hopes that a peace can be achieved.”
    - “This decision is taken with the full support of the President’s peace team.”
    - “This was a collaborative U.S. government position.”
  - 2) The President will direct the State Department to begin a process of moving the United States embassy from its current location in Tel Aviv to a site in Jerusalem.
    - The embassy will not be moving tomorrow.
    - “It will take some time to find a site, address security concerns, design a new facility, fund a new facility—working with Congress, obviously—and build it.”
      - But it will be done “with the minimal additional burden on American taxpayers.”
    - It is not an instantaneous process.
    - We don’t have a specific timetable at the moment.
      - “This will be a matter of some years.”
      - “It won’t be immediate, it won’t be months, it won’t be quick.”
      - “No embassy is constructed today anywhere in the world in shorter than three to four years.”
      - “A commonality that once an embassy begins the process of building that process moves through to completion.”
      - “This is the initiation of the construction of an embassy. Once it begins, the course is set.”



- **A:** “This announcement doesn't changes U.S. policy over the specific borders, dimensions, or any of that. All of that is going to be subject a final status agreement.”
  - **A:** “The decision the President will announce does not change anything with respect to those juridical issues.”
- **Q:** There has been a lot of disagreement from other world leaders, so how does this decision help advance U.S. policy interests and peace?
  - **A:** “For a long time, the United States position held that ambiguity or lack of acknowledgement or somehow would advance the prospect of peace.”
  - **A:** “We're 22 years in, and it seems clear now that the physical location of the American embassy is not material to a peace deal.”
  - **A:** “So, after having tried this for 22 years, an acknowledgement of reality seems like an important change.”
- **Q:** What are you hearing through the diplomatic channels?
  - **A:** “We will refer you to the Saudi or other foreign government to describe their position. But the President has had very detailed discussions with all of the leaders in question.”
  - **A:** “He’s heard out everyone’s views.”
- **Q:** Is this the last waiver President Trump is going to sign?
  - **A:** “I think he will have to sign the waiver for as long as the law remains on the books, and we cannot physically move the U.S. embassy. Otherwise, the State Department would suffer a loss of funding.”
  - **A:** “That is a problem we think of years rather than of a shorter period.”
  - POTUS has also asked us to work with Congress to try and modify the law so there’s not a waiver requirement in the meantime.
- **Q:** Has any party the President has spoken with said this is a deal breaker?
  - **A:** “It's fair to say all parties with whom the President spoke wish to remain engaged on a peace process on the quest for a regional peace.”
- **Q:** Why this decision now?
  - **A:** “It's a calendar date. December 4 was the requirement date for this.”
  - **A:** “He thinks, in a sense, not making this acknowledgement reality one of the central issues, a sort of taking it out so we can work on the core issues of the deal, will help advance peace.”
  - **A:** “He's encouraged by the progress that his peace team has made so far.”
- **Q:** Is the President going to be talking about concession to either the Palestinians or Jordanians to soften the blow of this?
  - **A:** “He does believe that the successful confidentiality of the talks thus far have been a major reason why they've progressed as well as they have.”
  - Short answer: In public, no he will not.

- **A:** “Nothing in this decision speaks to a final status resolution of the boundaries of sovereignty issues here.”
- **A:** “He knows what it is the Palestinians want. He's trying to reach out and find a way to achieve those goals.”
- **A:** “As I noted about the Temple Mount Haram al-Sharif, that the status quo there will be preserved and maintained. So nothing's going to change with those sites.”
- **A:** “So we are leaving space for the Palestinians, for this peace process to move forward. We're not touching on that.”
- **Q:** What does this mean for settlements in East Jerusalem? Is there any policy change?
  - **A:** “There's no change.”

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

---

Embargoed For Release Until 9:00 P.M. EST December 5, 2017

BACKGROUND BRIEFING  
BY SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS  
ON JERUSALEM

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

5:34 P.M. EST

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: All right. Reiterate the ground rules -- this is off camera, on background. We are three senior administration officials.

We are here to talk about the President's announcement tomorrow he will make regarding U.S. policy on Jerusalem. I think there's two core components.

First, the President will recognize, or he will say that the United States government recognizes that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. He views this and we view this as a recognition of reality, both historic reality that Jerusalem has been the capital of the Jewish people, the Jewish faith since ancient times; and modern reality that it has been the seat of government of all important -- not all, but nearly all of the Israeli government -- it's government ministries, its legislature, its supreme court, et cetera since the foundation of Israel in 1948.

And the second announcement that the President will make is he will direct the State Department to begin a process of moving the United States embassy from its current location in Tel Aviv to a site in Jerusalem.

That does not mean the embassy will move tomorrow; it is a practicable impossibility to move the embassy tomorrow. There are about 1,000 personnel in the embassy in Tel Aviv. There is no facility they can move into in Jerusalem, as of today. It will take some time to find a site, address security concerns, design a new facility, fund a new facility -- working with Congress, obviously -- and build it. So this is not an instantaneous process.

Therefore, the other question I think is probably all on your minds is what's going to happen with the waiver. The President will sign the waiver in order to avoid fairly significant cuts to State Department's funding that the law requires as a consequence.

So I think that's pretty much the broad contours of the announcement, but if my colleagues have --

Q Can you give us a timetable for moving it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He's not going to specify a timetable. But we are trying to set expectations and let people know that --

Q And what are those expectations?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- this will be a matter of some years. It won't be immediate, it won't be months, it won't be quick. It's going to take time to do all of the things that I outlined. And I'm sure my colleague can give you more detail. My colleague knows a lot more about about building embassies than I do.

But, you know, for instance, the United States was looking at moving out of Grosvenor Square in London for a long, long time. And I think that took something like eight years to get done and will be done in early 2018.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: So thanks. I'll just go through some of the details in addition to what my colleague said and just reiterate those.

So tomorrow, on December 6, 2017, President Trump will recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In taking this action, President Trump fulfills a major campaign promise that had been made by a number of previous presidential candidates.

President Trump's action enjoys broad, bipartisan support in Congress, which has voted the Jerusalem Recognition Act into law in 10 successive congresses, including a 90 to 0 vote in the Senate last summer after the last waiver.

As my colleague noted, the President has instructed the State Department to develop a plan to relocate the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, with the minimum additional burden on American taxpayers.

While President Trump recognizes that the status of Jerusalem is a highly-sensitive issue, he does not think it will be resolved by ignoring the simple truth that Jerusalem is home to Israel's legislature, its supreme court, the prime minister, and, as such, is the capital of Israel.

President Trump remains committed to achieving a lasting peace agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and is optimistic that peace can be achieved. Delaying the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has done nothing to achieve peace for more than two decades.

President Trump is prepared to support a two-state solution to the dispute between the Israelis and Palestinians if agreed to by the two parties.

President Trump also recognizes that the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem are subject to final status negotiations of such an agreement.

President Trump reaffirms U.S. support for the status quo at the Temple Mount Haram al-Sharif.

There has been a thorough, productive interagency process on this issue that has included the Cabinet and department principals and the President. The Trump administration is fully coordinated in supporting this historic action by the President and has engaged broadly with both our congressional and international partners on this issue.

Departments and agencies have developed and implemented a robust security plan to ensure the safety of our citizens and assets in the greater Middle East.

With that, I'll ask my colleague if he has any additional comments.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, I think we'll take your questions, which will probably be more useful.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Steve.

Q Two things. Will the embassy be built in West Jerusalem, or have you decided yet?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We have not. A part of the directive the President has given the State Department is to find an appropriate site, so we don't have any sites to announce at this time.

Q And then there was some widespread alarm expressed today in the Middle East. How concerned are you about that? How concerned are you about the possibility of unrest and violence over this decision?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We're obviously concerned about the protection of U.S. citizens, U.S. officials anywhere in the world, including the Middle East.

All the appropriate agencies, the U.S. government, including security agencies, have been involved in this decision, have provided their assessment of the situation. We'll act appropriately on those assessments to provide the degree of protection we believe necessary.

Olivier.

Q Thank you, guys. Thanks for doing the briefing. What is President's message tomorrow to the Palestinians, particularly in regard to their aspirations to have their own capital in East Jerusalem?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think his message tomorrow is the same as his message has been to the Palestinians since he took office, in his meetings with President Abbas here at the White House, with President Abbas in Jerusalem in May -- or sorry, in -- overseas in May. I don't remember exactly when that meeting took place, now that you mention it.

And on a phone call today, he very strongly reiterated his absolute commitment to the United States facilitating a peace deal between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and his belief that such a deal is within reach and can be achieved.

He couldn't have been clearer or more forthright, and he has confidence in the team he has put together to work toward a peace agreement, and is optimistic.

Q But on the other question of the capital, though. What's his position?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, as we have said, this announcement doesn't change U.S. policy over the specific borders, dimensions, or any of that. All of that is going to be subject a final status agreement.

Yes.

Q In terms of East Jerusalem, the United States has said that it's occupied Palestinian territories for decades. Does the United States still believe that East Jerusalem has occupied Palestinian territory?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The decision the President will announce does not change anything with respect to those juridical issues.

Q Nadia Bilbassy, with Al Arabiya. You've been dealing with this issue since the Bush Administration, and you know that Jerusalem is a final status --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: You're being kind, with the Bush administration. (Laughter.)

Q So since Jerusalem is a final status issue, how can the Palestinians and the Arab states, who the President talked to today, believe that (inaudible) can be an honest broker in the peace process? And how can this not jeopardize the final status, considering the Palestinians already called for three days of rage starting from tomorrow?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Look, the Palestinian Authority, like any other government, is going to have to take its own decisions, make its own announcements. But what we can speak to is what the President is doing.

The President is affirming a reality. A historic and current reality. He is not taking a decision that affects any of the boundaries of sovereignty. Those issues will have to be discussed during permanent status negotiations.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Just let me add one thing. You used the phrase "honest broker." I mean, when we say acknowledging reality, that's fundamentally what the President is doing. The United States policy is going to be honest about the fact -- which is now, in the terms of modern Israel, a seven-decade-old fact -- that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. And also, bringing U.S. policy fundamentally in line with the will of the American people as expressed by the U.S. Congress.

Q Thanks. So, the President has heard this, you know, disagreement from allies in the region, and warnings from allies in the region, and from the President of France -- I don't want to name all of them -- but there are a lot of world leaders who have warned against this.

How does this decision fundamentally advance U.S. foreign policy interests, and how does it advance the peace process rather than stymie it as these other world leaders have warned?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President believes this is a recognition of reality, and that this issue, which does not touch on any of those boundaries -- aspects of sovereignty, which do have to be resolved in the final status negotiations -- are not affected. But it makes clear we affirm a reality.

Q That doesn't answer the question. How does that advance U.S. foreign policy interests, and how does it advance the peace process?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think we can answer that in two ways. One is what my colleague just said, which I would just reiterate. Going forward on the basis of a truth that is undeniable -- it's just a fact.

And to state it differently, a little bit closer to what I said earlier: For a long time, the United States position held that ambiguity or lack of acknowledgement or somehow would advance the prospect of peace.

That view might have been reasonable at certain circumstances, at certain times, but it's certainly been tried. It's been tried now -- I think the Embassy Act was passed in 1995. So we're 22 years in, and it seems clear now that the physical location of the American embassy is not material to a peace deal. It's just not -- it's not an impediment to peace fundamentally, and it's not a facilitator of peace.

So, after having tried this for 22 years, an acknowledgement of reality seems like an important change.

Yes, Major.

Q Related to that, I mean, obviously you're flipping the script because this had been, historically, on a bipartisan basis, reserved as a final status issue.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, wait, historically on a bipartisan basis since 1995, the bipartisan majority of the U.S. Congress has said United States policy should be --

Q Well, but, administrations from the White House have taken that symbolic vote from Congress but also applied it in a sense to say we're going to hold this to the end. You're clearly flipping that script.

Related to the answer you just gave, do you believe this will create a new reality, a new understanding of this administration's approach and that will jar things loose or accelerate a peace process? I mean, you clearly believe there will be some advantage to this, setting this in motion -- this clarity, this reality. What is it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President and his peace team have had many, many discussions with all of the players in the Middle East, not just the parties directly concerned with this peace process, but with Arab states, regional states, international partners.

The President came to the judgement that this was both the right time and the right step to take, specifically with respect to his hopes that a peace can be achieved.

Q On that point, if I could. Publicly, we're hearing protestations from the Saudis and from the Jordanians and from Macron and other people like that. But we hear that quietly, through diplomatic channels, particularly with the Saudis, you're hearing very different things. What are you hearing through the diplomatic channels?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: John, you know the answer on this. We will refer you to the Saudi or other foreign government to describe their position. But the President has had very detailed discussions with all of the leaders in question.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I would say, yes, he's heard out everyone's views. But he's also gone out of his way to express to America's Arab allies and partners in the region that they have a vital role to play, and that he hopes and expects -- and has been encouraged to large extent by many of their actions and statements -- that they're going to work alongside us as facilitators toward peace.

Q What does the pending ascendance of Mohammed bin Salman to the throne in Saudi Arabia have to do with the timing?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It is not related to this issue.

Q Is this the last waiver the President is going to sign? Or can we expect him to sign it in --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think he will have to sign the waiver for as long as the law remains on the books, and we cannot physically move the U.S. embassy. Otherwise, the State Department would suffer a loss of funding.

Q So it might be years then?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He's also asked us to work with Congress to try to modify the law so that there's not a waiver requirement in the meantime -- but until that changes.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: To flip the answer, if there isn't a congressional change that mandates a six-month waiver, the current text of the law requires a waiver every six months until the embassy is opened. And that is a problem we think of years rather than of a shorter period.

Q So again, has anyone said that they are going to walk away in the extensive discussions you've had with the leaders -- Palestinians, other Arab authorities, and Israel? Has anyone said, hey, look, this is a deal-breaker, we're walking away?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think it's fair to say all parties with whom the President spoke wish to remain engaged on a peace process on the quest for a regional peace.

Q Has anyone said that it is going to factor into their decision in the future in how they present themselves in the peace process?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me just answer that this way: I think it's fair -- I can speak for all of us when I say we don't necessarily see an upside for any party or any facilitators,

like our Arab and Muslim partners, who aren't directly parties from walking away. Walking away doesn't advance the cause of peace. So if everybody wants peace, and we think everybody wants peace, everybody wants an agreement, the way to achieve it is to remain engaged.

Q Okay, so you mentioned that you think it will probably be a case of years not just, say, months, and that this will have to be signed again and again. Now, the question comes --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Absent a change to the law, yes.

Q But you're saying, you're going to move the embassy, but that it will take probably years, correct?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Correct.

Q Right. So how are you going to inform us of updates as to the progress on doing that? And as far as years, say -- President Trump has a four-year term. So if it's not moved within that four-year term, it could all be reversed with the next administration, right? So do you think it will happen at least within that term?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: As a practical matter, no embassy is constructed today anywhere in the world in shorter than three to four years -- no embassy. And that's to meet the necessary requirements for security, resiliency, safety, and simple accommodation of the staff. And that's going to be the case here as well. It is, in my experience, a commonality that once an embassy begins the process of building that process moves through to completion.

Q All right, so you don't see this getting changed if it takes beyond, say --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: This is the initiation of the construction of an embassy. Once it begins, the course is set.

Q And then for part of the question were, how are you doing to update us, as to the progress of that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Typically, we do provide updates on the contracting process, on how construction is moving ahead. We get many queries on embassies around the world. Some of our bigger projects -- the embassy in Baghdad, the embassy in Beijing, more recently the embassy in London, which will open in January. All of these things, our office of building operations speaks to when inquired.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Jessica.

Q Thanks for doing this, first of all. Can you talk a little bit more about the impact of the decision -- the timing of the decision? Because you said, that the President believes this is the

right time. If it is the right time, why is it the right time, right now? And what is the -- does it give U.S. interests an advantage to get any closer to getting these two parties back together? Does it play into a strategy?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: You know, I think -- repeating myself a bit here -- but he believed that moving forward on the basis of any acknowledged truth and acknowledged reality would, is a change, a policy of ambiguity, which hasn't worked in 22 years.

And that, he has said too that he thinks, in a sense, not making this acknowledgement reality one of the central issues, a sort of taking it out so we can work on the core issues of the deal, will help advance peace.

I think that's fundamentally where his opinion has been on this subject all along, including before he became President.

And he's encouraged by the progress that his peace team has made so far. I know a lot of progress isn't visible. I think one of the things that I know he believes, and I know the peace team believes, it's partly because that progress is not visible that they've been able to make so much progress. But that there are things happening that the parties, the people directly in the talks, know about. A lot of the rest don't -- people around the world don't know about, that will become known when the time is right. And that's one of the reasons why the President is still very optimistic.

Q So is that why it's now? Is it --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Just remember, it's a calendar date. December 4 was the requirement date for this.

Q Kind of acknowledging how this is likely have you received, I'm wondering if the President is going to say or announce anything tomorrow that could be seen as sort of a concession either to the Palestinians or Jordanians, or boarder Arab world -- something to, sort of, soften the blow of this?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think he's trying to keep the give-and-take between the parties -- and whatever concessions are made, whatever provisions are made -- private, for the reasons I just said.

Q So there are ones, but you're not going to share them?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, we're not really going it no -- like I said, we're not going into the details of what they're talking about. Specifically, because -- yeah, because I think he does believe that the successful confidentiality of the talks thus far have been a major reason why they've progressed as well as they have.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We talked to you before. Nothing in this decision speaks to a final status resolution of the boundaries of sovereignty issues here. That's point one. That addresses a whole galaxy of concerns. Same answer: It doesn't speak to those issues. Those are final status discussions, as they have been, as they will remain in the President's view.

Secondly, the President very much wants to see a success in this peace process. The President understands Palestinian aspirations. He's heard it directly; his peace team has heard that directly. He knows what it is the Palestinians want. He's trying to reach out and find a way to achieve those goals.

With respect to this, we are trying to make clear what this decision does, recognition of reality, current and historical, simple affirmation of that. But secondly: Where we are on sensitive issues. This doesn't change the status quo with respect to the holy sites in Jerusalem. It's a very sensitive issue, as all of you who follow the events of this summer know. Doesn't touch on that, at all.

So we are leaving space for the Palestinians, for this peace process to move forward. We're not touching on that.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: So if I could add to that though. Just, as I mentioned -- I'll just reiterate it. That President Trump prepared to support a two-state solution to dispute between the Israelis and the Palestinians, if agreed to by the two parties. I think you're likely to hear an acknowledgement of that.

And then, as I noted about the Temple Mount Haram al-Sharif, that the status quo there will be preserved and maintained. So nothing's going to change with those sites. So I think you'll see those, and those are intended to reassure some of the people that are listening carefully to that.

Q Tara McKelvey, BBC. Can you tell us anything about how the announcement will be made tomorrow? Even the timing or the setting?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think Sarah already clarified that earlier. But if she didn't, we're tracking a 1 p.m. speech by the President.

Yeah, I think we got to go, so last question.

Q Two quick questions. One is that this idea of signing the waiver because of the construction concerns -- experts said that you can just place a sign on the existing American consulate and call it an embassy. Why not just do that?

And the second is, I just want to confirm: If you're saying that this is getting rid of this, this is just acknowledging reality, does Jared Kushner and his peace team agree that this helps with what they've been working on for the past year?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: This decision is taken with the full support of the President's peace team. That's the second part of your question.

The first part is, today's world -- whether we're dealing with the Americas, Africa, Asia, Middle East -- we don't just put a plaque on a door and open a mission. There are major security, structural concerns and very, very strict guidelines anywhere in the world that have to be followed before that flag goes up or that plaque goes on. Jerusalem is no exception to those rules.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Okay, this will really, truly be the last one. Yeah.

Q Michael Shure, with i24NEWS. Two quick ones. Secretary Tillerson, has he weighed in on this in the past few days?

And secondly, the State Department security arm was told to prepare for violent protests -- or possibly violent protests. What sort of preparations are put in place? How did that impact these discussions?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think they've already said the secretary's entire team, the principals involved in this decision all had an opportunity to discuss and were consulted on this decision. This was a collaborative U.S. government position.

Secondly, we've also noted all of the security agencies of the U.S. government, including Diplomatic Security at State, are of course consulted on any decision like this and take appropriate actions, as they believe necessary, to protect both American officials and American citizens abroad. Not unique here.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Okay. Thanks, everybody.

Q What does this mean for settlements in East Jerusalem? Does that change anything, as far as U.S. policy on that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There's no change.

Q And is the President still committed to a two-state solution?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: If that's what the parties want, we support it.

Q But if Netanyahu doesn't support it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: If the two parties wish this as an outcome, we support it.

Q But if Netanyahu doesn't support it?

Q Can you confirm that some U.S. troops are being moved as a precautionary measure?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I have to refer you to DOD.

END 5:58 P.M. EST