

Jerusalem fallout takes a turn for the worse as Trump threatens to cut aid

The Arab Weekly staff

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Palestinian officials' disagreement with the United States over its decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital took a turn for the worse following the Trump administration's threat to cut aid to the Palestinians and the Israeli parliament's approval of a measure requiring a supermajority to relinquish control over any part of the holy city.

In a tweet, US President Donald Trump threatened to cut aid to the Palestinian territories. The move was in response to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas saying the United States could no longer play a role in the Middle East peace process after its stance on Jerusalem.

"We pay the Palestinians HUNDRED OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS a year and get no appreciation or respect," Trump tweeted on January 2. "With the Palestinians no longer willing to talk peace, why should we make any of these massive future payments to them?"

The United States reportedly provides the Palestinian territories with an annual average of \$400 million. Israel receives more than \$3 billion in US military aid per year.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said the United States plans to stop funding the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees.

"The president has basically said he doesn't want to give any additional funding or stop funding until the Palestinians agree to come back to the negotiation table," Haley said. The Palestinians said that they were not against negotiations but accused Trump of siding with Israel and flouting international law.

The talks should be "based on international laws and resolutions that have recognised an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital," Abbas's spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, told



International crisis. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas talks during a meeting in the West Bank city of Ramallah, last September. (AFP)

Agence France-Presse. "Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the state of Palestine and it is not for sale for gold or billions."

In a statement, senior Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi said Palestinians "will not be blackmailed." She added that "President Trump has sabotaged our search for peace, freedom and justice. Now he dares to blame the Palestinians for the consequences of his own irresponsible actions!"

The tensions appear to have postponed an expected visit by US Vice-President Mike Pence to the region. "The visit is not included in our provision of scheduled visits of high-

● **Trump's envoy to the United Nations said the United States plans to stop funding the UNRWA.**

level dignitaries in January," said Israeli Foreign Ministry Spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon.

Israeli officials voiced support for the US president.

"We are dealing with a president who says what he thinks clearly and does not resort to diplomatic convolutions that mean nothing," Israeli Culture and Sport Minister Miri Regev told Israel's Army Radio.

Abbas's stance of rejecting US mediation is seen as being in

Israel's favour.

"Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has accomplished one of his most cherished policy goals: Finally driving a massive wedge between the United States and the Palestinians," Anshel Pfeffer wrote in Haaretz.

"As prime minister (initially from 1996-99 and then from 2009), Netanyahu had to contend with the new realities of the post-Oslo era... but every engagement of his with the Palestinians was slow, grudging and through gritted teeth," Pfeffer wrote. "[The Palestinians] have given Netanyahu what he's always wanted for Christmas."

The Israeli parliament passed a measure that bars the government from ceding Israeli sovereignty over any part of Jerusalem without approval of at least 80 of the Knesset's 120 members. The law is mostly symbolic as it can be overturned with a simple majority but it antagonised the Palestinians.

"This vote clearly indicates that the Israeli side has officially declared the end of the so-called political process and has already begun to impose dictatorial and de facto policies," Abbas's office said in a statement.

The amendment came just days after Israel's ruling Likud Party's central committee unanimously endorsed a resolution calling for the annexation of West Bank settlements.

Although the central committee is only an advisory body, the move is considered another step by Likud to reject the idea of establishing an independent Palestinian state as part of a future peace deal.

"To those who have long contended that Netanyahu's Israel will never allow a Palestinian state, certainly not one with a capital in Jerusalem, and that Israel's goal is permanent, comprehensive dominion over all the West Bank and East Jerusalem with no negotiations with Palestinians over equality of rights or self-determination, the answer came this week. The answer was – 'You were right all along,'" wrote Haaretz columnist Bradley Burston.

Viewpoint



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Hamas's deeply troubling stance regarding Hezbollah

Saudi Arabia has persuaded most of the 22 members of the Arab League to declare the Lebanese Shia group Hezbollah a terrorist organisation. Lebanon and Iraq, countries almost totally controlled by Hezbollah's benefactor Iran, snubbed the meeting but it was not enough to douse a motion condemning the group.

Hezbollah supplied the Yemeni rebel group the Houthis with an Iranian-made rocket that they fired at a civilian airport in Riyadh in early November, the latest in a long line of provocations in support of violence by the Shia group.

Rather than stand in solidarity with the victims of Hezbollah's violence, Musa Abu Marzouq, a senior member of the Palestinian militant movement Hamas, tweeted his condemnation of the vote. Abu Marzouq said: "Hezbollah is not a terrorist organisation and if that categorisation continued then we [groups against Israel] will all be branded the same way. The stance of all [Arab states] should be to reorient the Arabian political compass towards Palestine and Jerusalem."

Hamas issued a formal news release, stating that it "strongly rejects" the designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation and that such a designation

should "solely be handed down onto the Israeli occupation."

The group blasted the decision to brand Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation and lamented the move as something that would lead to further divisions.

Hamas's stance regarding Hezbollah is deeply troubling and needs to be called out for its apparent support for an organisation that has been involved in the sectarian killing of hundreds of thousands. It is deeply troubling that Hamas says Israel is the entity that "solely" deserves to be described as terrorist. This gives a clear indication that the Palestinian group's definition of terrorism is highly selective and minimises the suffering of those around the world who have faced great loss at the hands of ultra-nationalist, religious or other ideological terrorist groups.

Hamas's credentials as an "Islamic" movement are also placed into doubt. One of the methods Hamas uses to garner international support is marketing itself as "Islamic" compared to Fatah and other factions of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) that are nationalist or leftist in outlook. Drawing on an ideology rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas's official name is the "Islamic Resistance Movement," which tugs at the heartstrings of more than 1 bil-

lion Muslims worldwide who view Palestine as sacred and holy land.

How can Hamas be described as Islamic when it is largely silent on what Hezbollah has done across the Arab and Islamic world?

Half a million Syrians have lost their lives and Hezbollah has played a key role in causing those deaths. In Iraq, millions of lives have been affected by Iran's employment of Hezbollah as a template organisation that can train, equip and sometimes lead fellow Iraqi Shia jihadist groups. One need only look at the logos of these various organisations to see the iconic symbol of a hand clutching a Kalashnikov that belongs to the Lebanese group and to feel Hezbollah's influence.

Are these Arab civilians not considered "Islamic" enough to warrant Hamas's sympathies or are Hamas's vaunted religious morals and credentials expeditiously thrown out of the window when pragmatic considerations and loyalty to Iran are on the table? Hamas and its supporters should be ashamed of themselves for prioritising their suffering over that of countless millions of others across the region, whether in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia or Lebanon.

Hamas called upon Arabs to reorient their political compass to focus solely upon the Palestin-

ian cause. There can be no doubt that the Palestinians have suffered under decades of Israeli oppression but Hamas's single-minded focus on Palestine at the expense of everyone else is madness and their propensity to declare anyone not with them as traitors to the Palestinian cause is despicable.

By Hamas's calculus, it is perfectly acceptable for it to work with Iran, a country that has single-handedly incinerated half of the Arab world, but anyone who disagrees with it or its methods is somehow a Zionist conspirator.

Rather than lecturing other Arabs, Hamas should focus on making life easier for those under its care in Gaza. Hamas should clamp down on the corruption within its own government and institutions, which are apparently "Islamic."

Hamas also should focus on forging unity with the other Palestinian factions, rather than constantly playing a tit-for-tat game with them while hypocritically denigrating other Arabs for being "divided."

Finally, Hamas should live up to its claims of being Islamic and have the moral fibre to put its pragmatism aside and call Iran and Hezbollah out for their mass killings of fellow Muslims.

Until then, we can only say one thing: Shame on you, Hamas.

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