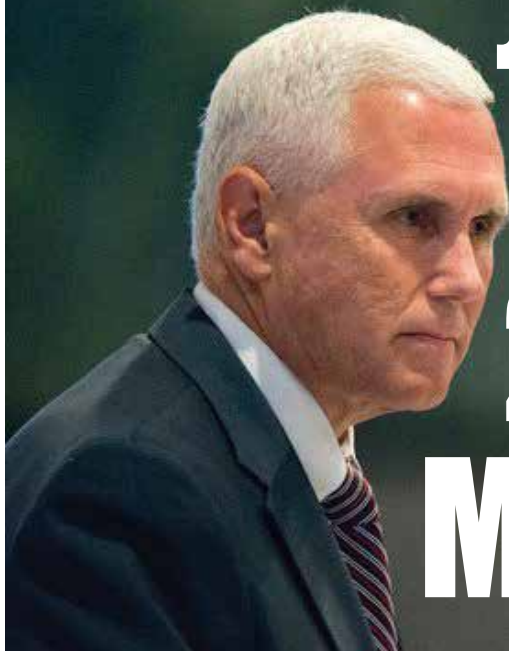


Embassy in Jerusalem by end of 2019, says Mike Pence



Jerusalem

The U.S. Embassy in Israel will move to Jerusalem by the end of 2019, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said in a speech to the Israeli parliament yesterday.

President Donald Trump last month recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and said he would move the U.S. Embassy there - dismaying Palestinians who claim the eastern part of the city and angering Arab states across the region.

"In the weeks ahead, our administration will advance its plan to open the United States Embassy in Jerusalem - and that United States Embassy will open before the end of next year," Pence said.

"Jerusalem is Israel's capital - and, as such, President Trump has directed the State Department to immediately begin preparations to move the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem."

The speech was briefly disrupted, at the outset, by Israeli Arab parliament members who held up protest signs in Arabic and English, reading "Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine", and were ejected by ushers.

Pence responded to the fracas by saying with a smile: "It is deeply

humbling for me to stand before this vibrant democracy."

Responding to Pence's speech, Nabil Abu Rdainah, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said: "If the United States wanted to play a role of a mediator in the peace process it must be a fair mediator and it must abide by (international) resolutions."

Palestinians seek East Jerusalem, including the walled Old City with its holy sites, as the capital of their own future state. Israel, which annexed East Jerusalem after capturing it in 1967 in a move not internationally recognised, regards all of the city as its "eternal and indivisible capital".

Pence, who visited Egypt and Jordan before travelling to Israel, said that with its policy shift on Jerusalem, "the United States has chosen fact over fiction - and fact is the only true foundation for a just and lasting peace".

It was the highest-ranking visit by a U.S. official to the region since Trump's Jerusalem declaration and gave Pence and Netanyahu an opportunity to highlight their own warm relationship for a conservative Christian American community that serves as a power base for the U.S. administration.

Abbas wins EU backing for capital in E. Jerusalem



European High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini shakes hands with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Brussels, Belgium

Brussels

The European Union's foreign policy chief assured President Mahmoud Abbas at a meeting in Brussels on Monday that the EU supported his ambition to have East Jerusalem as capital of a Palestinian state.

Abbas in return repeated his call for East Jerusalem as

capital as he urged the EU member nations to recognize a state of Palestine immediately, arguing that this would not disrupt negotiations with Israel on a peace settlement for the region.

Mogherini, in what appeared to be a veiled reference to U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as

capital of Israel, called on those involved in the process to speak and act "wisely", with a sense of responsibility.

Abbas made no reference to Trump's move on Jerusalem or to comments on the issue made on Monday in Jerusalem by U.S. Vice President Mike Pence. (Reuters)

Iran not respecting UN on missiles: France

Brussels

France's foreign minister accused Iran yesterday of not respecting part of a U.N. resolution that calls on Tehran to refrain from work on ballistic missiles designed to carry nuclear warheads.

Speaking on arrival at a European foreign ministers meeting in Brussels, Jean-Yves Le Drian also said the 28 ministers would reiterate their concerns over Iran's activities in Yemen, Lebanon and Syria, which he described as destabilizing.

"We will also have the opportunity of underlining our firmness on Iran's compliance with United Nations

Resolution 2231, which limits access to ballistic capacity and which Iran does not respect," Le Drian said. Under the U.N. resolution enshrining the 2015 nuclear deal with Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, Iran is "called upon" to refrain from work on ballistic missiles designed to deliver nuclear weapons for up to 8 years.

Le Drian on Sunday said he would travel to Iran in March and that France had begun talks with Tehran to discuss its missile programme.

With U.S. President Donald Trump warning of a last chance for "the worst deal ever negotiated", Britain, France



French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian arrives at the Elysee Palace in Paris

and Germany have begun talks to address Iran's missile tests and its regional influence. (Reuters)

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