

# IND Weekly

## Israel News Digest Weekly



Christian Friends of Israel

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# Will They Really Move the US Embassy THIS time?

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday it would be “great” if US President-elect Donald Trump made good on his campaign pledge to move the US embassy to Jerusalem. Netanyahu, who was visiting Azerbaijan, was asked how he responded to a comment by Trump’s senior aide Kellyanne Conway, who said on Monday moving the embassy to Israel’s capital was a “very big priority.” Netanyahu answered with one word: “great.”

The comment followed reports that some Israeli security and diplomatic officials are worried about the consequences of an immediate relocation of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv, with fears of adverse reactions from the Arab world and on the streets of Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. Trump’s transition team has begun exploring the logistics of moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv, and checking into sites for its intended new location. Israel’s Foreign Ministry has already gotten involved in the matter, with officials in Jerusalem checking into when a possible site for the embassy, in an area that includes the Diplomat Hotel in Jerusalem’s Talpiot neighborhood, would be available.



*Diplomat Hotel - Jerusalem*

The Trump team’s advance work on moving the embassy is being conducted without coordination with the US State Department, and officials there “deeply dislike the idea,” the report said. The US government purchased the land on which the Diplomat Hotel sits in 2014, but the hotel itself remains privately owned and leased out to the Immigrant Absorption Ministry. It is home to some 500 mainly elderly immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The building would not be available until 2020, Immigrant Absorption Ministry officials have reportedly told their Foreign Ministry colleagues in recent days. The Diplomat Hotel area adjoins the existing US Consulate compound in Talpiot, and has therefore been considered a potentially logical site for the embassy should it move, but it is not the only potential site.

On Monday afternoon, Trump’s senior aide Conway said moving the embassy was a “very big priority for this president-elect, Donald Trump.” Conway told conservative talk radio host Hugh Hewitt, in a lengthy interview discussing Trump’s transition to the White House: “He made it very clear during the campaign, and as president-elect, I’ve heard him repeat it several times privately, if not publicly.”

During the 2016 election, Trump pledged to end a longstanding White House policy to perpetually defer a 1995 Congressional decision to recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital and move the embassy there. “It is something that our friend Israel, a great friend in the Middle East, would appreciate and something that a lot of Jewish-Americans have expressed their preference for,” Conway said. “It is a great move. It is an easy move to do based on how much he talked about that in the debates and in the sound bites.” She went on to say that Trump’s commitment to Israel would be an integral aspect of his administration’s policies, along with the domestic agendas that he emphasized in his campaign. “People think it’s just marriage, abortion or religious liberties, and of course it’s about all that, but it’s also about a strong Middle East and about protecting Israel,” she said.

“Evangelical Christians always have Israel at the top of their list when you ask what’s most important to them.” Nearly two weeks ago, Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman played down the centrality of moving the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, telling a gathering of the Saban Forum in Washington DC, “It’s very important, but we have other issues.” He added: “We’ve seen this promise [from US presidential candidates] in every election... We will wait and we will see, but I think [Trump’s statement] is a strong public commitment,” he said. But he stressed that “what is really crucial for us is to meet with a new administration about all our common policy, not just one issue – not only one point, like the American embassy.”

Several members of the Israeli coalition have hailed the election of Trump as representing the best opportunity of seeing the US relocate its embassy to Jerusalem, and thus signaling recognition of Israeli claims to the city. Earlier this month, US President Barack Obama renewed a presidential waiver that again delayed plans to relocate the embassy for another six months. In keeping with every other presidential administration over the last 20 years, Obama cited “national security interests” in waiving Congress’s 1995 decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and move the embassy there. Every president since Bill Clinton has cited national security in presidential waivers signed every six months that have postponed the embassy’s relocation.

The US has been reluctant to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel, and the CIA World Fact Book notes that “while Israel proclaimed Jerusalem as its capital in 1950, the international community does not recognize it as such; the US, like all other countries, maintains its embassy in Tel Aviv-Yafo.” The most often cited argument against Washington recognizing Jerusalem as the capital and moving its embassy, is that such a move should only come after the successful conclusion of an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. The status of Jerusalem is subject to bilateral negotiations, diplomats generally argue, and relocating the embassy as a gesture to Israel before a final-status agreement is signed would greatly anger Palestinians and the larger Arab world, sending an already moribund peace process to its certain death.

But Trump, who campaigned with the promise to do things differently, could throw the longstanding policy out of the window. During a March address to AIPAC, Trump said he intended to “move the American embassy to the eternal capital of the Jewish people, Jerusalem.” In a television interview that month, Trump said it would happen fairly quickly.

However, shortly after Trump’s November 8 victory, Walid Phares, one of his foreign policy advisers, appeared to walk back the pledge to relocate the embassy. “Many presidents of the United States have committed to do that, and [Trump] said as well that he will do that, but he will do it under consensus,” Phares said, causing some confusion. He later clarified that he meant “consensus at home,” yet what he means by that is still somewhat murky, as there is broad bipartisan support in Congress for moving the embassy. Earlier this year, Republican senators proposed legislation that would force the president to change the longstanding policy and move the US embassy. (Based on *Times of Israel* article, December 13, 2016)

Thus, although it’s not a done deal, there seems more likelihood under a Trump presidency that the Embassy will actually be moved this time, to **Israel’s capital, Jerusalem**, as it should have been a long time ago.



***“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels” (Psalm 122:6-7, NIV).***

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