

Trump will begin process to move U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, officials say

WASHINGTON — President Trump will announce Wednesday that he is beginning the process of moving the American Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, one of the most consequential foreign policy decisions of his presidency so far.

The move – mandated by Congress but waived for national security reasons for 22 years – could potentially complicate peace efforts in the Middle East. The Palestinian Authority and rest of the Arab world opposes the move, but the Israeli government would welcome the acknowledgment of Jerusalem as its capital — something no other nation has done.

The plan, outlined to reporters Tuesday night by three senior administration officials on condition of anonymity ahead of a formal announcement, is still in its early stages. It could still take years to find a site for the new embassy, get funding, and build and secure the facility, the officials said. There are about 1,000 U.S. diplomatic personnel at the current U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv, with a smaller existing consulate in Jerusalem.

Until the new embassy opens, the officials said, Trump will continue to waive the Jerusalem Embassy Act. That 1995 law that requires the president to move the embassy to Jerusalem, or else give Congress a notice every six months that it's not in the national security interest of the United States to do so.

It's that waiver forcing Trump's hand this week. Trump waived the embassy move in June; his second waiver was due on Monday.

Trump, who prides himself on his negotiating skills, has been seeking what he calls "one of the toughest deals of all" – an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that would finally end decades of failed and frustrating diplomacy.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity ahead of Trump's official announcement, said the president would portray the move as an

acknowledgement of a historical and political fact: That Jerusalem has always been Israel's capital city and seat of government.

Yet Jerusalem is a major point in controversy: While Israel sees Jerusalem as its undivided, "eternal" capital, the Palestinians also claim east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, and no other country has its Israeli embassy in Jerusalem. Israel captured east Jerusalem in 1967 and later annexed it.

In his address from the White House Wednesday, Trump will also signal to the Arab world that he remains committed to the Middle East peace process, the officials said. Trump will say he's still open to a two-state solution that would have Israel and Palestine coexist as separate nations, and that existing borders should be respected until a final agreement.

More: Trump pushes for Middle East peace, 'one of the toughest deals of all'

More: Jerusalem has history of many conquests, surrenders

More: Why declaring Jerusalem as Israel's capital could cause a furor on the Middle East

Trump called Israeli and Palestinian leaders on Tuesday ahead of the announcement.

The Palestinian Authority said Trump told President Mahmoud Abbas that he would move the embassy, and that Abbas warned him the decision could derail the Middle East peace process.

Yet Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Tuesday that Trump was "pretty solid in his thinking at this point."

European allies have begun lining up against the move. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met Tuesday with European leaders in Belgium, where the status of Jerusalem was a key question.

"A way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both states so that the aspiration of both parties can be fulfilled," said European Union High Representative Federica Mogherini.

More: Palestinians, Arab League warn U.S. not to recognize Jerusalem as Israeli

capital

More: Kushner talks Middle East peace Sunday, not special counsel investigation

Source: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/12/06/trump-move-u-s-embassy-israel-jerusalem/919927001/>

[Disclaimer]