

Trump's new embassy opens in Jerusalem - Gaza suffers most horrific day of violence for four years

Tuesday 15 May 2018, by [BALOUSHA Hazem](#), [BEAUMONT Peter](#), [BESNOIST Chloé](#), [FOX Tessa](#), [HOLMES Oliver](#), [KHOUDARY Hind](#), [MASARWA Lubna](#), [Middle East Eye \(MEE\)](#) (Date first published: 14 May 2018).

Contents

- [Defiance, then death: Gaza](#)
- [Israel: Trump's new embassy](#)
- [Israel condemned over Gaza](#)
- ['Burn them, shoot them, \(...\)](#)
- ['This is our land': US embassy](#)

Defiance, then death: Gaza suffers most horrific day of violence for four years

Scores of Palestinians killed by Israeli fire while taking part in 'Great March of Return'.

Amid the wail of sirens and the urgent to and fro of ambulances from the front line, Gaza's hospitals struggled on Monday to cope with the influx of dead and wounded after Israeli forces opened fire on Palestinian protesters.

Witnesses described morgues filling up and a sense of panic as hundreds of relatives converged on hospitals seeking news.

Among the 40,000 Palestinians who flocked to Gaza's border fence, it was clear to many that the day would end with death.

"Today is the big day when we will cross the fence and tell Israel and the world we will not accept being occupied for ever," said Ali, a science teacher who declined to give his last name. "Many may get martyred today, so many, but the world will hear our message: occupation must end."

But after weeks of similar protests in which at least 40 Palestinians have died, the violence at Monday's "Great March of Return" - coinciding with the controversial ceremony in Jerusalem to mark the relocation of the US embassy - was shocking even by the standards of the recent demonstrations.

Within the space of a few hours, at least 55 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire, including five minors, in the single most deadly day in Gaza since the end of the last war in 2014.

In line with previous protests in recent weeks that have resulted in dozens of Palestinian fatalities, there were no reports of any dead or injured on the Israeli side.

It was soon clear that repeated calls on Israel to show restraint were being swept away by volleys of

teargas and live bullets, with most of the casualties concentrated in the southern Gaza towns of Khan Younis and Rafah.

The violence began as it would continue. In one area, about 150 metres from the border fence, reporters watched two men who tried to advance towards the border fence being shot in the legs by Israeli troops. Scores more were hit in the upper body, according to health workers.

Included among the Palestinian fatalities were three men the Israeli military said it had killed as they tried to place an explosive device near the border fence; 14-year-old Az-Adin Asamak; a medic; and a man in a wheelchair who had been pictured on social media using a slingshot, while Al Jazeera television said one of its reporters had been injured by Israeli live fire.

Israeli jets launched airstrikes against five Hamas outposts and Israel said it was preparing for the risk of retaliatory rocket fire from Hamas in Gaza.

Many of those drawn to the protests spoke of mounting desperation in Gaza where Israel's blockade has devastated the economy, leaving unemployment for under-25s at more than 60%.

"I'm here because we want our land returned. We have nothing to lose," said Mohammad Nabieh, 25, who had been burning tyres to provide cover for the protesters.

Nabieh said he was the descendant of refugees from a village near the Israeli city of Ashdod but had never been able to visit the place his family came from. "Nobody cares about us, so why to wait to die slowly. The blockade put us in a big cage - we have to get out. I'm 25 and have almost no work. What am I supposed to do? Rely on aid?"

Said Gherbawi, 28, who was black with soot, had also been burning tyres. "I have no work. This is my work now. We have to keep Israelis bothered by the smoke. I don't know any better way than this. We have to fight," he said.

Ismail Radwan, a senior Hamas figure, said the mass border protests against Israel would continue "until the rights of the Palestinian people are achieved".

Israeli troops had been reinforced along the border before the protests that coincided with Palestinians marking Nakba - or "catastrophe" - day, the annual commemoration of the displacement of Palestinians during the foundation of Israel in 1948.

Israeli planes dropped leaflets warning Palestinians not to approach the fence, while amateur Israeli drone racers were recruited to bring down "incendiary kites" launched over the fence.

"Even if the fence is breached," warned Israeli military spokesman Jonathan Conricus in advance, "we will be able to protect Israeli civilians from attempts to massacre or kidnap or kill them."

Hazem Balousha in Gaza City and **Peter Beaumont**

* The Guardian, Mon 14 May 2018 18.35 BST Last modified on Mon 14 May 2018 22.07 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/14/israel-palestine-defiance-death-gaza-jerusalem-suffers-horrific-day-of-violence-for-four-years>

Israel: Trump's new embassy opens - and dozens are killed

Gaza counts its dead as tens of thousands protest in bloodiest day since 2014 war.

Gaza has had its bloodiest day in years after Israeli forces shot and killed 55 Palestinians and wounded at least 1,200 as tens of thousands protested along the frontier against the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem.

The violent scenes contrasted sharply with the glossy inauguration of Washington's new mission around 60 miles away in an affluent Jerusalem neighbourhood. The US president's daughter, Ivanka Trump, celebrated the opening to clapping and cheering from American and Israeli VIPs.

In Gaza's hospitals, dozens of casualties were in a critical condition, and medics said the dead included a 14-year-old boy. There were reports that a man in a wheelchair who had been pictured using a slingshot had also been killed.

The sky was blackened with thick smoke as protesters lit tyres. Intermittent sniper fire was heard and crowds of protesters were seen rushing towards the fence, although Israel's military said none had managed to breach it.

Fury and desperation at Trump's December declaration on the embassy helped to ignite the six-week protest movement. To international condemnation, Israeli snipers have regularly fired on demonstrators in past rallies. Monday's shootings raised the total deaths close to 100.

Demonstrations were set to culminate in a mass outcry against the embassy event on Monday, which soon became the bloodiest day in the coastal enclave since the 2014 war.

Gaza's rulers Hamas has fought three conflicts with Israel but say they support peaceful ideals advocated by civilian protest leaders.

Donald Trump, who had tweeted that Monday was a "great day for Israel", did not attend the embassy opening but spoke in a video message, saying he extended "a hand in friendship to Israel, the Palestinians and to all of their neighbours. May there be peace."

South Africa recalled its ambassador in protest at the "violent aggression carried out by Israeli armed forces" against a peaceful protest.

The UN's secretary-general, António Guterres, said he was concerned about the reports of the high death toll. Amnesty International said the shootings were "another horrific example of the Israeli military using excessive force and live ammunition in a totally deplorable way".

At the ceremony in Jerusalem, Washington's ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, stood on a stage painted with the US flag and said: "Today's historic event is attributed to the vision, courage, and moral clarity of one person to whom we owe an enormous and eternal debt of gratitude: President Donald J Trump." The crowd cheered and gave a standing ovation.

The only direct reference to the bloodshed came from Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who said: "As we have seen from the protests of the last month and even today those provoking violence are part of the problem and not part of the solution."

In Washington, the White House deputy press secretary Raj Shah was repeatedly challenged to condemn the Israeli response. "We believe Hamas is responsible for these tragic deaths," he told reporters. "Their rather cynical exploitation of the situation is what's leading to these deaths and we

want it stopped.”

Israel has portrayed the protests as a terrorist ploy by Hamas. Naftali Bennett, Israel’s education minister, told Israel Radio that anyone who approached the fence would be considered a terrorist. A foreign ministry spokesman labelled protesters “murderous rioters”.

The army said it had almost doubled the number of troops surrounding Gaza and in the occupied West Bank on Monday.

The Israel Defence Forces said in a statement: “The rioters are hurling firebombs and explosive devices towards the security fence and IDF forces, and are burning tires, throwing rocks and launching flaming objects in order to ignite fires in Israeli territory and harm IDF troops.”

Israel’s military said its troops had killed three “terrorists” attempting to place an explosive device adjacent to the fence in the southern area of the strip “under the cover of violent riots”.

Hamas has encouraged and funded the protests and said it would not stop people from attempting to break the metal fence. Loudspeakers at the frontier called for people to push through as Israeli drones dropped teargas on the crowds.

Until this week, no Israeli had been harmed since protests began on 30 March. An IDF spokesman, Lt Col Jonathan Conricus, said one soldier had been “slightly wounded by shrapnel” on Monday but he did not have details on the source of the injury.

No one had crossed the fence despite several attempts, Conricus said. “Our troops have not taken any sustained direct fire,” he added.

Protest organisers have called for an end to a decade-old Israeli-imposed blockade, and for Palestinian refugees and their descendants to be allowed to return to their ancestral homes.

Mosques in Gaza called for people to protest as a general strike was observed. Buses ferried residents to the perimeter. Black clouds billowed from piles of burning tyres – which organisers say are used as a smokescreen against Israeli snipers. People have been shot tens of metres from the fence.

“I’m here because of our land that we want back. We have nothing to lose,” said 25-year-old Mohammed Nabieh, who said he was the descendant of refugees from a village near the Israeli city of Ashdod. “Nobody cares about us. Why should we wait to die slowly?”

Large protests also took place throughout the occupied West Bank and inside Jerusalem at the same time as the embassy event.

Trump’s Jerusalem recognition dismayed Palestinians, who see East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. The holy city has been one of the most contentious issues in past negotiations, and broad international consensus has been that its status will be settled under a peace deal, although Trump has said Jerusalem is now “off the table”.

About 800 people attended the inauguration ceremony for the Jerusalem embassy. US ambassador Friedman, has moved his office from Tel Aviv into what had been a US consulate building.

Many Israelis have praised the decision to move the diplomatic mission. The Friends of Zion Museum has put up posters in Jerusalem saying: “Make Israel Great Again” and US flags have been hung from buildings in the city.

Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, said Monday was a “glorious day”. “Remember this moment. This is history. President Trump, by recognising history you have made history,” he said to applause.

Palestinians, however, see the scheduling as an insult. This week they mark the “Nakba”, or catastrophe, commemorating the more than 700,000 Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes in the 1948 war surrounding Israel’s creation.

Oliver Holmes in Jerusalem and **Hazem Balousha** in Gaza City

* The Guardian, Mon 14 May 2018 18.27 BST First published on Mon 14 May 2018 10.38 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/14/israel-tells-palestinians-they-are-risking-lives-in-us-embassy-protests>

Israel condemned over Gaza ‘bloodbath’ as Amnesty raises war crimes concerns

#Occupation

Amnesty says Monday’s killings may constitute war crimes as UN committee calls for ‘immediate end to use of disproportionate force’

Israeli forces faced accusations of committing war crimes and using “disproportionate force” against Palestinian demonstrators in Gaza on Monday on the deadliest day in the enclave since “Great March of Return” protests began in March.

Amnesty International condemned the use of “excessive force” by Israeli forces on Monday and said in some instances they appeared to be “committing what appear to be willful killings constituting war crimes”.

Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said “those responsible for outrageous human rights violations must be held to account,” while Human Rights Watch described the killings as a “bloodbath”.

In an earlier statement, the United Nations’ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination said it was “gravely concerned” that many of those killed or injured during weeks of protests were reportedly posing no imminent threat when they were shot.

Israeli army kills dozens and injures thousands at Gaza border

The statement, dated 8 May but published by the UN Human Rights Council on Monday, also called on Israel to “fully respect the norms of humanitarian law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to lift the blockade of the Gaza strip”.

It called on Israel to “put an immediate end to the disproportionate use of force against Palestinian demonstrators in the Gaza strip, refrain from any act that could lead to further casualties and ensure prompt and unimpeded access to medical treatment to injured Palestinians”.

Dozens of people were killed and thousands injured on Monday as Israeli forces fired live ammunition at protesters commemorating the 70th anniversary this week of the Nakba and protesting against the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem.

The Nakba, or Catastrophe, is the name given by Palestinians to the events of 1948 when hundreds of thousands of people were displaced from their homes during the creation of the state of Israel.

Sarah Leah Whitson, Human Rights Watch's executive director for the Middle East and North Africa, said Israeli authorities' policy of firing at protesters irrespective of whether there was an immediate threat to life had resulted in a "bloodbath that anyone could have foreseen".

The Palestinian Authority in Ramallah on Monday accused Israel of committing a "terrible massacre".

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said the killing of protesters was a crime that would only produce more violence.

Egypt's foreign ministry said in a statement: "Egypt rejects the use of force against peaceful marches demanding legitimate and just rights, and warns of the negative consequences of this dangerous escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories."

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization in the US, condemned the Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilians, calling them a "massacre".

In a statement, CAIR National Executive Director Nihad Awad, who is of Palestinian heritage, said:

"We condemn this massacre of civilian protesters - including children, medical personnel and the disabled - who seek to shake the conscience of an international community that has long ignored or excused Israel's past dispossession of the Palestinian people and its continuing occupation of those few who were able to survive in their ancestral land.

"Perhaps this tragic mass killing - played out in full view of the world's media - will spark a new call for justice similar to that sparked by the Soweto uprising against Apartheid."

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag also described Monday's killings as a "massacre" and said the US shared the blame with Israel.

"The US administration moving its embassy to Jerusalem destroyed the chances for peace and ignited a fire that will cause more human losses and injuries as well as destruction and catastrophe in the region," Bozdag said.

Turkey also recalled its ambassadors to Israel and US, according to a TRT report.

South Africa's foreign ministry said that it had withdrawn its ambassador from Israel until further notice because of the "indiscriminate and grave manner of the latest Israeli attack".

"Like other members of the international community, South Africa is disturbed by the latest deadly aggression and reiterates calls made by several member states of the United Nations for an independent inquiry into the killings, with a view to holding to account those who are responsible," it said in a statement.

The European Union's high representative for foreign affairs Federica Mogherini called on Israel to

“respect the right to peaceful protest and the principle of proportionality in the use of force”.

Mogherini said Hamas and leaders of demonstrations in Gaza “must ensure that they remain strictly non-violent and must not exploit them for other means”.

The White House on Monday blamed Hamas for deadly violence on Israel’s border with Gaza where Israeli troops fatally shot at least 55 Palestinian protesters.

White House spokesman Raj Shah accused Hamas’ leaders of making a “gruesome and unfortunate propaganda attempt” that led to the clashes in Gaza at the same time the United States was opening its new embassy in Jerusalem, a move that has fueled Palestinian anger.

“The responsibility for these tragic deaths rests squarely with Hamas,” Shah said. “Hamas is intentionally and cynically provoking this response.”

Amnesty International said Israel’s “use of excessive force in Gaza” was an “abhorrent violation of international law”.

Philip Luther, research and advocacy director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International, said: “This is another horrific example of the Israeli military using excessive force and live ammunition in a totally deplorable way. This is a violation of international standards, in some instances committing what appear to be wilful killings constituting war crimes.” Israeli human rights group B’Tselem said that firing live ammunition at protesters showed “appalling indifference to human life on the part of senior Israeli government and military officials” and called for an immediate halt to the killing of protesters.

The Israeli army said in a tweet on Monday that 35,000 Palestinians were taking part in “violent riots” and its troops were “operating according to standard operating procedures”.

British foreign secretary Boris Johnson said the British government was “extremely saddened by the loss of life that has taken place” but suggested that the violence had been “provoked”.

“We understand that there are some people who have been provoking that violence but on the other hand there has got to be restraint in the use of live fire,” he said.

At least 40 people had been killed and thousands injured prior to Monday in recent protests at the Gaza border, the committee said, although Gaza’s ministry of health put the death toll at 65.

MEE correspondents on the ground in Gaza on Monday reported that Israeli forces stationed behind the fence had been heavily firing live bullets at crowds since the morning, in addition to small drones dropping tear gas canisters right above the demonstrators.

Middle East Eye (MEE) staff

* MEE. Monday 14 May 2018 12:09 UTC. Last update: Monday 14 May 2018 20:28 UTC:

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/gaza-killings-un-gravely-concerned-israeli-targeting-protesters-667206318>

'Burn them, shoot them, kill them': Israelis cheer in Jerusalem as Palestinians shot in Gaza

#Occupation

While the US officially transferred its embassy to Jerusalem, Israeli forces killed scores of demonstrators in Gaza.

The contrast could not have been more jarring on Monday between Jerusalem and Gaza, even as a mere 75 kilometres separated the two.

As American and Israeli officials inaugurated the move of the US embassy to Jerusalem - an Israeli victory over the international community's rejection of its claim to Jerusalem as its capital - Israeli forces gunned down Palestinian protesters in Gaza, the death toll rising inexorably throughout the day.

'Friends, what a glorious day, remember this day. This is history. Mr Trump, by recognising history, you made history'

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu exuberantly hailed the embassy move as a "historic" moment.

"Friends, what a glorious day, remember this day," the Israeli leader said in a triumphant address on Monday. "This is history. Mr Trump, by recognising history, you made history." All of us are deeply moved and grateful. The embassy of the most powerful nation on earth, the United States of America, opened here. "Trump's son-in-law and senior advisor Jared Kushner also gave a speech at the ceremony, during which he hailed US support for Israel, seemingly casting aside concerns about the Israeli army's actions in Gaza occurring at the same time as his speech." "We stand with Israel because we both believe in human rights, democracy worth defending, and believe that we know that it is the right thing to do," Kushner said.

Meanwhile, just outside the new embassy, Palestinian demonstrators in Jerusalem were brutally repressed by Israeli forces.

MEE witnessed dozens of unarmed Palestinians beaten and arrested by Israeli security forces outside the embassy, eliciting cheers from Israeli demonstrators who came out to support the embassy's opening.

"Burn them", "shoot them", "kill them", the Israelis chanted.

Meanwhile, former Israeli army spokesman Peter Lerner complained on social media, implying Palestinian deaths in Gaza were an attempt to rain on Israel's parade.

But in Gaza, Palestinians expressed their deep anger and disbelief at the celebration occurring in Jerusalem as hundreds were indiscriminately shot by Israeli forces.

According to Gaza's health ministry, fifty-eight Palestinians had been killed and 2,410 had been wounded by Israeli forces in the bloody culmination of the six-week "Great March of Return" in Gaza which had already claimed 49 lives before Monday.

In total, 101 Palestinians have been killed during demonstrations in Gaza since 30 March.

The scenes in Gaza in the zone close to the fence separating the small Palestinian enclave from Israel were ones of chaos and blood since the morning, with numerous demonstrators shot in the head, neck or chest.

A number of bodies were trapped close to the fence, army fire too heavy for ambulances to reach them.

"A lot of Palestinians died today for the sake of Palestinians peacefully protesting, and we won't give up on the blood they shed," Wade Masri, 52, told Middle East Eye. "I came here to participate in the march, to prove that I am a person that has a right to return to my land.

Protester near the Gaza border on Monday (MEE/Mohammed al-Hajjar)

"Celebrations today in Jerusalem make me feel sad for what the US did against Palestinians," he added. "There is no peace without Jerusalem. We will live and die fighting for Jerusalem."

International groups decried the situation in Gaza as a "bloodbath".

"The policy of Israeli authorities to fire irrespective of whether there is an immediate threat to life on Palestinian demonstrators in Gaza, caged in for a decade and under occupation for half a century, has resulted in a bloodbath that anyone could have foreseen," Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

Jamal Zahalka, a political leader for Palestinian citizens of Israel, told MEE that Israel and the US bore responsibility for the violence in Gaza.

'Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine, and Trump and the USA cannot decide to give our land to Zionists'

- Samira Mohsen, 27, protester in Gaza City

"This is a violation of international law. Trump and the US are responsible for all the blood that has been shed since the US decision," Zahalka said.

"Those who are celebrating today [the US embassy inauguration] have blood on their hands."

But despite the trauma of the deadliest day in Gaza since the 2014 war, Samira Mohsen, a 27-year-old protester east of Gaza City, remained defiant despite the heavy toll of the day's demonstrations.

"One day we will be celebrating in Jerusalem, we will pray there, no one will ban us," she told MEE. "My dream is to see Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine, and Trump and the USA cannot decide to give our land to Zionists."

Hind Khoudary, Lubna Masarwa, Chloé Benoist

* MEE. Monday 14 May 2018 16:36 UTC. Last update: Monday 14 May 2018 21:41 UTC:

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israelis-celebrate-jerusalem-palestinians-mourns-gaza-12004378>
83

‘This is our land’: US embassy move riles ‘Nakba’ refugees from West Jerusalem

#Nakba

Palestinians who fled western neighbourhoods and villages in 1948 say Trump has no right to recognise Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

JERUSALEM - Naime Al Sheik Ali was just nine years old when her father told her that they had to leave their Palestinian village of Beit Thul in order to save their lives.

Just a few hours later, at midnight on 1 April 1948, Jewish paramilitary forces were in the hills surrounding Beit Thul, situated a few kilometres to the west of Jerusalem city.

“When they came they started shooting so we fled,” Al Sheik Ali told Middle East Eye, recalling the events of 70 years ago that have shaped her life to this day.

That night, Al Sheik Ali became one of 700,000 Palestinian refugees displaced by Jewish forces during the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 in which Israel declared its independence on 14 May.

Many of the refugees ended up in camps across Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, the West Bank and even in East Jerusalem, where they continue to live with their descendents, bringing the number of refugees to more than five million today, according to UNRWA, the United Nations agency responsible for Palestinian refugees.

Mohammed Abu Kaya, whose name has been changed to protect the privacy of his family, is a third-generation refugee. The massacre orchestrated by Jewish forces in the West Jerusalem village of Deir Yassin is what scared Abu Kaya’s grandfather into fleeing his home within the inner city.

At least 110 people, including women, children and elderly residents, are estimated to have been killed by Lehi and Irgun militia fighters in their assault on Deir Yassin, a key village on the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, on 9 April, 1948.

‘The same will happen to you’

“When the massacre started the [paramilitaries] took a kid and strapped him on an army jeep and drove him around different neighbourhoods of Jerusalem, saying ‘the same will happen to you if you don’t leave,’” Abu Kaya said, retelling his grandfather’s story to MEE. His grandfather and his family fled to Egypt.

Also in West Jerusalem is the neighbourhood of Arnona. Like many Palestinian population centres in 1948, Arnona was seized by Haganah fighters, the main Jewish paramilitary force in British Mandate-era Palestine.

Now an upscale Israeli district, Arnona is also where the US Consulate building is located. It is here the US government will temporarily move its embassy from Tel Aviv on 14 May, coinciding with the day Palestinians commemorate the Nakba, or “catastrophe”, referring to the mass expulsion in 1948.

Israel claims Jerusalem as its “undivided capital”, while Palestinians claim the city as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

But not a single country currently has its embassy in Jerusalem because such a move is widely considered to violate international law.

Under United Nations Resolution 181, which in 1947 set out the conditions for the partition of Palestine into an “Arab State” and a “Jewish State”, Jerusalem was to be administered by the UN under a “special international regime”.

The 1949 armistice agreement that formally ended the first Arab-Israeli war divided the city along the “Green Line” into Israeli-controlled western areas, and Jordanian-held East Jerusalem, which included the Old City.

Israel’s occupation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war is widely recognised as illegal and violates further United Nations resolutions.

For Palestinians then, sovereignty over the city is not something for leaders of other countries to determine, as US President Donald Trump did when he announced the embassy move in December.

But Abu Kaya said that Trump, in declaring Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, had at least removed the “fig leaf of American diplomacy” that had allowed Washington to style itself as a mediator between Israel and the Palestinians.

“The US is not being an honest broker, not now and will never be,” he said.

The US is not being an honest broker, not now and will never be
- Mohammed Abu Kaya

There are arguments the US embassy move has killed any possibility of a two-state solution, which would grant Palestine a state with its borders along the Green Line and East Jerusalem as the capital.

This solution is a rhetoric pushed by the majority of the international community, including the UN, as well as by the Palestinian Authority – the governing body in the West Bank.

But the two-state solution is not favourable for the Palestinian refugees who fled their villages in 1948, or during the 1967 war.

The right of return for refugees is enshrined in the United Nations General Assembly resolution 194 (III), passed in December 1948, but Palestinian refugees know their return will not be possible if historical Palestine is split into two nations.

What is important to stress at the time of the US embassy move to a neighbourhood in West Jerusalem is not the death of a two-state solution, but the fact it will be situated on land stolen from its legal owners in 1948.

‘All of Jerusalem has been occupied’

Amany Kalify, a coordinator for the Grassroots Jerusalem Local Mobilisation and Network, sees “hypocrisy” in the position of most countries that recognise the 1948 borders of Israel while condemning its further annexation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank in 1967.

“What has been occupied by Israel in 1948 is legitimate [under international law] and what has been occupied by Israel in 1967 is illegal and illegitimate. For me as Palestinian I don’t make this distinction between areas; for me all of Jerusalem has been occupied and occupied twice,” Kalify told MEE.

“In both cases it’s Palestinian land, I don’t think it should be a question whether it’s inside the Green

Line or outside, it should be a question within the context of Palestine. This colonial project did not start in 1967,” said Kalify.

“Even based on international law... refugees have the right to return to their land, but this was never fulfilled. International law will never bring justice to Palestinians.”

Palestinian refugee Al Sheik Ali agreed: “This land is our land, no one has the right to do what they want in this land, whether they are American or Israeli. Trump said Palestine belongs to the Jews. He doesn’t have the right to say that.”

At the same time Palestinians mourn the Nakba, Israel celebrates the 70th anniversary of its “independence”.

According to a statement issued in February by the US Embassy in Israel, the opening of the embassy offices on 14 May within the existing consulate compound in Arnona is only temporary.

“In parallel, we have started the search for a site for our permanent embassy to Israel, the planning and construction of which will be a longer-term undertaking,” the statement said.

It leaves the question as to why the US government had to rush the embassy move if the location was going to be temporary.

“This is what the US is telling the Zionist government: it’s an important year for you, the 70th year since the establishment of Israel... it’s saying we’re supporting you in this project, of the Zionist regime, telling the world Israel has the right to occupy the whole of Palestine,” Kalify said.

Embassy on Palestinian land

The plot on which the US embassy will eventually be built, situated in the al-Baqa al-Fawqa neighbourhood of West Jerusalem, is also land appropriated by Israel from its Palestinian owners.

The land was originally owned by Maqdissian Taham al-Khalili and her sister Hussein al-Fetyani, who purchased it in the 1920s.

According to a report by Al Jazeera, a contract was signed between Israel and the US in 1989, leasing the land out for 99 years, at \$1 a year. Within the contract Israel outlined the land would be used for an embassy.

When al-Khalili passed away, the ownership of the land was passed to her son Ali al-Fetyani who then, before his death, handed it on to his son Daoud al-Fetyani who still possess the proof of ownership documents.

MEE contacted Daoud al-Fetyani though he declined to be interviewed.

Israel maintains a law of custodian absentee property, which takes custody of land left absent by Palestinian refugees who had to flee their homes.

Abu Kaya explained the law as a way for the Israeli government to hand private Palestinian property to Jewish settlers, and also in this case, the US government.

This law is relevant to the land owned by the al-Fetyani family, as the original owners fled outside the country.

“They can easily do whatever they want [with the land] between the US and the state of Israel,” said

Abu Kaya.

"All the families are in the same boat, [it applies to all] the properties that were stolen from the people who fled."

Tessa Fox

* MEE. Monday 14 May 2018 00:01 UTC. Last update: Monday 14 May 2018 12:45 UTC:

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/our-land-us-embassy-move-riles-palestinian-refugees-west-jerusalem-2027680826>

This article is available in French on Middle East Eye French edition.
