

# A WORLD IN MOTION



P1 | US-ISRAEL

*The US has fulfilled its commitment to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem despite widespread criticism and Palestinian protests.*

P2 | INDONESIA

*The recent spate of terror attacks in Indonesia continues to highlight the threat of jihadist indoctrination and returning IS fighters.*

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*Iraq's parliamentary elections delivered a surprise result, yet a coalition government is certain after no party gained a sufficient majority.*

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*PROJECT REFUGE – Supporting various relief efforts among refugees in countries like Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt.*



## THE NUMBERS:

### US EMBASSY IN JERUSALEM



1980

The year in which Israel passed a law that led to an explicit claim of East Jerusalem



±800

The approximate number of guests at the embassy's opening ceremony



\$400,000

The approximate amount spent to upgrade the embassy's security and to enable it to start functioning



35,000

The approximate number of Gazans who gathered at the Israeli border around the time of the embassy opening

## US FULFILLS COMMITMENT TO RELOCATE EMBASSY



By *Cherolyn Amery*

The United States has officially relocated its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in a deeply controversial move that angered Palestinians and drew widespread regional condemnation. The ceremony on Monday [14 May] took place amid road closures and heavy police presence in anticipation of Palestinian protests, as well as deadly demonstrations in Gaza [with 58 reported fatalities and more than 2,700 injuries] calling for the refugees' right to return to the homes they were forcibly expelled from 70 years ago. US President Donald Trump – who in December 2017 declared Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a move long sought by Israel – addressed the ceremony via a recorded video message. "Today we follow through on this recognition and open our embassy in the historic and sacred land of Jerusalem, and we're opening it many, many years ahead of schedule," Mr Trump said. (*Aljazeera*)

### *Jerusalem, the highly contested city*

In a physical sense, the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem was a relatively small affair. For the time being, the move is mostly symbolic – a small 'interim embassy' was opened inside the existing building belonging to the US consulate, and a new plaque marking the embassy was unveiled during the ceremony. A larger site in Jerusalem for the new embassy is still to be found, and most of the staff will move from Tel Aviv at a later date.

On a political level, however, the repercussions of the move of the embassy to Jerusalem could be massive. The city of Jerusalem is considered sacred by all three of the world's major monotheistic religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – and

control of the city has been fought over for centuries. After the creation of modern-day Israel in 1948, and the Arab-Israeli War that followed, Israel gained control of West Jerusalem, while Jordan gained control of the East. In 1967, during the Six Day War, Israeli forces captured East Jerusalem and annexed it, but the international community did not recognise this move. While Israel declares Jerusalem to be its "eternal and undivided" capital, Palestinians see it as the capital of their desired future state.

### *Peace talks and international relations*

This struggle for the city of Jerusalem is one of the most highly volatile issue in the peace process between Israel and Palestine, and a lasting peace agreement between the two enemies has long been sought by US leaders as "perhaps their biggest diplomatic prize" (Josh Lederman and Matthew Lee, for *TIME Magazine*). Mr Trump's decision to officially recognise it as Israel's capital "broke with decades of US neutrality on the issue and put it out of step with most of the international community" (*BBC News*). Past US administrations have also been openly 'pro-Israel', but there was more allowance made for the Palestinian perspective.

Following Mr Trump's December 2017 announcement about relocating the embassy, Hamas (the Palestinian ruling party in Gaza) said that the decision opened the "gates of hell". And while Mr Trump insisted that the US "remains fully committed to facilitating a lasting peace agreement", many analysts believe that the outright expression of support for Israel will derail future peace talks with Palestine, at least with regard to US involvement in negotiations. Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesperson for Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, said that "with this step, the US administration has cancelled its role in the peace process and has ... created incitement and instability".

However, the embassy relocation is praised by others as another bold move by Mr Trump (following soon after the US withdrawal from the Iran agreement) and has been hailed by many of his supporters as another example of promises that have been carried out. Ilene Pusher, writing for *TIME Magazine*,

# NEWS HEADLINES



**US** President Donald Trump said on 22 May that there's a "substantial" chance that his summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un "may not work out" for June. Mr Trump made the remark while he met with Moon Jae-in, South Korea's president, for pivotal discussions ahead of the American president's planned meeting with the North Korean leader on 12 June in Singapore, which is widely viewed as a neutral site. Yet doubts continue to grow about whether the meeting will actually take place.



**Syria's** military, on 21 May, captured an enclave in southern Damascus from Islamic State militants following a ruinous month-long battle, bringing the entire capital and its far-flung suburbs under full government control for the first time since the civil war began in 2011.



The latest death in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** brings to 26 the number of fatalities from the latest outbreak of Ebola. Health authorities in the central Africa giant believe they can stop the haemorrhagic disease from spreading to the Congo's northern neighbours. But they believe they can deal with the worst possible scenario. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has stopped short of calling the outbreak an international medical emergency.

describes both moves (concerning Israel and Iran) as "a kind of message about America's new face in the Middle East", while Lederman and Lee see them as "the latest in a series of US decisions that may have set off a domino effect of unpredictable consequences".

## FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

A recent article in the *Economist* highlighted the ways in which Israel is 'in a good place' as it celebrates its 70th anniversary. According to the report, Israel's economy is growing in a sustainable way, unemployment is the lowest in decades, high-tech exports are booming, and foreign relations are good. Regionally, Israel is more secure and stable than its Arab neighbours; leading Muslim nations like Egypt and Saudi Arabia to want to ally with Israel in order to counter the Iranian threat more effectively; and the world's leading superpower has just confirmed its unequivocal support by relocating its embassy to Jerusalem. For Christians who are passionately pro-Israel, all these 'positives' would appear to be confirmation that God's favour rests on Israel.

There are, however, also believers who care deeply for the Palestinians, especially those who are suffering as a result of Israel's Gaza blockade. And, as well as the enduring challenge of Palestine's Islamic threat and humanitarian crisis,

Israel faces some internal social and political challenges.

When analysing events in Israel, *INcontext* seeks to be neutral in our reporting, and in doing so, to engage all parties in a pursuit of peace, rather than finding scapegoats or exploring the prophetic. Our aim is to remind people of the critically important role that Israel plays on today's global stage, and to encourage people to pray for this nation, its leaders, its challenges, its influence, and its complicated relationships with its neighbours.

[NOTE: This article does not attempt to cover the full picture of the Israel-Palestine situation, or to ignore the recent violence in Gaza. For this publication, it merely focuses on the move of the embassy. For a perspective on the violence in Gaza, click here: <http://www.incontextinternational.org/perspectives/>. For an article on the protests in Gaza, click here: <http://www.incontextinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/AWIM192-Final.pdf>]

**PRAY > For Israel as they continue to forge ahead despite much opposition > For breakthrough in areas of impasse in the region > For believers to continually seek ways to build bridges across the many divides**

## THE THREAT OF RETURNING IS FIGHTERS



By Andrew Richards

A series of deadly suicide bomb attacks claimed by [the Islamic State] on Indonesian churches were carried out by members of a single family, police have said, as the world's most populous Muslim nation recoiled in horror at the attack on the country's Christian minority. The national police chief, Tito Karnavian, said the attacks, which killed at least 13 people including the six bombers, and injured more than 40 others, were carried out by children, teenagers and adults from a family who were among 500 Islamic State sympathisers who had returned from Syria. (*The Independent*)

### Jihadist indoctrination

The recent attacks (there were two more subsequent incidents) have highlighted the ability of the Islamic State to indoctrinate people, to the point of carrying out attacks. Police inspector Machfud Arifin said the following in a statement: "The three families were all connected through a Sunday evening group; they met each week to study Islam and watch jihadist films. The content of the films included footage from Syria and Iraq,

as well as [Islamic State] attacks in France, and was intended to encourage those in the group to commit terrorist attacks."

According to the Indonesian police, the first attack (involving three separate targets) happened within minutes of each other: the father directed a car bomb into one church building; two teenage sons on motorcycles drove into another, and the mother with two daughters, aged 12 and 9, wore explosives at the third, setting them off as she hugged a churchgoer. Arifin explained: "What happened is their parents indoctrinated the children. So, when the mother asked them to wear the waist bombs, they did it."

### Threat of returning Islamic State fighters

Joshua Roose – Director for the Institute of Religion, Politics and Society at the Australian Catholic University – makes two observations about an alarming trend in Islamist attacks on Christians. Firstly, the recent attacks in Indonesia coincided with the start of Ramadan, and according to Roose, the Islamic State carried out more than 300 separate attacks worldwide during the same period in 2017. Secondly, the attacks show an uptick in radical Islamist violence in Southeast Asia.

The return of foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq is one reason why attacks by the Islamic State have increased in the region, especially in the Philippines and Indonesia. From May to October 2017, an armed conflict was fought in the city of Marawi between the Philippine government and militants affiliated with the Islamic State. The militants, who called themselves the 'East Asia branch of the Islamic State', wanted to establish a provincial territory for the Islamic State in Asia. After five months of fighting, the

# NEWS HEADLINES



The **United Nations'** top human rights body has voted to send a team of international war crimes investigators to probe the deadly shootings of Gaza protesters by Israeli forces. A resolution calling on the UN Human Rights Council to "urgently dispatch an independent, international commission of inquiry" was backed on Friday by 29 members. Two members - the United States and Australia - voted against and 14 abstained. Israel has defended actions, saying it was done in self-defence to protect its borders and communities.



A plane carrying three **Americans** released by North Korea landed at a military base near Washington to be welcomed by US President Donald Trump and his wife, Melania. North Korea released the three - Kim Dong-chul, Kim Sang-duk, also known as Tony Kim, and Kim Hak-song - and handed them over to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Pyongyang, clearing a major obstacle to an unprecedented summit between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.



Former **Malaysian** Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has scored a historic victory in the general election. At the age of 92, Mr Mahathir defeated the Barisan Nasional coalition, which has been in power 60 years. Mr Mahathir will become the oldest elected leader in the world.

Philippine army liberated the besieged city, where the fighting had displaced more than one million people.

But it's not only in East Asia that the Islamic State wants to establish a foothold, albeit with a 'dying breath' as it faces total defeat in Iraq and Syria. According to the Washington Post, about 1,200 Islamic State fighters have returned to Europe: about 400 to the United Kingdom, 271 to France and 300 to Germany. These returning fighters have been equipped with combat expertise, including bomb making and weapons usage. And although very few returned fighters have caused authorities to act against them thus far, experts caution that these fighters could still act in the future.

## FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The recent attacks on the three churches (and a police station a day later) are seen as Indonesia's deadliest terrorist attacks since the 2002 Bali bombings that killed more than 200 people. Before that, a Catholic church in East Jakarta was bombed in 2001, and 11 churches were attacked during Christmas Eve services in 2000. Indonesia is currently ranked number thirty-eight on the World Watch List of countries where Christians are most persecuted, and in the world's largest Muslim majority country, it is not surprising that Christians are targeted.

In 2017, Jakarta's Christian ex-governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as "Ahok"), was sentenced to two years in prison on blasphemy charges. Although Ahok denied the charges, he withdrew his appeal because the case threatened

a possible violent conflict between hard-line Islamists and Christian supporters. Ahok simply said that "for the sake of our people and nation, I have learned to forgive and accept." The act of forgiveness staved off violent clashes and reminded Christians that hatred will only lead to destruction.

If it were justice and peace that Christians were after when defending Ahok, his example showed that these things cannot be bought with a currency of hatred and anger. As Mike Burnard wrote in his latest "Just a Minute" editorial, the currency of love will buy harmony, harmony will buy forbearance, forbearance will buy restraint, restraint will buy truth, truth will buy kindness, goodness and gentleness, and they will buy peace.

When it comes to terrorists returning from the Middle East, the most important thing for Christians in Southeast Asia (and beyond) to remember is that fear is not a currency that can buy peace. The role of Christians in fearful societies is to restore hope and promote the use of a 'Godly currency' that will see people saved, rather than condemned. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

**PRAY > For Indonesia's authorities as they tackle the threat of Islamic extremism > For Indonesia's Muslims who question their faith to find answers in Christ > For Indonesian believers to demonstrate Christ's love through forgiveness and the fruits of the Spirit**

## IRAQ'S FUTURE AFTER SHOCK ELECTION RESULT



By **Donnelly McClelland**

**I**nfluential Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's political coalition has won the most seats in Iraq's national parliamentary elections, according to complete results released by Iraq's electoral commission. The announcement came nearly a week after Iraqis cast their votes on 12 May and put Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in third place, according to seat allocations. An alliance of candidates with close ties to mostly Iranian-backed paramilitary forces came in second. (*The Independent*)

### Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?

Muqtada al-Sadr is a 44-year-old nationalist Shia cleric who made his name as a militia chief fighting US forces after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He has in more recent times (after some years of political isolation) reinvented himself as an anti-corruption

champion, while also campaigning on a platform of investing in public services. Unlike his predecessor Mr Abadi, a rare ally of both the United States and Iran, Mr Sadr is an adversary of both countries that have wielded influence in Iraq after the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein and ushered the Shiite majority into power. Adding fuel to the fire, Mr Sadr last year met Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia who is also staunchly opposed to Iranian influence in the region.

Mr Sadr, like many of Iraq's leading figures, has close ties with the religious community, and was born into a family of prominent Shia scholars. His father was the highly respected Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr, who even has a suburb in Baghdad named after him — Sadr City. The elder al-Sadr clashed with Saddam Hussein and was ultimately killed for his stance in an ambush alongside two of his sons in 1999. Almost twenty years earlier in 1980, Mr Sadr's father's cousin Mohammed Baqir — also a prominent cleric and philosopher — was executed by the Hussein government.

Mr Sadr has a zealous following among the young, poor and dispossessed, particularly in the capital Baghdad. His election campaign tapped into growing public resentment directed at Iran and what some voters say is a corrupt political elite that has failed to help the poor.

## FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

### INcontext Website:

[www.incontextinternational.org](http://www.incontextinternational.org)

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If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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## What's next for Iraq?

Mr Sadr cannot be prime minister as he did not run as a candidate in the elections, however, he is expected to play a major role in forming the new government. His nationalist Sairoon Alliance - formed of his own party and six mainly secular groups, including the Iraqi communist party - failed to win more than 54 of the 329 parliamentary seats, which means he faces the complex task of drawing together a governing coalition, over the next 90 days (though it may drag out longer).

The vote was the first in the country since the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group was defeated and the fourth since Saddam Hussein was toppled. It also had the lowest voter turnout (around 45%) which some have attributed to apathy of voters, who are disenchanted with the system and lacked faith in the candidates. This pessimism towards politicians is in contrast to the cautious optimism about Iraq's future in the period after its victory over IS. Michael Knights, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute, explained: "You could say that maybe [some Iraqis] think the country is moving in the right direction in spite of its politicians and not because of them." Many Iraqis possibly felt their country is not their own (due to the foreign influence), so why vote?

In this context it is easy to see how Mr Sadr's cross-sectarian approach has been appealing to many, but it remains to be seen what complexion this new government will take on. In a recent post on social media, Mr Sadr appeared to suggest his support for a broad coalition that could include the party of the current prime minister, Haider al-Abadi. He also repeated a call for a government of technocrats, who many Iraqis believe will be more efficient and less corrupt than traditional politicians.

How the next Iraqi government will look, and whether it will be able to successfully lead the Iraqi people into a post-war nation, focussed on rebuilding and development, will depend a lot on Muqtada al-Sadr. However, Mr Knights points out: "The biggest downside of Muqtada as a key player in the next government formation ... is Muqtada is very hard to predict. And it's not always clear which game he's playing: does he want to be part of the government or does he want to perpetually be in opposition to any government?"

## FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

It is clearly evident from the election results (and low turnout) that the people of Iraq have lost faith in the current status quo. They are desperately in search of hope, but it's not going to be the politicians, no matter their popular appeal, who can deliver a lasting hope, only Christ can. In this regard it is imperative that Iraqi believers in Iraq are supported in their 'bridge-building' efforts in society. Simultaneously, it is crucial that the Church be in the forefront of assisting Iraqis to return home and rebuild their shattered communities. Iraqi Christians speak of times, not too long ago (as recently as 2002), when there was brotherhood between different ethnic and religious groups, but a lot has happened since then and it's going to take a monumental shift and daring love to heal the terrible rifts in society. There are already people on the ground demonstrating just such love, they just need willing partners, both in Iraq and beyond, in order to multiply their efforts.

**PRAY > For an efficient and speedy formation of a coalition government > For Iraqi believers in the country to be effective in their bridge-building efforts > For returning believers to be strengthened and encouraged**

## KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION



## PROJECT REFUGE

### Supporting various relief efforts among refugees

The project mainly supports Christian workers who are actively working among refugees, as well as making it possible for these workers to provide much-needed aid such as food, clothing and bedding.

These Christian workers are from various countries (Korea, China, Kurdistan, Syria, Lebanon, Brazil and Egypt) but they all have one thing in common: despite being over-worked and under-resourced, they are completely committed to bringing relief and restoring dignity.



"They need helpers more than they need help. Our calling here is to be shepherds. Not preachers, but caregivers. They need us before they need food. So we give them ourselves."

**To make a financial contribution, please make use of the INcontext bank account details and use REFUGE and your email address (or part of it) as your reference.**

**For more information on this project, please contact our project department: [gustav@incontextministries.org](mailto:gustav@incontextministries.org) or visit our website [HERE](http://www.incontextinternational.org).**