

Next stop for Donald Trump is Israel, in pursuit of 'ultimate deal'

21/05/2017 08:47 by admin

Jerusalem: President Donald Trump has cast the elusive pursuit of peace between Israelis and Palestinians as the "ultimate deal." But he will step foot in Israel having offered few indications of how he plans to achieve what so many of his predecessors could not.

File pic of US President Donald Trump

Trump has handed son-in-law Jared Kushner and longtime business lawyer Jason Greenblatt the assignment of charting the course toward a peace process. The White House-driven effort is a sharp shift from the practice of U.S. previous administrations that typically gave secretaries of state those reins.

Kushner and Greenblatt were to accompany Trump on his two-day visit, set to begin Monday and include separate meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Trump also planned to visit the Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem and the Western Wall, an important key Jewish holy site.

White House aides have played expectations for significant progress on the peace process during Trump's stop, casting it as more symbolic than substantive. Yet Trump may still need to engage in some delicate diplomacy following revelations that he disclosed highly classified intelligence Israel obtained about the Islamic State group with top Russian officials, without Israel's permission.

Israel also has expressed concern about the \$110 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia that Trump announced Saturday in Riyadh. Yuval Steinitz, a senior Cabinet minister and Netanyahu confidant, called Saudi Arabia "a hostile country" and said the deal was "definitely something that should trouble us."

Trump's first overseas as president comes as the dynamics between the United States and the region's players are moving in unexpected directions.

While Israeli officials cheered Trump's election, some are now wary of the tougher line he has taken on settlements: urging restraint but not calling for a full halt to construction. Trump has retreated from a campaign pledge to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, bending to the same diplomatic and security concerns as other presidents who have made similar promises.

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