

Arabs shocked by Obama speech

By [Global Research](#)

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Barack Obama said he spoke as a “true friend” of Israel [EPA]

Arab leaders have reacted with anger and disbelief to an intensely pro-Israeli speech delivered by Barack Obama, the US Democratic presumptive presidential nominee.

Obama told the influential annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Council (Aipac): “Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel and it must remain undivided.”

His comments appalled Palestinians who see occupied East Jerusalem as part of a future Palestinian state.

Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator, told Al Jazeera on Thursday: “This is the worst thing to happen to us since 1967 ... he has given ammunition to extremists across the region”.

“What really disappoints me is that someone like Barack Obama, who runs a campaign on the theme of change - when it comes to Aipac and what’s needed to be said differently about the Palestinian state, he fails.”

“I say to Obama ... please stop being more Israeli than the Israelis themselves, leave the Israelis and Palestinians alone to make decisions required for peace.”

Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, rejected the statement, saying: “We will not accept an independent Palestinian state without having Jerusalem as the capital.

“I believe that case is clear.”

He said: “Jerusalem is part of the six points that are subjects on the negotiations’ agenda.

“And the whole world knows that East Jerusalem, Arab Jerusalem and Holy Jerusalem were occupied in 1967.”

‘Hope slashed’

Sami Abu Zuhri, a spokesman for Hamas, the largest Palestinian resistance group, also condemned the speech, saying on Thursday: “These statements slash any hope of any change in the American foreign policy.

“[They] assure that there is a total agreement between the two parties, the Democratic and the Republican, on support for the Israeli occupation at the expense of the rights of Arabs and Palestinian interests.”

He also said any deal between Israelis and Palestinians should preserve Israel's identity as a Jewish state and that Hamas should be isolated and pledged to approve \$30bn in aid to Israel over the next 10 years.

'Impressive speech'

Ehud Olmert, Israel's prime minister, called the Illinois senator's speech "very impressive". "His words on Jerusalem were very moving," Olmert told reporters after meeting George Bush, the US president, at the White House.

The Illinois senator's comments come a day after US media projected that Obama had enough delegates to win the Democratic nomination and face John McCain, the presumptive Republican candidate, in the November election.

Iranian 'threat'

Obama also had harsh words for Iran, vowing to work to "eliminate" the threat it posed to security in the Middle East and around the globe.

Obama said an "undivided Jerusalem should remain the capital of Israel" [AFP] "There's no greater threat to Israel or to the peace and stability of the region than Iran," he told the Aipac assembly.

Calling for "aggressive, principled diplomacy" with Tehran, he also warned he would never take the military option off the table in guaranteeing US and Israeli security.

Iranians responded cautiously, but optimistically, with officials expressing hope he can bring about change in Iran-US relations.

Hamidreza Hajibabaei, member of Iranian parliament, said: "We hope that Obama turns his words into actions, helps the Islamic Republic of Iran believe that the US has given up enmity and paves the way for fair negotiations."

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