

Temple Mount Tensions Diffusing Rapidly

Tensions on the Temple Mount were easing at the weekend, but new developments in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship are adding concerns for the Middle East region.

Friday, President Donald Trump called Jordanian King Abdullah II to discuss the situation at the Temple Mount, which is administered by Jordan. The White House released the following readout of that phone call on Saturday:

President Donald J. Trump spoke today with King Abdullah II of Jordan to discuss the events that transpired in the region over the past two weeks. Both leaders said they were encouraged by the efforts taken to de-escalate tensions and by the progress that has been made. They pledged to continue to stay in close communication. President Trump also emphasized Jordan's important role in regional security.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continued to take criticism from his own people for his decision to take down the metal detectors and other additional security measures. Opinion polls suggest that decision was extremely unpopular with the Israeli people.

"I am in tune with the emotions of wider society, I understand the feelings, I know that the decision that we made was a difficult one," he said Sunday at the start of his weekly Cabinet meeting in Jerusalem. "However, as prime minister of Israel, as the one who carries the security of Israel on his shoulders, it is my duty to make decisions calmly and in an informed manner. I make these decisions while looking at the wider picture, with a broad view of the challenges and threats that we are facing, some of which the wider public are not aware of and which I cannot detail."

The previous day, Israeli Defense Force soldiers raided a Palestinian radio station in Ramallah and confiscated its broadcast equipment in retaliation for inciting violence. While the Palestinian Authority declared it a criminal act, it's unlikely there will be a much larger impact, particularly in light of recent developments surrounding PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

Over the weekend, Abbas, 82, was rushed to the Al Istishari Hospital near Ramallah after "suffering from fatigue caused by the stressful events of the past two weeks concerning the Temple Mount," according to PA officials. He was reportedly in the hospital for approximately 90 minutes before he was released.

Both Israeli and Palestinian sources have assessed that Abbas's health has deteriorated during recent months and could hasten the process of choosing new PA leadership. While Israel has accused the Palestinian leader of inciting violence and terror, especially over the Temple Mount, Israel security officials also coordinate with the PA and are concerned with any power vacuums that may emerge atop the PA if Abbas were to leave office or die.

Abbas is overweight and is said to be a heavy smoker—having recently switched to electronic cigarette. He has previously been treated for prostate cancer during the past decade and was also diagnosed with heart problems. In June, Abbas dismissed reports that he had suffered a stroke.

JNS contributed to this article.