

Israel settlements not illegal, says U.S

Decision will provide greater space for Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate peace, says Pompeo

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WASHINGTON

The Trump administration declared on Monday that the U.S. does not consider Israeli settlements in the West Bank a violation of international law, reversing four decades of U.S. policy.

The announcement by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was the latest political gift from the Trump administration to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has vowed in two elections this year to push for the annexation of the West Bank. His chief opponent, Benny Gantz, has until Wednesday night to gather a majority in Israel's Parliament or he will relinquish his chance to form a new government, raising the prospect of a third round of elections.

The U.S. has in the past described the settlements as illegitimate, and Palestinians have demanded the land for a future state, a goal that has been backed by the UN, European governments and U.S. allies across West Asia.

Political support

But President Donald Trump has been persistent in changing U.S. policy on Israel and the Palestinian territories — moves aimed at bolstering political support for Netanyahu, who has failed to form a government after two rounds of elections with razor-thin outcomes.

Monday's decision reversed a 1978 legal opinion by the State Department concluding that the settlements were inconsistent with international law. Mr. Pompeo said that ruling "hasn't advanced the cause of peace".

"We've recognised the

reality on the ground," Mr. Pompeo told reporters at the State Department. (President Ronald Reagan also told reporters shortly after taking office in 1981 that he did not believe the settlements were illegal but called new Israeli communities in Palestinian territory "unnecessarily provocative".)

The settlements have been a main sticking point in peace negotiations that have failed to find a solution for generations. They are home to Israelis in territory that Palestinians have fought to control, and their presence makes negotiations for a two-state solution all the more difficult. The two-state solution has been a primary focus of past peace plans, calling for a separate state for Palestinians.

Within hours of the announcement, the State Department issued a travel alert to Americans planning to visit Jerusalem, the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. "Those opposed to the Secretary of State's announcement may target U.S. gov't facilities, interests, and citizens," the department said on Twitter.

In Washington, Mr. Pompeo said the decision would provide greater space for the Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate over the status of the settlements.

He said that the issue could be largely left to Israeli courts to decide, and that it had no bearing on legal conclusions regarding similar situations elsewhere in the world.

Instead, Mr. Pompeo said the issue must be solved by the Israelis and the Palestinians. "And arguments about who is right and wrong as a matter of international law will not bring peace," he said. **NY TIMES**



Fighting over land: Israeli border guards keeping watch as bulldozers demolish Palestinian houses near the al-Arubb camp, on the outskirts of the West Bank town of Hebron. **AFP**

Palestinians rail against U.S. decision, Israelis hail it

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday hailed a U.S. announcement that it no longer considers settlements in the West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem illegal, but the Palestinians pledged new measures to oppose it.

Mr. Netanyahu visited the Gush Etzion settlement bloc south of Jerusalem, where he told settler leaders he was "very moved" by the announcement made by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Monday.

"Here, we are on a historic day with another tremendous achievement for the State of Israel, which we have greatly worked for," he told them, according to a statement released by his spokesman.

"The Trump administration has corrected an historic injustice and lined up with truth and justice."

Mr. Pompeo said that after legal consultation Washington had concluded the establishment of settlements was "not, per se, inconsistent with international law".

More than 6,00,000 Israelis live in settlements in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, alongside more than 3 million Palestinians.

The Arab League criticised Mr. Pompeo's announcement, calling it an "extremely adverse development".

The only two Arab states to have signed peace treaties with Israel — Egypt and Jordan — also sharply criticised the U.S. policy shift, with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi warning of its

"dangerous consequences".

The EU reiterated that it considers all settlement activity "illegal under international law".

The direct impact on the ground may be limited but analysts say it will further embolden the settlement movement.

The Palestinian Authority — which considers the U.S. biased and has rejected the Trump administration as a mediator if peace talks are ever revived — denounced the latest decision.

Chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said the Palestinians would take a series of measures to oppose it. "We began deliberations in the UN to present a draft resolution in the Security Council," he said. "We expect a (US) veto but we will do it. Let the U.S. veto international law."

Swedish prosecutor drops Assange rape investigation

'Evidence is not strong enough for filing an indictment'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
STOCKHOLM

Swedish prosecutors said on Tuesday they have dropped their investigation into WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange over a 2010 rape allegation, even though they found the plaintiff's claim "credible".

"My assessment is that all investigative measures that can be taken have been taken. But... the evidence is not strong enough to file an indictment," deputy director of public prosecutions Eva-Marie Persson told reporters.

The investigation was launched after a Swedish woman who met Assange at a WikiLeaks conference in Stockholm in August 2010 accused the Australian of having unprotected sex with her while she was sleeping.



Julian Assange

She said she had previously repeatedly refused to have unprotected sex with him.

The statute of limitations in the case was to expire in August 2020.

Mr. Assange has always denied the allegation.

"I want to stress that the plaintiff has given a credible and reliable account (of events). Her statement is clear, long and detailed," Ms. Persson said in a statement.

"But altogether, my assessment is that the evidence has weakened in such a way that there is no longer reason to continue the investigation."

Mr. Assange, 48, has been held at a top-security British prison since April after police dragged him out of the Ecuadoran embassy in London, where he had been holed up since 2012 to avoid an extradition order to Sweden.

He was subsequently sentenced to 50 weeks in prison for breaching bail conditions when he took refuge in the embassy.

Swedish authorities closed the rape investigation in 2017, saying it was not possible to proceed as Mr. Assange could not be reached. But the case was reopened following his arrest.

Three killed by 'rioters' in Iran

Internet will be unblocked once abuse stops, says govt.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

Three security personnel have been killed by "rioters" in Iran, the latest deaths in protests that showed no sign of subsiding on Tuesday, despite a wave of arrests and an internet shutdown.

A shock decision to impose petrol price hikes sparked the nationwide demonstrations in which officials say at least five people have been killed.

The United Nations expressed alarm on Tuesday "that the use of live ammunition has allegedly caused a significant number of deaths

across the country".

The situation in the streets remains unclear largely due to the government-imposed internet outage now in its third day.

Footage of masked young men clashing with security forces has been broadcast on State television, which rarely shows any signs of dissent.

In the latest bloodshed, assailants wielding knives and machetes ambushed and killed three security personnel west of Tehran, the ISNA and Fars news agencies reported late on Monday.

In response to the vio-

lence, the authorities say they have arrested hundreds of people.

Iran said on Tuesday the internet will only be unblocked when authorities are sure it will not be misused. "The internet will come back gradually in some provinces where there are assurances the internet will not be abused," government spokesman Ali Rabieci said.

Netblocks, a website that monitors global net shutdowns, said internet connectivity in Iran was at 4% on Tuesday compared with normal levels.

Hong Kong university holdouts desperately seek escape routes

1,100 protesters arrested; about 100 still remain on campus

REUTERS
HONG KONG

Anti-government protesters holed up in a Hong Kong university were frantically searching for escape routes on Tuesday after more than two days of clashes with police, dramatic breakouts by rope and motorcycle and more than 1,000 arrests in 24 hours.

About 100 protesters were trapped in the Polytechnic University a day after students, some tired and fearful of police storming the campus, tried again and again to flee, only to be beaten back by police firing rubber bullets, water cannon and tear gas. Some 235 in-



Out in the open: Injured protesters leaving the Hong Kong Polytechnic University on Tuesday. **AFP**

jured were hospitalised.

Police have made about 1,100 arrests in the past 24 hours on charges, including rioting and possession of offensive weapons. The total number of those arrested since protests began in June is more than 5,000.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said she had told police to handle the protests humanely.

The university is the last of five that protesters have occupied to use as bases from which to disrupt the city.

Trump's call with Zelensky 'inappropriate'

Officials give firsthand accounts of conversation between Ukraine & U.S. Presidents

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON DC

As the second week of public impeachment hearings got underway, Americans heard from witnesses who could provide firsthand accounts of conversation between U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Calling what he heard on the July 25 phone call "inappropriate", Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman, the top Ukraine expert at the National Security Council, testified that it was "improper for the President to request... to demand an investigation into a political opponent".

Foreign Service professional and an adviser to Vice President Mike Pence, Jennifer Williams, who was on



Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman

the call and testified alongside Lt. Col. Vindman on Tuesday, called the call "unusual". "... I found the July 25th call unusual because in contrast to other Presidential calls I had observed, it involved discussion of what appeared to be a domestic political matter.

Lt. Col. Vindman also tes-

tified that he spoke to State Department official George Kent and an unnamed intelligence official about the call.

A decorated Army officer, who has served in South Korea and Iraq, Lt. Col. Vindman was brought to the U.S. as a child by his family, which left the Soviet Union forty years ago. On Tuesday, he called attacks on the character of testifying public servants "reprehensible" and "vile".

Addressing his father during his opening remarks, he said his decision to leave the Soviet Union forty years ago was the right one. "Do not worry, I will be fine for telling the truth," he said.

Mr. Trump has publicly criticised those testifying, including on Twitter while

their hearings were in progress, as in the case of former Ukraine Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch's last week.

The U.S. Army is considering moving Lt. Col. Vindman and his family to a military base for their physical safety, if required, the *Wall Street Journal* reported.

Both provided firsthand testimonies of the call. This is significant given that one of the core Republican strategies has been to discount the testimonies, saying they are based on second- or third-hand accounts.

In his opening remarks, ranking Intelligence Committee member, Devin Nunes, focused his criticism on "media", referring to some of them as "puppets of the Democratic Party".

ELSEWHERE



Rajapaksa seeks PM's resignation

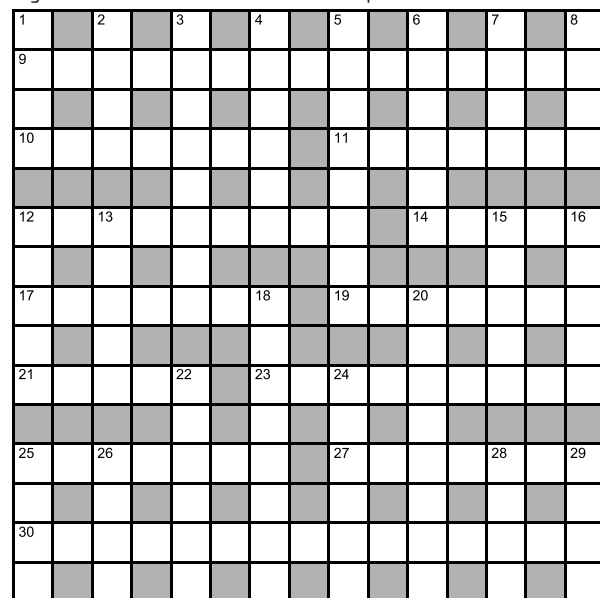
COLOMBO
Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa has sought the resignation of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, asserting that governance will improve if the President and the Cabinet are from the same party. **PTI**

Sharif flown to London for further treatment

LAHORE
Pakistan's ailing former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday left for London in an air ambulance to seek better treatment for multiple illness. This comes days after a court here allowed him to travel abroad for four weeks. **PTI**

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12785

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



(set by Hypatia)

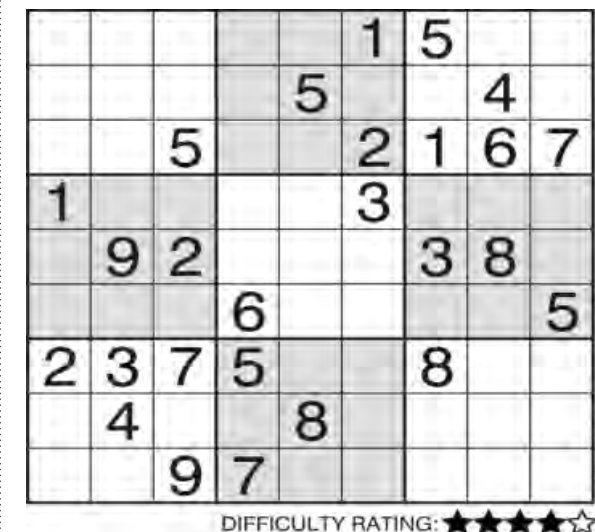
- 14 Thin recorder? (5)
- 17 Say, extras in total, e.g. by estimation (3,4)
- 19 Sensible paper trashed without liberal notion (7)
- 21 Stole and returned without a fight (5)
- 23 Cushy life at her Edinburgh house (9)
- 25 Eat bear (7)
- 27 Around lunch time, two queens became increasingly lustful (7)
- 30 Face up to something else (7,3,2,3)

DOWN

- 1 They're not even large to cover priest (4)
- 2 Roll up flag after fine address (4)
- 3 When it doesn't rain on Spooner's beloved earth (5,3)
- 4 Attack gangster without one back-up (7)
- 5 Ratnam, perhaps devours Italian's favourite pasta (8)
- 6 Judge wore a clean suit (6)

- 7 Boring book finally offered for reading to a toddler (4)
- 8 For starters, ultimately someone employing resources (4)
- 12 World-class book for students? (5)
- 13 Mother and grandmother rock! (5)
- 15 Former busybody on the telephone (5)
- 16 Hard cryptic grid cracked by Incognito, at first (5)
- 18 Picked up comfy clothes for program (8)
- 20 Robbed diamond that made Robinhood broke (3-1-4)
- 22 Awkwardly lift hubby's coat that's dirty (6)
- 24 Launching regularly, can ISRO gain gravity with World body's projectile? (3,3)
- 25 Members go up and trade (4)
- 26 Crazy man in perfect condition (4)
- 28 Hint: Reverse the first 9 letters (4)
- 29 Scan metal with the other hand (4)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12784

D	E	A	R	J	O	H	N	S	P	U	R	G	E
E	U	I	O	J	I	E	X						
N	O	T	E	B	O	O	K	U	P	K	E	E	P
T	U	E	D	J	S	L	E						
A	R	M	A	D	I	L	L	O	Q	U	E	E	N
L	N			U	E	U	C	E					
M	L	V	I	I	F	S							
G	H	L		T	H	E	A	T	R	E			
U	R	A	N	I	U	M	P	O	K	E			
F	U	L	S	E	M	N	E	M	O	N	I	S	T
T	O	T	E	R	V	L	L	A					
I	N	W	A	R	D	A	C	T	U	A	L	L	
O	E	E	E	E	L	E	E	E					
N	O	D	D	E	D	A	D	V	E	R	T	E	D

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

9	4	8	3	6	2	1	7	5
3	7	5	8	9	1	2	4	6
1	6	2	5	4	7	8	3	9
6	1	4	7	3	5	9	2	8
8	2	9	6	1	4	7	5	3
5	3	7	9	2	8	6	1	4
7	9	6	2	5	3	4	8	1
4	8	3	1	7	6	5	9	2
2	5	1	4	8	9	3	6	7



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