

Jordan recalls envoy to Israel over holy site disputes

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Jordan recalled its ambassador, Walid Obeidat, on Wednesday (November 5) amid Palestinian allegations that Israeli security forces had entered Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam.

It was the first such recall since Israel and Jordan signed a peace agreement in 1994.

For nearly a century Jordan has administered the mosque, located atop Jerusalem's most sensitive religious site, known to Muslims as Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, and to Jews as the Temple Mount, site of the biblical Jewish temples.

"We have sent repeated messages to Israel directly and indirectly that Jerusalem is a red line, and these continuous violations and incursions, and stopping people from worshiping freely and allowing extremists to come in under the protection of Israeli police, and so many other violations, we have said that this is a red line," said Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, who was in Paris meeting U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

Judeh also said Israel's actions were "infuriating the emotions and the sensitivity of 1.5 billion Muslims around the world."

Amid the worst tensions Jerusalem has seen in a decade, Palestinian officials claimed Wednesday that Israeli forces entered the mosque to quell protesters, though Israeli police denied this. Both Palestinian and Jordanian officials appealed to the United Nations Security Council, on which Jordan currently holds a rotating seat, to stop the Israeli "violations" on the site.

Vow to preserve status quo

Over the past few months, as Palestinian protesters armed with rocks, fireworks, and Molotov cocktails have increasingly clashed with Israeli forces, at times from within Al Aqsa, Israel has repeatedly prohibited males under the age of 40 from praying in

the compound as a preemptive bid to limit violence. Last week Israel briefly cut off all access to Al Aqsa, sparking an outcry from Palestinian officials.

In an attempt to reassure both Jordanian and Palestinian officials, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to preserve the status quo on the site, under which Jewish prayer is banned, despite rising pressure from prominent Israeli lawmakers to change that. Mr. Netanyahu reiterated that pledge in a statement released Thursday night, after Obeidat's recall.

Palestinian media recently reported that a bill that would legalize Jewish prayer at the site and establish equal rights for Jews and Muslims is due to come before the Israeli parliament soon, prompting Obeidat to demand clarification. In the eyes of Arab Muslims, a change in the status quo would pose a major threat to the sanctity of the Muslim sites.

More broadly, many see the Al Aqsa issue as part of a broader Israeli push to exercise sovereignty over East Jerusalem, which Israel conquered in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and later annexed as part of its "eternal and undivided capital." Jordanian and Palestinian leaders have decried the Israeli push as an attempted "Judaization" of Jerusalem.

Jordanians planning visit

More than a dozen Jordanian members of parliament are planning a visit to Al Aqsa to express solidarity with Palestinians, and some have said that Israel's actions imperil its 1994 peace treaty with Jordan, which could be frozen or canceled.

Both countries have an interest in preserving the deal, however. Jordan is dependent on a key water-sharing agreement with Israel and this fall signed a \$15 billion contract for natural gas supplies as well, making Israel its No. 1 energy supplier.

Israel, meanwhile, benefits from the relative stability of its next-door neighbor in a region alight with Islamist extremism. A deterioration in bilateral ties would also likely affect Israel's relations with Egypt and the Palestinian Authority, reducing cooperation over mutual threats such as Hamas militancy.