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## IRAQ'S AL-SADR REISSUES CALLS TO 'LIBERATE' JERUSALEM

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Iraqs firebrand Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr on Thursday condemned the U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israels capital and reiterated calls to liberate the holy city.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League must play a more robust role, al-Sadr told reporters in Iraqs southern city of Najaf. They must do more than simply voice their condemnation as they have so many times in the past, he said. He also urged Riyadh to "end the ongoing conflicts in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria and direct its Saudi-led Islamic alliance towards the liberation of Jerusalem. Otherwise, al-Sadr asserted, humiliation and shame will be our fate." "We are currently mulling a response to the U.S. decision [to recognize Jerusalem as Israels capital] with resistance factions," he said. "If these factions are prepared to confront Israel, he said, I will stand on the front lines."

The Shia cleric also called on the Arab youth to realize the seriousness of the situation and rekindle the spirit of Jihad with a view to liberating Jerusalem before its too late. Contentiously, he went on to warn Israel of the ability of resistance factions to strike the Jewish state from Syrian territory.

While al-Sadr did not identify the resistance factions in question, he may have been referring to Shia Hashd al-Shaabi fighters -- and other Iraqi Shia militias -- now deployed in Syria to support the Assad regime.

In the face of widespread opposition, U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday announced his decision to officially recognize Jerusalem as Israels capital.

The dramatic shift in U.S. policy triggered protests on Thursday in the occupied Palestinian territories, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq and other Muslim countries.

Jerusalem remains at the heart of the Israel-Palestine conflict, with Palestinians hoping that East Jerusalem -- now occupied by Israel -- might eventually serve as the capital of a Palestinian state.