

## US recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel

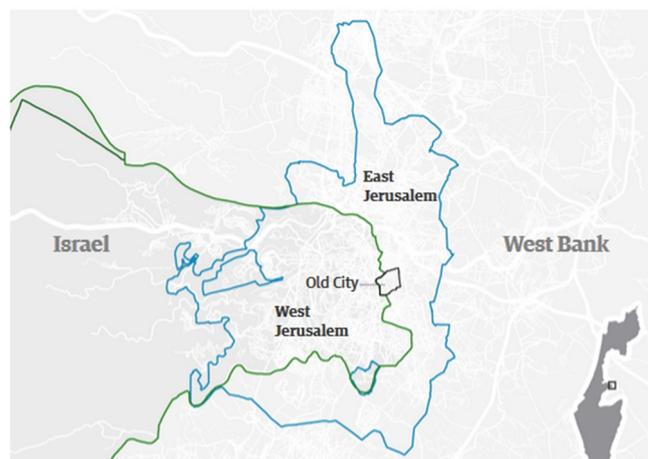
On 6 December 2017, US President Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, mirroring the official Israeli position on the status of the city. In doing so, the US has become the first country to officially endorse the Israeli position on a hotly disputed issue that lies at the very heart of the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), potentially weakening the role of the US in that process as an impartial mediator and tilting the odds further in Israel's favour. The move has been widely condemned as a violation of international law and a political provocation. However, it leaves open the possibility to address the status of the city as part of a comprehensive peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians.

### President Trump's announcement

On 6 December 2017, President Trump announced in a [speech](#) at the White House that the United States will recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and gave instructions to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In doing so, the President is acting on a policy embodied in US federal law since 1995, and fulfilling an election [campaign promise](#) to relocate the US Embassy, [strengthening](#) his appeal to core supporters. The [Jerusalem Embassy Act](#), passed by a [large majority](#) in Congress and the Senate in 1995, declares it to be [US policy](#) that Jerusalem be 'recognized as the capital of the State of Israel', and that 'the U.S. Embassy in Israel be established in Jerusalem'. The bill authorises the President to suspend the application of the law for a renewable six-month period, 'to protect the national security interests of the United States'. For the past two decades, US Presidents have routinely issued waivers to delay the opening of a US Embassy in Jerusalem. In doing so, they repeatedly thwarted the attempt launched by Congress in 1995 to [forestall](#) the outcome of the 1993 Oslo Accords, the first direct agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. On 6 December, even though he [signed](#) another waiver to prevent a cut in State Department funding stipulated by the Act, President Trump de facto broke with this tradition, overturning [70 years](#) of US foreign policy on the Middle East.

### The importance of Jerusalem to the MEPP

There have been many [attempts](#) to resolve the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians since the Middle East war of [June 1967](#), in which Israel occupied the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, the Golan Heights and parts of Sinai. [UN Security Council Resolution 242](#), passed on 22 November 1967, embodies the principle that has guided most of the peace negotiations – the exchange of land for peace. Clause 1 of Resolution 242 called for Israel to withdraw from the 'territories' conquered in 1967. Efforts to resolve the dispute between Palestinians and Israelis still centre on the principle of a 'two-state solution' to the conflict, with an independent Palestinian state created alongside the state of Israel. One of the [most intractable](#) issues in peace talks has been Jerusalem. The [1980 Basic Law](#) on Jerusalem declared Jerusalem to be the 'complete and united' capital of Israel. Israel officially rejects any division of the city, the seat of the Israeli government, and has built extensive [settlements](#) in East Jerusalem; however, in successive peace negotiations, various plans for the division of Jerusalem have been discussed. Palestinians, for their part, seek to establish the capital of their future Palestinian state in East Jerusalem. The international [consensus](#) has so far been that Jerusalem would



Source: [The Guardian](#).



have to be the capital of both states, in a manner to be agreed between the two sides to the conflict during 'final status' negotiations. In his speech, President Trump explicitly said that he was not stipulating how much of Jerusalem should be considered Israel's capital, and did not rule out a future division of the city, or a two-state solution. This leaves open the possibility of establishing the capital of a future Palestinian state in the eastern part of the city. He also acknowledged in his speech that the status quo of the Holy Places must be preserved. In April 2017, Russia was the [first country](#) to [officially recognise](#) West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian state.

### The importance of Jerusalem to Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Jerusalem is a holy place central to [three](#) world religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, adding a [religious](#) dimension to the question of who [controls](#) the city and its most important religious sites. For Jews, Jerusalem is the site of the two [Temples](#) that were the centre of worship and national identity in ancient Israel. The second Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Jews still come to pray at the Western Wall, a remnant of the retaining wall of the mount on which the Temple once stood. For Christians, the city is central to the story of Jesus, his death, crucifixion and resurrection. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is a significant focus for Christians around the world. For Muslims, Jerusalem is their third holiest city, after Mecca and Medina. The temple mount, site of the former Jewish temple, is known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary, al-Haram al-sharif. The site is dominated by two structures to mark a sacred location referred to in the [Quran](#). In accordance with the [Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty](#), Jordan is custodian of the Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem.

### International reactions and implications

With the exception of opinions in Israel, which [welcomed](#) the [decision](#), political and religious leaders from around the world have condemned President Trump's announcement as a [dangerous](#) move that will 'destroy the peace process, strengthen extremists and weaken the US's standing in the world'. Palestinian President [Mahmoud Abbas](#) condemned the recognition as undermining any attempt to achieve a two-state solution, violating international law, encouraging the occupation and construction of Israeli settlements, and ending the US role as a diplomatic sponsor and mediator of peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Other senior Palestinians declared the two-state solution '[over](#)', saying it was time to move to a '[one state](#)' approach, 'with equal rights for everyone living in historic Palestine'. [Violence](#) has erupted in cities across the West Bank, and the Islamist movement Hamas has threatened a new intifada. [US allies](#) including [Jordan](#), Egypt, [Saudi Arabia](#) and the United Arab Emirates have spoken out strongly against the announcement. The [Arab League](#) has called it a 'dangerous violation of international law', and has called on the US to 'abandon the announcement'. Russia has called the change in policy [alarming](#), as it risks further complicating Palestinian-Israeli relations and destabilising the region. Republicans in the US Congress have [overwhelmingly](#) supported President Trump's announcement, while Democrats were split. The chiefs of the State and Defence Departments and the CIA [opposed it](#). In recent decades, the US has been a key facilitator of efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The US has been a member of the '[Middle East Quartet](#)' – with the EU, the UN and Russia – which in 2002 launched a 'road map for peace' aimed at resolving the conflict. The new US position on Jerusalem arguably [weakens](#) the role of the US in the [Quartet](#) or in any future [peace negotiations](#). The announcement is likely to strain the '[Riyadh-led](#) tacit Sunni alliance with Israel' that the Trump administration has been trying to build up to confront Iran, and play into the hands of Tehran, which has [warned](#) Arab governments against building closer ties with Israel, and urged their Muslim populations to oppose what it sees as the betrayal of the Palestinian cause.

### European Union and European Parliament positions on Jerusalem

The [EU's objective](#) for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is 'a two-state solution with an independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security with the State of Israel', with Jerusalem as the capital of both the state of Israel and the state of Palestine. On 7 December 2017, the High Representative [confirmed](#) that the EU and its 28 Member States will continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem, until the final status of the Holy City is resolved through direct negotiations between the parties. She announced that the EU will renew efforts to work with regional and international partners, including the Middle East Quartet and Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to re-launch direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians on the basis of the [Arab Peace Initiative](#). The European Parliament, in its [resolution](#) of 18 May 2017 on achieving the two-state solution in the Middle East, reiterated its strong support for the two-state solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states. This follows Parliament's [resolution](#) of 17 December 2014 on recognition of Palestine statehood.