

Capital crisis — on U.S. recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital

U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to [recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel](#), despite warnings at home and abroad, will worsen the Israel-Palestine conflict. Jerusalem, which houses holy places of all three Abrahamic religions and is claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians, is at the very heart of the dispute. Israel built its seat of power in West Jerusalem decades ago and occupied the East during the 1967 war, and later annexed it. Palestinians insist that East Jerusalem should be the capital of their future state. Even though there is a Congressional resolution in the U.S. urging Washington to relocate its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, previous American Presidents avoided doing so given the legal, ethical and political implications of the issue, besides their commitment to a negotiated two-state settlement. By breaking with this consensus, Mr. Trump has in effect endorsed the Israeli claims to East Jerusalem. The decision will likely help him bolster his image among the Jewish lobby in Washington as well as American evangelical groups, his social base. Israel is obviously happy. Though Arab countries have voiced protest, they are unlikely to challenge an American decision. Mr. Trump's move raises vital questions about U.S. diplomacy in the region besides putting new roadblocks in the peace process. It could be viewed as illegal as the Israeli claim that Jerusalem "complete and united" is its capital has been declared "null and void" by UN Security Council Resolution 478, which also asks member-countries to "withdraw diplomatic missions from the Holy City". The U.S. is now acting against the spirit of this resolution.

The Jerusalem gambit risks triggering another cycle of protests and repression in the Occupied Territories. In 2000, Ariel Sharon's visit to the al-Aqsa compound in the Old City sparked the second intifada. Palestinians are expressing similar distress today. The peace process is not going anywhere, while Israel has gradually been tightening its occupation and building new settlements. Hamas has already called for a third intifada. In the longer term, Mr. Trump has just made the two-state solution more complicated. The Israeli-Palestine conflict can be settled only after an agreement is reached on the [status of Jerusalem](#). The city was not part of Israel in the original 1947 UN plan to partition Palestine. Jerusalem, which was supposed to be ruled by an international trusteeship, was conquered by Israel. This is why the UN has not recognised it as Israel's capital. With his latest announcement, Mr. Trump has endorsed the occupation. And in doing so, he has undermined the U.S.'s position as a neutral broker in Israeli-Palestinian talks. In short, he has dealt a blow to the peace process.

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