

History and politics of Jerusalem

May 2017

In light of US President Donald Trump's trip to Israel and, in particular, Jerusalem next week and the speculation over whether the Trump administration will implement the 1995 US Jerusalem Embassy Act and move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (postponed by every President to date), the BICOM research team has produced a briefing on the city of Jerusalem.

History

- Jerusalem is sacred to all three monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Jerusalem is the holiest city in the world for Jews, and was their ancient capital and the site where both temples were built in ancient times. For Muslims, the city is the third of Islam's holiest sites, after Mecca and Medina. For Christians, the city is the site of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.
- Jews have maintained a continuous presence in Jerusalem for more than 3,000 years, despite prohibitions on habitation and harsh conditions, and have been a constant feature of the city's life. They have been the largest single group of inhabitants in the city since the early 19th century – in 1870 Jews made up 11,600 of Jerusalem's 22,000 residents. In 1948, the year of Israel's independence, Jews constituted 100,000 of the city's 165,000 inhabitants. In 2016, Jews comprised 62 per cent of the city's population, Muslims comprised 37 per cent and Christians less than 1 per cent, although over the years, there has been a decline in the relative size of Jerusalem's Jewish population, with a concomitant increase in the proportion of the Arab population. The proportion of the Jewish population fell from 74 per cent in 1967 to 72 per cent in 1980, to 68 per cent in 2000, and to 63 per cent in 2014.
- For 400 years Jerusalem was part of the Ottoman Empire, until the British army under the command of General Edmund Allenby captured the city in December 1917. He was the first Christian in over six centuries to control Jerusalem. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George described the capture as "a Christmas present for the British people".
- Jerusalem stayed in British hands as part of the British Mandate from 1922 to 1948. In November 1947 the UN passed [Resolution 181](#) that called for partitioning Mandatory Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, and for a "Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem". Whilst the Jewish leadership accepted Res. 181 with reservations, the Arab states rejected the resolution, leading to then Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declaring that Israel would no longer accept the internationalisation of Jerusalem.
- Following the 1948 War of Independence Jerusalem was *de facto* partitioned for the first time in its history, with Israel controlling the western part and Jordan the eastern (including the Old City). In 1950, Jordan [annexed](#) the territories it had captured in the 1948 war. West Jerusalem was 38 km sq. and East Jerusalem was 6km sq. Although the UK and Pakistan were the only two countries that recognised Jordan's annexation, the UK never recognised Jordan's sovereignty over Jerusalem, viewing it as illegal.
- In December 1949 Prime Minister Ben-Gurion announced that Jerusalem was an inseparable part of Israel and her eternal capital. This was echoed by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol following the reunification of East and West Jerusalem by Israel during the Six-Day War.
- Under Jordanian rule, and in contravention of [Article VIII of the 1949 Israel Jordan Armistice Agreement](#), Jews and Christians were restricted from visiting their holy sites. Jews were denied access to the Western Wall, the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives and all religious sites in East Jerusalem.

The 1949 armistice lines were sealed as Jordanian snipers would perch on the walls of the Old City and shoot at Israelis across the lines. Christians were allowed access to their holy sites; yet they were subject to restrictions under Jordanian law. For instance, there were limits on pilgrims during the religious holidays, restrictions on religious charities and institutions buying real estate in Jerusalem, and Christian schools were subjected to strict controls such as teaching all students the Koran and Arabic and forbidding the teaching of Christian religious materials to non-Christians.

- Following the 1967 Six-Day War - when Israel captured East Jerusalem and reunited the city - Israel has maintained access to the Holy Sites for all people. The approximately 300,000 [Palestinian residents](#) in the municipal territory of East Jerusalem hold the status of “permanent resident” of Israel, meaning they enjoy various civilian rights and are entitled to welfare services such as National Insurance, health services, and municipal services.

A disputed city

- Israelis and Palestinians both claim Jerusalem as their capital. The State of Israel has proclaimed Jerusalem to be the “undivided, eternal capital of Israel” and maintains its primary governmental institutions there. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) ultimately foresees the eastern part of the city as the capital of the State of Palestine. The international community has [accepted](#) the *de facto* application of Israeli law in West Jerusalem while the claim to internationalise Jerusalem is not seriously raised anymore.

- There are no legal documents that clearly [resolve](#) the status of Jerusalem. The Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (DoP), signed between Israel and the PLO in September 1993, leaves open the status of Jerusalem. Article V of the DoP says that the permanent status of Jerusalem is one of the issues to be agreed by both parties in bilateral negotiations.

- While many Israelis oppose any division of Jerusalem, Israel has offered to share the sovereignty of Jerusalem with the Palestinians for the sake of peace. In 2000 Ehud Barak offered dramatic concessions that would have allowed the Arab neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem to become the capital of a Palestinian state, and given the Palestinians control over the Muslim holy places on the Temple Mount, but this offer was rejected by Yasser Arafat. In 2008, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered to put the Old City and Holy Basin under joint management by a special committee consisting of representatives from five nations: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Palestine, the US and Israel.

- The [official UK policy](#) on the status of Jerusalem in the peace process is that it should be the shared capital of both sides in a way that is agreed through bilateral



- Also in contravention of the 1949 armistice agreement, Jordan permitted construction over Jewish holy places. For instance, a road to the Intercontinental Hotel intersected the Mount of Olives cemetery, destroying hundreds of Jewish graves, and 58 synagogues were either destroyed or converted into stables or chicken coops in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.
- On 27 June 1967, after Israel’s captured East Jerusalem and reunited the city in the Six-Day War, Israel passed the Law and Administration Ordinance (Amendment No. 11), which provided for the extension of its law, jurisdiction, and administration to East Jerusalem. Jerusalem’s boundaries expanded to include 108km sq. The next day Israel passed the Municipalities Ordinance (Amendment No. 6) Law, which authorised the Interior Minister to enlarge the municipal boundaries of East Jerusalem. In 1993 and 1998 Israel extended the municipal boundary of Jerusalem and has pursued a policy of building communities around the city to ensure it is never divided again.

negotiations and navigates Israeli and Palestinian sensitivities without causing serious security and logistical problems.

- Although most foreign embassies are based in Tel Aviv, the US consulate-general, along with [eight other countries](#), are based in Jerusalem and handle diplomatic relations with the Palestinian Authority. Five of them — the UK, Turkey, Belgium, Spain and Sweden — are in East Jerusalem. The consulates-general of the US, France, Italy, and Greece are in West Jerusalem. The European Union also has a representative office in East Jerusalem. In Israel there is a strong belief that if these countries maintain diplomatic mission to the Palestinians in the eastern part of Jerusalem, there is no reason why they can't base their embassies in the western part of Jerusalem, which has de-facto been regarded as being the capital of Israel by the Palestinians in peace negotiation since 1993.

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This briefing was produced by BICOM's research team.

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