

Netanyahu's Annexation Drive

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Land seizures, annexations, and conquest. These are words axiomatic to the state of Israel. In the main, the state has maintained an uncomfortable position based on patience and attrition. We have waited this long; you will wait longer. Be it dispossessed Palestinians and their aspirations for state recognition or what are loosely described as the objections of the "international community", Israel has imperial staying power. Be patient, and the rage over the abuse of Palestinians will die down.

It is that staying power that navigates the often feeble exhortations to international law that pullulate airwaves and diplomatic traffic. Be it the legality of international settlements, attacks on sovereign countries that have not been given the legitimising wash of the UN Security Council, or Israel's possession of nuclear weapons – all of these are frowned upon, condemned only to be assimilated into a ceremony of legitimacy. Israel might well be condemned and scolded, but nothing more will come of it. The game of semantics will be played, masking the exertion of brute force.

This pattern threatens to reassert itself in the latest warnings directed at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's promise of annexation. The timetabling for this muscular assertion of land pinching remains vague. It is intended to apply to Jewish settlements in the West Bank and in the Jordan Valley from this month.

The promise seems, on paper, audacious, foolish, and destructive – and that's just for starters. Benny Gantz [warned](#) that there was little reason to take such action, given the coronavirus crisis and the country's economic ills. But for Netanyahu, every crisis needs a distraction, even if that distraction is another crisis.

Accordingly, explanations for this annexation drive vary. The "legacy" line of thinking is that Netanyahu wants to leave something to remember him by. David Horowitz [ponders the point](#). "Has Netanyahu decided that this is to be his legacy – as the Israeli leader who formally, permanently reconnected modern Israel to its formative biblical territory? Well, maybe." Then come [those reasons motivated](#) by psychology (keep the people busy with something else instead of focusing on the corruption trial) and ideology (habitual expansionist aided by Washington right-wingers).

Various foreign governments have strong words on the point, but they are not likely to affect the balance sheet of considerations. Netanyahu's tactics in dealing with the Palestinians tend to be finessed upon domestic considerations and moderated by winds of Washington. Those winds have tended to blow warmly in his favour. In 2017, the Trump administration recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital, though remained abstruse on the

scope of sovereignty. President Donald Trump's [peace plan](#) gave Netanyahu much confidence to cock a snook at the Palestinians and his detractors. As [he explained](#) to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. "Israel is prepared to conduct negotiations on the basis of President Trump's peace plan, which is both creative and realistic, and will not return to the failed formulas of the past."

European powers have done their bit to make a fuss. European Union foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell [promised](#) in February that annexation, were it to be implemented "could not pass unchallenged." But opposition within the EU to the measure is taking place in different registers. Germany, for instance, will not accept the imposition of economic sanctions, [the very thing](#) that Palestinian figures such as Saeb Erekat urge.

On July 7, the foreign ministers of Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan clubbed together to issue a joint warning. "We concur that any annexation of Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 would be a violation of international law and imperil the foundations of the peace process." The ministers went on to state that they "would not recognise any changes to the 1967 borders that are not agreed by both parties in the conflict." Taking such steps "would have serious consequences for the security and stability of the region, would constitute a major obstacle to efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive and just peace." An attempt to barbed the statement was also made. "It could also have consequences for the relationship with Israel."

The soothsayers are also in evidence in such publications as *Foreign Policy*. Philip H. Gordon and Robert Malley [claim](#) that this annexation push "won't trigger a disaster." Interest will initially focus on Palestinian protest, the fate of the Palestinian Authority, the threats by Arab states to sever "budding ties" or the imposition of sanctions by European states. The "aftermath", however, promises to "be toxic for the Jewish state." Not only does it breach international law and violate Palestinian rights, it will poison the already troubled waters which nourish the state, affecting democracy even as it isolates Israel. Israel's already diminished fan club would get even smaller.

In all this violent fuss, there may be yet another side to the overture: the pure bluff. As Netanyahu likes to often claim in deflecting interest in his criminal charges, "There is nothing because there is nothing." Israel's new opposition leader Yair Lapid, is simply [not convinced](#) by the plans, confining them to the already full bin of political spin. Naftali Bennett of the Habayit Hayehudi party [is even more direct](#). "When I see Netanyahu talking about this so often, I'm convinced more and more that he's not going to do it. If you want to do it, then do it."

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