

# Netanyahu prepares Israel's annexation of large slice of West Bank

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is preparing to announce later this week his intention to annex the most important parts of the Palestinian West Bank, which Israel has illegally occupied since the 1967 war with its Arab neighbours.

The cabinet is to meet to approve the move, set for July 1, after it gets the green light from US President Donald Trump.

Last January, Trump, in his so-called “deal of the century,” gave Washington’s stamp of approval for Israel’s Greater Israel policy including its annexation of settlements built on Palestinian land as well as other parts of the West Bank Israel deems essential for its security.

It would end all pretence that the Palestinians will ever be given control of even the truncated territories that presently make up the Palestinian Authority (PA)—a series of disconnected Bantustans in just 15 percent of historical Palestine. President Mahmoud Abbas’ PA, which rules parts of the West Bank and functions as Israel’s subcontractor in suppressing the Palestinians, rejected the deal.

Netanyahu himself rejected the part of the plan calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state and the freezing of any expansion of Israeli settlements in areas to be included in that state. This is anathema to his right-wing political base. Indeed, some ultra-nationalist factions have opposed the partial annexation, fearing that they imply implicit support for a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu’s move is a flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions. Enacted in the wake of the Second World War to prevent the repetition of similar actions carried out by Germany’s Nazi regime, they outlaw the annexation of territory captured in war. But successive Israeli governments, protected by the US veto in the United Nations Security Council, have long acted in defiance of these and other international laws.

His plan, yet to be precisely defined, includes not only the settlement blocs around Jerusalem, enabling their rapid expansion, but also the 105 kilometre long Jordan Valley—the most fertile half of the West Bank—as far as the

northern Dead Sea area. The Jordan Valley is presently part of Area C that under the 1993 Oslo Accords was temporarily under military rule before being transferred to the PA in 1999. Area C has remained for decades under Israel’s military control.

The annexation of the Jordan Valley would mean Israel’s takeover of some 30 percent of the West Bank and the total encirclement of what remains of the Palestinian West Bank, making even a mini-statelet unviable. Most Palestinian farmers, who are not connected to the water grid, would be unable to access the Jordan River and would have to buy water from tankers. Jericho, the main Palestinian city in the Jordan valley, with about 28 villages and small Bedouin communities, would not be annexed, leaving it isolated and cut off from the rest of the West Bank.

The proposed annexation of the Jordan Valley is about 30 percent larger at 1,236 square kilometres than the area outlined in Trump’s January 2020 plan of around 964 square kilometres.

Since those Palestinians living in the area would not be given Palestinian citizenship, if allowed to remain, annexation would entail a nakedly apartheid-style system of rule.

This has been prepared by measures enacted by the Netanyahu government, including the “Nation-State Law” enshrining Jewish supremacy as the legal foundation of the state. The law provides the framework for an apartheid state that would ghettoize the Palestinians, who comprise nearly half of the total population of Israel and the occupied territories, taken as a whole.

Such a system can only be accomplished by stepped up repression—within Israel and across the occupied territories—and Israeli military rule in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Trump’s “deal of the century” is bound up with his campaign of maximum pressure on Iran, in which Israel plays a vital role along with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, and his quest for US hegemony in the resource-rich Middle East as part of his plans to isolate China, viewed as

an existential threat to Washington's geostrategic interests.

Netanyahu's plans are tantamount to a declaration of war against the Palestinians and a broader war in the Middle East, where Israel—the strongest military power in the region—acts as Washington's proxy force. It has stoked dissent within Israel as some in the military-intelligence establishment warn of the explosive consequences.

Palestinians have taken to the streets to protest the annexation plans. On Saturday, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) blocked roads leading to the village of Bardala, while at the Hamra and Tayasir checkpoints that control the routes between the West Bank and Jordan Valley, soldiers refused to allow non-residents of the Jordan Valley to cross.

An IDF spokesperson said that its roadblocks were part of the preparations against "protests that turn into violent riots and friction with residents of Bardala and Tubas."

On Friday, the IDF carried out air strikes in response to two rockets fired from the besieged Palestinian enclave of Gaza, which is controlled by Hamas, the bourgeois clerical group.

On June 18, a protest of Israeli and Arab women against the planned annexation—that included blocking a road—was organised in Tel Aviv by the Women Wage Peace movement. On Saturday, Combatants for Peace held a protest of Palestinian and Israeli activists at the Almog junction, north of the Dead Sea, where at least one person was arrested. But the largest demonstration took place on Monday, when thousands attended a rally organised by the PA in Jericho.

The IDF set up roadblocks to prevent access to the protest, provoking angry clashes. The protest was attended by the PA's Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, the UN's Middle East Envoy Nickolay Mladenov, and foreign diplomats, including the ambassadors of the European Union (EU), China, Russia, Jordan and other Arab states.

Israel's neighbours, Egypt and Jordan, whose population is largely of Palestinian descent, fear that any instability in the Palestinian territories could spill over into their own unstable countries. Last week, Netanyahu despatched the Mossad chief Meir Cohen to discuss the annexation plan with Jordan's King Abdullah, who has warned of a "massive conflict" if Netanyahu went ahead with his plans.

Speaking at the UN Security Council Wednesday, UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Mladenov urged Israel to abandon its plans, warning that they threatened the prospects for peace with the Palestinians.

France, Germany and the UK joined other European members of the UN Security Council in echoing these statements, and said they would refuse to recognise Israel's sovereignty over the Jordan Valley, with calls from some European parliamentarians for sanctions or a boycott against

products made in the settlements.

Mladenov was explicit about the fears among the major European powers, which have a long record of "opposing" Israeli aggression against the Palestinians but doing nothing in practice. Hinting at the severe economic and social hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, coming atop of decades of brutal suppression, he warned that the Israel/Palestine "conflict has been marked by periods of extreme violence, but never before has the risk of escalation been accompanied by a political horizon so distant, an economic situation so fragile and a region so volatile."

While Trump had indicated his consent to Netanyahu's annexation plans, which play well with his evangelical Christian base of support as November's presidential elections approach, he faces divisions within his administration.

On Thursday, Kellyanne Conway, a senior White House adviser, said that Trump would be making a "big announcement" on the issue, but such is the disagreement and haggling going on between the White House, the Pentagon and State Department that discussions have continued with no agreement and no public statement.

The resolution of the terrible situation confronting Palestinian and Israeli workers alike cannot be left with the region's ruling class and the imperialist powers. They must unite with their class brothers and sisters across the region and internationally in a struggle to put an end to capitalism on a world scale and reorganise society on a socialist basis.



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