

The Trump administration is an exception in the sense that it is difficult to predict its reaction to a limited annexation. However, **future administrations are liable to exhibit hostile reactions to annexation, undermining Israel's most important security relations.**

### Diplomatic Ramifications

**Annexationists are trapped in a dangerous misconception about a historic opportunity. They underestimate the international and regional reaction to an act of legislated annexation.**

External factors accelerating the annexation plans include the noted exceptional support of the Trump administration for Israeli government policies, as well as its overall foreign policy orientation. Current US policy on the Middle East features sweeping declarations without the strategy to implement them. Regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, too, Trump's campaign slogan of a "Deal of the Century" still drives policy. However, the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem, the cut in aid for the PA and UNRWA, the closure of the PLO Mission in Washington, DC, and attempts to shape a negotiation course that is clearly biased in Israel's favor, have combined to entrench the diplomatic freeze. This has weakened the PA and the Oslo–derived infrastructure and has created room for radical initiatives such as a Hamas–controlled Palestinian mini state in Gaza or the annexation by Israel of parts of the West Bank.

The shockwaves of the Arab Spring that have divided the Arab world are also perceived as providing a tailwind for the annexation initiatives. Arab rulers are concerned mainly with bolstering domestic control and preventing further waves of revolution and are less interested in the Palestinian issue. Moreover, the challenge presented by destabilizing elements such as Iran and the Islamic State has created a confluence of interests and a desire to forge security cooperation between Israel and leading Arab countries. This interest, which is perceived as existential, has accelerated the tendency to sideline the Palestinian issue. At the grassroots level, too, under the influence of social networks, the goals of improving living conditions and defending rights under authoritarian regimes is a higher priority than protecting Palestinians' rights. **As a result, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has become a much less important issue for the leadership and much of the public in the relevant Arab countries.**

This combination of circumstances invites annexationists to argue that Israel faces substantially fewer regional constraints than ever before.

In the broader international arena, too, various trends ostensibly favor the annexationists. The shifting of the global economic center of gravity to China and other Asian markets has opened up opportunities for Israel, enabling it to diversify its export markets and attract investments from countries for whom the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a secondary consideration. Europe is less inclined to engage meaningfully with the Palestinian issue as it struggles with waves of immigration, economic crises in some EU countries, the need to protect the integrity of the EU following Brexit, and the challenge posed by the rise of illiberal regimes in Hungary and Poland as well as by Russian strategic subversion. As if all these were not enough, Israeli foreign policy success in securing the support of several EU members (Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) has prevented consensus on decisions that might be challenging for Israel and has paralyzed the EU structure, which along with several of its key members (e.g. Germany, the UK, and France) longs to be involved in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

**Israeli annexationists identify these trends and (wrongly) conclude that even though Europe is hostile to Israeli annexation, its ability to prevent it or to impose meaningful sanctions is and shall remain weak.**

When viewing the UN and other international organizations, here, too, annexationists can ostensibly draw encouragement from current trends. The Trump administration regards the UN as a wasteful, ineffective, and biased body, and has dramatically cut its contribution to its institutions. This approach, combined with the overtly pro–Israeli approach of the US ambassador to the UN, has largely paralyzed the Security Council and other UN institutions. Abu Mazen's consistent attempts to internationalize the conflict by securing UN recognition of Palestine have secured only symbolic gains. **Warnings that Israel would face a diplomatic tsunami have proved exaggerated, encouraging the annexationists, who simplistically assume that anything that has not happened will not happen.**

**The annexationists prove unable to distinguish between the current situation, in which players respond to creeping annexation, and the situation that would emerge once any of the annexation plans are legislated.**

For example, our assessment is that the annexation of a single settlement bloc such as Ma'ale Adumim (including the E1 area) – thereby bisecting the West Bank into two parts and dooming territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian state – can be expected to lead to a strong international and regional diplomatic reaction. Even the Trump Administration may find it difficult not to react to such a step, whereas the core EU countries, and even Eastern European ones that are currently more friendly toward the current Israeli government, can be expected to respond fiercely and to take tangible action, including diplomatic and even economic sanctions. In this scenario, the non-Western permanent members of the Security Council – Russia and China – can also be expected to take punitive steps and to cool their bilateral relations with Israel.

**A diplomatic tsunami can be expected to strike Israel's shores, leaving the US and Israel helpless to halt the process.**

Egypt and Jordan will not be able to maintain their business-as-usual approach. They have withdrawn their ambassadors from Israel in the past over far less significant issues. Pressure from the street and other considerations will demand firm reaction as annexation by legislation is viewed as final proof that Israel has shut the door on the two-state solution. This will probably lead to the freezing of diplomatic relations with Israel and enhanced cooperation with Israel's adversaries on the international scene, in order to build a broad anti-Israeli coalition. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states will also be forced to respond harshly, suspending all contacts with Israel – including clandestine diplomatic exchanges, due to fear of embarrassing leaks exploited by their adversaries (Iran, Qatar, and Turkey) – and supporting punitive measures by international bodies. The long-predicted *diplomatic tsunami* that has thus far not materialized can be expected to arrive on Israel's shores, regardless of the extent of territory involved in legislated annexation.

As dynamics on the ground deteriorate into violence, the ensuing collapse of the PA and the system of Oslo agreements, and an Israeli seizure of the entire area to follow, is bound to be met with increasingly harsh reaction and punitive measures imposed by the international community. The US and Israel will be left powerless to check that process.

**Full annexation of the West Bank will cause extreme damage to all of Israel's interests and will push it toward an international pariah status.**

Once the *domino effect* drives Israel to move from partial to a complete annexation of the West Bank, trends and developments outlined above will accelerate and intensify, causing harm to Israel's most important strategic interests:

- Israel's relations with the relevant Arab world, including Egypt and Jordan as well as states in the Gulf, will enter a state of deep freeze:
  - This will open opportunities for Iran, Turkey, and the Islamist movements to intensify their destabilizing efforts on the West Bank, in East Jerusalem and Gaza, as well as among Israel's Arab citizenry.
  - Should Iranian involvement in Syria and Lebanon still pose a security challenge, Russia might prove less tolerant of Israel's military effort to contain it.
- Israel's relations with the international community, including the US, can be expected to deteriorate. The Security Council may adopt resolutions, including the imposition of sanctions. While under President Trump, the US can be expected to veto such resolutions, this is not expected to be the case in a post-Trump era.
- Israel's relations with key countries in Europe will face an unprecedented crisis and delegitimization of Israel as an apartheid state will reach new levels.
- Even traditionally friendly Asian countries such as China and India will significantly cool and scale back their bilateral ties with Israel.
- The process of distancing from Israel of its most reliable ally – world Jewish communities, most significantly the American one – which is already apparent, will certainly accelerate with the potential for irreversibility among the young.
- Less significant but still noteworthy: the BDS movement will be given an unprecedented boost.

The international consensus around the “two states for two peoples” concept will be undermined. As time passes, Israel will face increasing pressure to justify its claim of being a democracy by granting equal rights to all its citizens – Arabs and Jews alike. It can be assumed that this demand will enjoy global support, presenting Israel with the most serious strategic crisis in its history.

**Israel will have to choose between a rogue nation status, similar to that of Apartheid South Africa, or abandoning its Jewish character and redefining itself as the state of all its citizens.**