



Brandeis University

Crown Center
for Middle East Studies

Mailstop 010
Waltham, Massachusetts
02454-9110

781-736-5320
781-736-5324 Fax
www.brandeis.edu/crown

*Crown Family Director
Professor of the Practice in Politics*
Gary Samore

*Director for Research
Charles (Corky) Goodman Professor
of Middle East History*
Naghmeb Sohrabi

Associate Director
Kristina Cherniahivsky

Associate Director for Research
David Siddhartha Patel

*Myra and Robert Kraft Professor
of Arab Politics*
Eva Bellin

*Founding Director
Professor of Politics*
Shai Feldman

*Henry J. Leir Professor of the
Economics of the Middle East*
Nader Habibi

*Renée and Lester Crown Professor
of Modern Middle East Studies*
Pascal Menoret

Founding Senior Fellows
Abdel Monem Said Aly
Khalil Shikaki

Goldman Senior Fellow
Chuck Freilich

Goldman Faculty Leave Fellow
Andrew March

Harold Grinspoon Junior Research Fellow
Alex Boodrookas

Neubauer Junior Research Fellow
Huma Gupta

Junior Research Fellows
Hayal Akarsu
Mohammad Ataie
Youssef El Chazli
Ekin Kurtic

October 2020
No. 138

Middle East Brief

Annexation, the Trump Plan, and the Future of Palestinian-Israeli Relations

Khalil Shikaki

The Trump peace plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, announced in January 2020, would allow Israel to annex the Jordan Valley and all Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which together constitute about 30% of the West Bank. In April, the new Israeli coalition government's mere declaration of intent to vote in the future on a unilateral annexation of these territories led Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas the following month to "absolve" the PA of all agreements and understandings with Israel and the U.S., thereby ending coordination in security, economic, and civil affairs. Although the planning for annexation has now been "suspended," "stopped," "delayed," or just "paused"¹ as a result of the Israeli-Emirati normalization deal announced on August 13, those links remain severed, and the possibility of a reconsideration of annexation remains a potent threat to Palestinian-Israeli relations.

This Brief argues that the threat of annexation and the severing of ties placed Abbas and the Israelis in a situation where each is waiting for the other to concede, while the PA weakens and moves toward gradual collapse. This standoff continues despite the Israeli-Emirati announcement and the Israeli concession because Palestinians believe that annexation is not "off the table."² And unilateral annexation, if it does take place, could produce additional consequences. It could accelerate the dynamics of a one-state reality, increase the prospects for violent confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli security services, undermine the basis of the Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process, further destabilize the PA and even threaten its existence, and have

serious regional ramifications, including a greater risk of a Palestinian regional realignment.

The Shadow of Annexation

Under the Oslo agreement, Israel cannot change the status of the occupied Palestinian territories: Such a change would constitute “a clear and substantive violation of the Oslo Accords,” according to Joel Singer, the attorney who represented Israel in negotiating that agreement.³ Nonetheless, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed in September 2019 that, if reelected, he would immediately annex the Jordan Valley.⁴ Under the terms of the coalition agreement of April 20, 2020, between Netanyahu and Blue and White Party head Benny Gantz,⁵ an Israeli government vote on unilateral annexation was to be held as early as July 1. No action was in fact taken by the Israeli government on that date. But the mere declaration of intention by the new Israeli government triggered, on May 21, a decision by Abbas to “absolve” the PA of all agreements and understandings with Israel and the U.S., which was understood as both terminating the PA’s Oslo-related obligations and severing security, economic, and civil links with the state of Israel. But the Israeli government took no action with respect to annexation on or after that date, and in mid-August reached an agreement with the United Arab Emirates to hold off on annexation plans in exchange for a normalization of relations between the two countries.

Because it is part of the Trump peace plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the implementation of annexation remains dependent on a green light from the Trump administration. And the Israeli-Emirati deal adds a further constraint on Israeli behavior. This constraint on annexation has been described differently by the various players: a “suspension,” according to a U.S. statement;⁶ a “delay,” according to the Israeli prime minister;⁷ and a “stop,” according to Mohamed Bin Zayed,⁸ the crown prince of the UAE. According to *The New York Times*, the Emiratis expect Israel to refer to it as a “pause,” one that would “postpone the prospect of [unilateral annexation] until after the American presidential election.”⁹ A report in the Israeli media, however, claims that the UAE has received assurances from the Trump administration that the U.S. will not recognize any Israeli annexation until January 2024.¹⁰ If true, a reversal by Trump and Netanyahu on annexation would run the risk of causing the UAE to reconsider the normalization agreement.

But the initial delay in implementing unilateral annexation suggests one additional constraint. That delay has been linked to what seems to be a Trump administration insistence on conditioning unilateral annexation on Israeli implementation of other elements of the Trump plan.¹¹ Given the opposition of some of Netanyahu’s extreme right-wing allies to some elements of the Trump plan, like the reference to a Palestinian state, the Israeli prime minister did not seem eager to go ahead with annexation if it was directly linked to that plan. Instead, it seems he sought unconditional U.S. support for unilateral annexation, support that would not commit Israel to implement any pro-Palestinian item in the plan. In early August, Netanyahu assured his Likud faction that annexation was “not off the table” and that he was waiting for the American president before making his move.¹² After the announcement of the deal with the UAE, Netanyahu claimed that the U.S. only asked for a temporary delay, reaffirmed his commitment to implementing annexation, and confirmed that it “remains on the table.” He added: “Just as I brought peace, I will bring sovereignty [to the West Bank].”¹³

Khalil Shikaki is a founding senior fellow at the Crown Center and director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah.

The opinions and findings expressed in this Brief belong to the author exclusively and do not reflect those of the Crown Center or Brandeis University.

Abbas and Netanyahu's Game of Chicken

In response to the Israeli government's declaration in April of its intention to vote on annexation, Abbas decided on May 21 to "absolve" the PA of all agreements and understandings with Israel and the U.S., which was understood as both terminating the PA's Oslo-related obligations and severing its security, economic, and civil links with the state of Israel.¹⁴ This decision invites Israel to assume full security and civil responsibility for the occupied Palestinian territories—responsibilities that it currently shares in some areas with the PA. Why would Mahmoud Abbas, often described as unwilling to challenge the status quo that exists between Israel and the Palestinians, take such a risk?

Abbas's calculus seems to be based on the assumption that the well-being of the PA is more valuable to Israel than it is either to himself personally or to the Palestinian people. Therefore, according to his logic, whichever party benefits most from the PA is the one that will blink first to preserve it—the "blink" he seeks being an Israeli abandonment of annexation. If, for his part, Netanyahu thinks Abbas or the Palestinians benefit more from the PA than Israel does, he will wait for Abbas to blink first—the "blink" sought by Israel being a Palestinian resumption of relations with Israel and a return to security, economic, and civil coordination, without an Israeli government removing annexation from its agenda. Given Abbas's dismal past record on implementing threats he has made, the Israeli prime minister might think that the Palestinian president is bluffing, and that with a little added pressure—like withholding the transfer of Israeli-collected Palestinian clearance funds¹⁵—Abbas will swallow his pride and concede defeat even if Israel goes ahead with annexation.

In the ensuing game of chicken—and this will become more explicit if Israel does implement its annexation plan—each side typically takes steps to demonstrate the seriousness of its threat or position, while the other side seeks to demonstrate that the threat is empty or the position untenable. PA leaders might find themselves being forced to take irreversible steps in order to give their threat added credibility, such as collecting arms from the PA security service and transferring them to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Alternatively, though we consider it unlikely, the Palestinian National Council (the parliament of the Palestine Liberation Organization) could vote to dissolve the PA at a certain date if Israel has not reversed its position. Israel might ignore such a step, thus calling the Palestinians' bluff; PA leaders might then

find themselves forced to disarm or dissolve the PA, or face humiliation and a further loss of credibility.

The key question, then, may be: Is the well-being of the PA more vital to the Palestinians or to Israel? For a long time, the Palestinians viewed the PA as fulfilling two critical roles: as a vehicle for statehood, embodying the aspiration of Palestinians for sovereignty and independence, and as a tool for institution building, modeling efficient organization and service delivery as well as clean and good governance. But questions are increasingly being raised regarding whether the PA is currently fulfilling these two roles. Findings show that more than 80 percent of Palestinians think their public institutions are corrupt.¹⁶ The so-called interim period within which Israel and the Palestinians were to negotiate a final status agreement, envisioned by the Oslo Accords to last for five years, has now lasted for twenty-seven, and all efforts since the 2000 Camp David Summit have failed to reach a peace agreement or end the occupation. Meanwhile, under Abbas's leadership, the PA has split into two entities: one in the West Bank under his authority and one in the Gaza Strip controlled by Hamas.

Since elections have not been held since 2006, the PA government as well as Abbas himself have lost electoral legitimacy, with polls showing 60 to 70 percent of Palestinians demanding his resignation.¹⁷ In recent years, economic conditions have worsened, with the U.S. suspending all economic and financial support, and other donor support declining to the lowest levels since 2007.¹⁸ At the same time, measures taken by Israel have chipped away at the Palestinian Authority's security and civil jurisdiction. Since 2002, Israel has denied the PA jurisdiction over internal security in areas of PA security control in the West Bank, labeled A in the Oslo agreement. In 2019, Israel demolished homes built in Wadi Homos in Area B of the West Bank—an area under the full civil responsibility of the PA, including planning and zoning—even though the PA had issued the owners the necessary building permissions.¹⁹

Some skeptics among the Palestinians believe that the mere existence of the PA helps sustain, rather than end, the Israeli occupation and hinders progress toward Palestinian statehood. Others argue that the continued existence of the PA serves the narrow interests of a small but powerful elite in the Palestinian nationalist movement which benefits politically and financially at the expense of the Palestinian people. Indeed, a recent poll shows that a majority of Palestinians today view the PA as a burden rather than an asset.²⁰

Many Palestinians as well as members of the PA elite think that Israel benefits greatly from the continued functioning of the PA. In this view, Israel sees the PA as serving two important roles. As a service provider, it releases the occupying power from the responsibility of caring for those living under its occupation. And as an agent of self-rule, the PA shields Israel against the demographic threat, embedded in the current one-state reality, to its Jewish character. Israel can have its cake and eat it too: maintain the occupation and its rule over the Palestinians while simultaneously maintaining its Jewish and democratic character.

Though the normalization deal between Israel and the UAE removes the immediate threat of unilateral annexation, the implications of the deal for this game of chicken between Netanyahu and Abbas are unclear. On the one hand, annexation remains a possibility, because it is one of the main elements of the Trump plan. Moreover, the Israeli prime minister insists that *unilateral* annexation remains very much on the table. Because the PA ended relations with Israel over the latter's *intent* to annex, it is difficult for the PA to declare victory and restore ties with Israel by arguing that the intent is no longer there. On the other hand, if Abbas seeks justification for restoring ties, he could argue that Israel has blinked first by accepting the conditionality in the Israel-UAE deal. He can cite the statement issued by the U.S. president that annexation was "off the table."²¹ However, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for Abbas to credit the UAE with such an accomplishment—and similarly difficult for most Palestinians to accept that justification—because a further clarification of the Trump statement only affirmed Netanyahu's claim that the suspension of annexation was temporary.²² So if he restores ties, Abbas could be seen as having blinked first. The current stalemate may therefore linger for at least a few more months, most likely until the U.S. elections in November. If Biden is elected and makes clear that the U.S. will not endorse annexation and seeks a restoration of contacts between Israel and the PA, Abbas might restore relations with Israel. If Trump is re-elected, the current stalemate will probably continue and perhaps worsen. In the meantime, it is highly unlikely that Netanyahu will make it easier for Abbas to restore ties by simply announcing that unilateral annexation is indeed "off the table." Such an announcement would leave him politically exposed both within his own party and with respect to right-wing factions—especially as he is facing potentially career-ending legal problems.

The PA Response to the Threat of Annexation

For Palestinians, the possibility of Israeli annexation of the Jordan Valley and the Israeli settlements in the West Bank is seen as an existential threat. By annexing the Jordan Valley, Israel would fully encircle any future Palestinian entity in the West Bank and deny it direct land access to its only Arab neighbor, Jordan. By annexing West Bank settlements, Israel would deny a future Palestinian entity any meaningful territorial contiguity: A future Palestinian map would be made up of multiple enclaves, without any real sovereignty.

This might explain why the PA response to the mere declaration of intention by the Israeli government has been so strong. The response was intended to demonstrate seriousness and resolve with respect to the three main aspects of Israeli-Palestinian relations: security, economics, and civil affairs.

In the *security* realm, the PA suspended all official contacts designed to enable security coordination between Palestinian and Israeli security services. These contacts normally address issues of counterinsurgency and violence, particularly those involving Hamas; preventing exchange of fire between Israeli and PA security services during IDF incursions into PA-controlled areas; and facilitating the ability of the Palestinian police to enforce law and order in parts of the West Bank linked via roads falling in B or C areas, which constitute about 80% of the West Bank. While area B, constituting 20% of the West Bank, is under Palestinian law enforcement jurisdiction, it remains under Israeli internal security control. Area C, constituting 60% of the West Bank, is under full Israeli control with respect to both law and order and internal security. But since the eruption of the second intifada in 2000, the Israeli police has, in effect, abdicated its law enforcement responsibility in Area C, leaving that in the hands of the IDF. And that means that Palestinians residing in area C must rely on the PA police to enforce law and order.

The PA also coordinates with Israel on many aspects of *economic and financial policy*. Most importantly, this ordinarily entails a transfer of clearance funds by Israel to the PA, usually amounting to about \$170 million per month—which constituted, in 2019, 60% of PA revenues. Israel collects these amounts from Palestinians as customs duties and taxes on PA-destined products when they arrive at Israeli points of entry and charges the PA 3% of the transferred amount as "handling

fees.” Israel and the PA have agreed-upon protocols for processing imports and exports of goods intended for and originating from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Because the Palestinians have no control over their external borders, all such goods go through Israeli ports.

PA-Israel coordination also extends to financial arrangements pertaining to the Gaza Strip, where the PA has nominal control even though effective control is in the hands of Hamas. This involves direct PA payments to its public sector in the Gaza Strip as well as payment for electricity and water purchased by Gazans from Israel.

Finally, the PA’s severance of links with Israel means that the Authority is no longer coordinating with Israeli authorities on *civil matters* that directly affect the daily lives of Palestinians. Among the significant areas directly impacted by this decision are those relating to the PA’s issuance of IDs, passports, birth and death certificates, marriage certificates, driving licenses, and vehicle registrations. Ordinarily, the PA transfers this information to an Israeli civil register, which confirms receipt and acknowledges the validity of such documents. Palestinian access to basic needs such as water, electricity, and fuel is likewise facilitated by officials from both sides.

Requests by Palestinians for family reunification and permits to travel to Israel for work or business or to travel from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip and vice versa are handled by the Palestinian Civil Affairs department, working in conjunction with its Israeli counterpart. The two sides likewise coordinate Palestinian travel to Jordan via the Allenby Bridge across the Jordan River, as well as the transport of patients from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank or Israel and from the West Bank to Israel. And travel on the part of the PA president and ministers and other senior government officials to Jordan or the Gaza Strip can take place only after coordination with Israel.

What would happen if all of this coordination ceased?

The Potential Consequences of Unilateral Annexation

If Israeli plans for annexation resume—either accompanying a collapse of the Israeli-Emirati deal or in spite of the deal—the status quo in Palestinian-Israeli relations will be further altered in a number of ways. One of the most important effects of an Israeli implementation of unilateral annexation would be its impact on the future of the two-state solution. The prospects for a two-

state solution have been dimming for more than a decade as Israel accelerated its settlement expansion under various governments. These “facts on the ground,” along with the election of Hamas in 2006 and the hardening of attitudes among both the Palestinian and Israeli publics, have significantly diminished the likelihood of a Palestinian-Israeli agreement based on the concept of a two-state solution. Between 2006 and 2018, support among the two publics for the two-state solution has declined from a high of 70% to less than 50%.²³

One of the major drivers of the change in Palestinian public opinion is the belief that “facts on the ground,” in particular settlement expansion, are making it impossible to separate the two populations into two states. Impelled by that conclusion, many Palestinians, particularly among the youth, have shifted to supporting a one-state solution, with equal rights for Israeli Jews and Palestinians. The release of the Trump plan back in January cemented their view that it will now be impossible to end the Israeli occupation and create a truly sovereign state: The Trump plan, as they see it, is designed to give Israel control over the entire area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, amounting to a forced *de facto* one-state solution without equality between Palestinians and Israeli Jews. Like settlement expansion, therefore, the plan led to a decline in support for the two-state solution and a rise in support for a one-state solution.²⁴

A second effect of an Israeli implementation of annexation will most likely be a consolidation of the current stalemate in the Palestinian-Israeli diplomatic process. It is highly unlikely that Palestinians will be willing to return to negotiations with Israel without first securing an Israeli annulment of annexation—inconceivable given the current balance of power between the two sides. Actual annexation will likely also contribute to a hardening of public attitudes on both sides, thereby reducing the leaders’ and publics’ willingness to compromise. And support for the two-state solution will most likely plummet further, removing the only viable framework for negotiations in any case.

Thirdly, the implementation of annexation could intentionally or unintentionally trigger Palestinian-Israeli violence. Without security coordination, the PA might be less able or less inclined to take countermeasures against Hamas and other groups that might be planning violent attacks against Israeli targets. Indeed, the PA might abdicate responsibility over internal security altogether and thereby force Israel to fully assume that responsibility.

As relations with Israel worsen, the PA might also have less incentive to share intelligence information with Israeli security services regarding plans for imminent attacks. Additionally, inadvertent clashes between Palestinian and Israeli security services might occur during Israeli army incursions into area A of the West Bank. As of now, despite a lack of coordination between the two security services, the PA has, on a de facto basis, instructed its police units to withdraw when they find themselves face to face with armed Israeli units. This might not last if Israel goes forward with annexation, or if the IDF does not show the same level of caution. If the PA abdicates responsibility over security, or if it wanted to avoid potential clashes with the IDF on roads leading to Palestinian areas patrolled by the IDF, it might abandon its law-and-order responsibilities in B and C areas of the West Bank, thereby increasing the prospects for lawlessness by turning such areas into a safe haven not only for organized crime, but also for armed groups and arms trafficking. These considerations highlight the potential for accidents and miscalculation. After the first clash between the two security services, the IDF would probably begin to seriously consider disarming the PA security services.

As the PA becomes weaker as a result of severing links with Israel, its ability to exercise control will also weaken—in which case, competing armed groups belonging to Fatah and Hamas might try to fill the vacuum left by a weak PA. To enforce the law and to protect against settler violence, the PA might allow Fatah's militia, the Tanzim, to operate freely in B and C areas. Given the likely rise in public support for violence against Israelis if annexation does take place,²⁵ various armed groups might be tempted to escalate violence in the hope of gaining greater public support. Although the PA might desire a popular non-violent response to annexation, its ability to persuade the public is very low, owing to Palestinian distrust in public institutions generally and the prevailing perception that the PA is corrupt and lacks electoral legitimacy. Under these conditions, one can safely rule out a non-violent popular response.

A fourth effect of an Israeli implementation of annexation might be the fate of the PA itself, as such a move could destabilize the PA and even threaten its existence. In May, when the PA refused to request its own clearance funds from Israel, it took its most far-reaching step on the road to collapse; some called the decision “nearly suicidal.”²⁶ As indicated earlier, the clearance funds constitute some 60% of PA revenues. Without these funds, the PA is now forced to borrow from banks to be able to pay just half of its public sector wage bill. The

monthly PA payment to the Gaza Strip, which until the severance of stood at \$105 million, has also been cut and will soon be cut further, as banks will not continue to lend to the PA indefinitely. Given the current economic and financial situation in the Gaza Strip, these cuts could be detrimental to the stability of Israel-Hamas relations and could bring the two sides closer to another devastating war.

On top of the temporary loss of the clearance funds, the United States had already cut about \$500 million in aid to the PA. The first U.S. cut came in January 2018, after Abbas announced a freeze in relations with Washington in protest of the U.S.'s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital; it was followed a year later by another cut, after the Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act (ATCA) came into force.²⁷

Given the other possible consequences of annexation discussed above, destabilization and potential collapse of the Palestinian Authority might become more likely—and the disappearance of the PA would dramatically affect the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank. The worst domestic consequences would likely be triggered by the combined effects of the anticipated collapse of law and order and the disappearance of more than three billion dollars of public spending. These developments would deliver a severe blow to the private sector and lead to the gradual collapse of the justice system as well as of service delivery in most sectors, from health and education to communication, water, and energy. Poverty, crime, and disorder would likely increase dramatically. In such a scenario, armed militias would likely try to take the law into their own hands, creating a greater potential for both domestic and Palestinian-Israeli violence.

Finally, annexation could have regional ramifications. So far, the threat of annexation has contributed to making public what was until then hidden in Israeli-UAE relations. On the positive side, the Israel-UAE deal has helped reduce prospects for an immediate escalation in PA-Israel tensions. But it also shattered whatever Arab unity had coalesced behind the Arab Peace Initiative and weakened the Palestinian negotiating position by depriving it of one of its bargaining chips: the prospect of Arab normalization with Israel.

Based on the PA's reaction to the deal, if annexation does take place in the near future, Palestinians will see the UAE and the Arab countries that have supported that deal—including Egypt and Saudi Arabia—as betraying the Palestinian cause.²⁸ At the same time, Turkey and Iran expressed reactions to the deal that mirrored the response of the PA. If Israeli implementation of annexation is met

with a weak Arab response, as most Palestinians expect,²⁹ the PA could find itself isolated by its major Arab allies and in search of new allies.

For Jordan, annexation, if implemented, poses a long-term threat to the stability of the country and brings to life nightmares involving the right-wing Israeli idea that “Jordan is Palestine.”³⁰ By destroying the two-state solution and bringing the PA to potential collapse, the resulting destabilization could lead to a great exodus from the West Bank to Jordan, thereby changing that country’s demographic balance.

Conclusion

Because it does not explicitly take annexation off the table in terms of Israeli-Palestinian relations, the Israeli-UAE normalization deal, as currently understood, will probably have little impact on the heightened tension between Palestinians and Israelis and the strategic game of chicken currently playing out. In such a game, the credibility of a threat is the most critical element if one is to have any chance of winning. The problem for the Palestinian president is that the Israelis still think he is bluffing, even after he responded to their mere declaration of intention by severing all links with Israel. Israeli leaders do not seem to think that Abbas will actually go all the way and allow the PA to collapse. Here lies Abbas’s Achilles heel—or, alternatively, the most fertile ground for miscalculation.

A PA restoration of ties with Israel on account of the conditionality clause in the Israel-UAE deal is unlikely because Abbas will fear loss of face and Netanyahu will fear loss of right-wing support. The current stalemate, as suggested above, will most likely ease or worsen depending on the outcome of the U.S. elections. If the two sides come to this same assessment, they might avoid serious escalation in the interim and perhaps begin to informally send positive and reassuring signals to each other.

Eventually, however, annexation or some other development, such as a major Israeli settlement expansion in strategic parts of the West Bank (in the area known as E-1, for example), could take place notwithstanding the Israeli-Emirati deal. If such an event does take place, it is likely to produce a paradigm shift, in more ways than one, that has a long-lasting impact. It would bring to an end the rules of the game that the two sides have known for twenty-seven years—the Oslo rules—without providing a clear replacement. And without mutually acceptable terms of reference, predictability fades and the two sides

are likely to begin to compete in creating de facto rules of their own: a recipe for miscalculation.

Moreover, without a clear path to a two-state solution, the search for a peaceful settlement will become more complicated than ever. There will likely be increased demands for other solutions, such as the one-state solution: one democratic state for Jews and Palestinians, based on one person, one vote. In the absence of negotiations, however, the reality will be much uglier, as “facts on the ground” will point to a de facto one-state result in which Palestinians enjoy few rights, even though their numbers would be equal to or larger than those of Israeli Jews in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

The demise of the PA, intentionally or unintentionally, would leave a vacuum. Fatah and Hamas will seek to fill that vacuum, but Israel too will face a challenge. The collapse or dissolution of the PA, followed by increased levels of chaos and violence, might force Israel to contemplate a return to the pre-1994 situation, in which it becomes directly responsible for the welfare of the Palestinian population under its occupation. Even if Israel refrains from fully reoccupying the Palestinian territories, Palestinians are likely to complicate matters greatly for Israel, forcing it to move into the center of cities in the West Bank.

The possibility of annexation, along with the Trump plan that conditionally endorses it, forces the Palestinians to confront the prospect of the demise of their dream of self-determination in their own sovereign and independent state, while the Israelis face the prospect of the demise of a state that is both Jewish and democratic. For now, the threat of unilateral annexation negatively affects the capacity of the two sides to effectively manage their conflict.

Endnotes

- 1 All of these terms have been used by the various relevant players to describe the condition attached to the Israeli-Emirati normalization deal. A Bahraini-Israeli normalization deal, announced by President Trump on 11 December 2020, made no mention of the Israeli annexation plan. See [Michael Crowley and David M. Halbfinger, “Bahrain Will Normalize Relations with Israel, in Deal Brokered by Trump,” *The New York Times*, September 11, 2020.](#)
- 2 A poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in September 2020 shows that three-quarters of the Palestinian public believe that the “suspension” of annexation referred to in the UAE-Israeli normalization agreement is merely a temporary delay,

- and will be in effect for only a short period. See [Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Press Release: Public Opinion Poll No \(77\), September 15, 2020.](#)
- 3 [Noa Landau, “Annexation Violates Oslo Accords, Says Israel’s Former Negotiator,” *Haaretz*, June 10, 2020.](#)
 - 4 [Dov Lieber and Felicia Schwartz, “Netanyahu Vows to Annex Jordan River Valley If Re-Elected,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 10, 2019.](#)
 - 5 [For details, see Tovah Lazaroff, “Annexation as Early as July 1 under Netanyahu-Gantz Deal,” *Jerusalem Post*, May 9, 2020.](#)
 - 6 [“Trump Says ‘Historic’ Israel-UAE Deal on Diplomatic Ties Will ‘Suspend’ Israeli Annexation of Palestinian Lands,” *RT*, August 13, 2020.](#)
 - 7 [“Israel, UAE Announce Normalisation of Relations with US Help,” *Al Jazeera*, August 13, 2020.](#)
 - 8 [See: <https://twitter.com/MohamedBinZayed/status/1293925353560461312>.](#)
 - 9 [Peter Baker, Isabel Kershner, David D. Kirkpatrick, and Ronen Bergman, “Israel and United Arab Emirates Strike Major Diplomatic Agreement,” *New York Times*, August 13, 2020.](#)
 - 10 [Jacob Magid, “US Assured UAE It Won’t Back Israel Annexation before 2024 at Earliest, ToI told,” *Times of Israel*, September 13, 2020.](#)
 - 11 [See Barak Ravid, “West Bank Annexations Must Come in Context of Palestinian State, White House Tells Israel,” *Axios*, April 30, 2020. See also “No Final Decision on Israeli Annexation after 3 Days of White House Talks,” *Times of Israel*, June 25, 2020.](#)
 - 12 [See Noa Landau and Hagar Shezaf, “Netanyahu Says Annexation Still on the Table, but White House Needs to Back It,” *Haaretz*, August 3, 2020.](#)
 - 13 [Raoul Wootliff, “Hailing ‘New Era with Arab World,’ Netanyahu Says Others Will Follow UAE’s Lead,” *Times of Israel*, August 13, 2020. See also “Netanyahu Says West Bank Annexation Plans Still ‘On the Table,’” *Al Jazeera*, August 13, 2020.](#)
 - 14 [See Jack Khoury and Noa Landau, “Palestinian President Abbas Declares End to Agreements With Israel, U.S.,” *Haaretz*, May 20, 2020.](#)
 - 15 [Israel normally collects customs duties and other taxes from Palestinians at ports of entry and transfers them on a monthly basis to the PA. The process of transfer is initiated through coordination between the Palestinian and Israeli ministries of finance. In the past, when the two sides failed to agree on the terms of the transfer, Israel unilaterally transferred the funds to a Palestinian bank without waiting for a Palestinian request. Since May 2020, however, the PA has not requested the funds, and Israel decided not to unilaterally transfer the money to the PA.](#)
 - 16 [PSR’s \[December 2019 poll\]\(#\) showed that perception of corruption in PA institutions stood at 82%.](#)
 - 17 [Between 2014 and 2019, average annual demand for Abbas’s resignation ranged between 60 and 70%. See \[recent polls conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research\]\(#\).](#)
 - 18 [See \[United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, “Palestinian Socioeconomic Crisis Now at Breaking Point,” September 10, 2019.\]\(#\)](#)
 - 19 [See \[Amira Hass and Jack Khoury, “Israel Demolishes 70 Homes in Palestinian-controlled East Jerusalem Neighborhood,” *Haaretz*, July 22, 2019.\]\(#\)](#)
 - 20 [In June 2020, 52% viewed the PA as a burden and 41% viewed it as an asset. See \[Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Public Opinion Poll No \\(76\\), June 17–20, 2020.\]\(#\)](#)
 - 21 [Michele Salcedo, “Trump: West Bank Annexation Is ‘Off the Table’ after Israel-UAE Normalize Relations,” *Axios*, August 13, 2020, \[_\]\(#\)](#)
 - 22 [Ibid.](#)
 - 23 [Khalil Shikaki and Dahlia Scheindlin, “Role of Public Opinion in the Resilience/Resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” \[Palestinian-Israeli Pulse: A Joint Poll \(2016-2018\): Final Report\], \[Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, December 2018, p. 2.\]\(#\)](#)
 - 24 [Support for the two-state solution stood at 42% one month before the plan’s release and 39% less than a month after its release. By contrast, support for a one-state solution stood at 28% one month before the plan and 37% one month after its release. See \[Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Public Opinion Poll No \\(75\\), February 5–8, 2020.\]\(#\)](#)
 - 25 [PSR’s February 2020 poll, which was conducted a few weeks after the release of the Trump plan, found a rise in support for violence as “the best means to change the status quo” to 45%, compared with 39% two months earlier. It also found that 77% were in favor of ending security coordination with Israel, and 64% supported resort to armed struggle as the most effective means to foil the Trump plan. See \[Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Public Opinion Poll No \\(75\\).\]\(#\)](#)
 - 26 [See \[Aaron Boxerman and Jacob Magid, “In Move Seen as ‘Nearly Suicidal,’ Abbas’s PA Refuses Tax Transfers from Israel,” *Times of Israel*, June 4, 2020.\]\(#\)](#)
 - 27 [See \[Yolande Knell, “US Stops All Aid to Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza,” *BBC News*, February 1, 2019, \\[_\\]\\(#\\)\]\(#\)](#)
 - 28 [Aaron Boxerman, “‘Despicable, A Betrayal’: PA Blasts Emirates, Demands Retraction of Israel Deal,” *Times of Israel*, August 13, 2020.](#)
 - 29 [Almost 80% of the Palestinian public do not expect Arab countries in the Gulf to end normalization with Israel if annexation does take place, and 70% do not expect Jordan or Egypt to even recall their ambassadors from Israel. See \[Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Survey Research Unit, Public Opinion Poll No \\(76\\), June 23, 2020.\]\(#\)](#)
 - 30 [See “\[Jordan’s King Warns of ‘Massive Conflict’ if Israel Annexes Land in West Bank\]\(#\),” *Times of Israel*, May 15, 2020. For an early exploration of this idea, see \[Daniel Pipes, “Is Jordan Palestine?” *Commentary*, October 1988, pp. 35-42.\]\(#\)](#)



Brandeis University Crown Center
for Middle East Studies

Mailstop 010
Waltham, Massachusetts
02454-9110

781-736-5320
781-736-5324 Fax
www.brandeis.edu/crown

Middle East Brief

Annexation, the Trump Plan, and the Future of Palestinian-Israeli Relations

Khalil Shikaki

Recent Middle East Briefs:

Available on the Crown Center website: www.brandeis.edu/crown

Arash Davari, "U.S.-Iran Relations under Maximum Pressure: A Narrow Path to Negotiations," No. 137

Youssef El Chazli, "Revolution as a Life-Altering Experience: The Case of Egypt," No. 136

Hayal Akarsu, "Proactive Policing, Crime Prevention, and State Surveillance in Turkey," No. 135

Yazan Doughan, "The New Jordanian Patriotism After the Arab Spring," No. 134

