

Israel's Intent to Annex Part of West Bank May Spark New Wide-scale Middle East Crisis Amidst Global Pandemic

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Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas announced that the Palestinian state and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) will no longer adhere to the agreements they signed with Israel and the United States. It is a reaction to Israel's intentions to annex Jewish settlements in the West Bank. If Abbas's intentions are consistently implemented, it would be a paradox for Palestine to abolish itself.

“The Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian state are rejecting any commitments from all agreements with the US administration and Israel, including those related to security,” Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said in response to the Israeli government’s intention to start on July 1 the process of annexing territories controlled by illegal Jewish settlers in the West Bank.

Abbas did not mention any specific agreements, but it is believed he is referring to a series of agreements signed by the Palestinians with Israel in the 1990’s - the 1993 Oslo Accords, the 1997 Hebron Protocol, and the 1998 Wye River Memorandum.

However, by cancelling the Oslo Accords, could the Palestinian Authority be abolishing itself?

If Abbas is referring to the entire Oslo Agreement, it would in a way mean the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority, since they emerged from that agreement. Abbas’s reaction was caused not only by the intention of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to annex large areas of the West Bank on July 1, but also by the visit of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Israel, who undoubtedly supports the move.

Security coordination with Israel, which Palestine could be giving up, is one of the most important aspects of the Oslo Agreement, which has become a cornerstone of the so-called peace process. Security coordination is essential for the day-to-day functioning of both the Palestinian Authority and Israel. The Palestinian Authority is highly dependent, in daily terms, on this cooperation with the Israeli authorities. And not only on security, but also on economics, as well as on the inflow of financial resources, which come from the Israeli government to Palestinian institutions.

Even in earlier announcements, despite the interruptions, the essential parts of the implementation of coordination were never questioned. Abbas is now more serious than

before when he announced and threatened to sever security ties which could be a blow to Israel, even if it means the Palestinian authorities lose the legal basis of its existence in international eyes.

Secretary of the Palestinian Fatah organization, Fayez Abu Aita, said that in these circumstances breaking all agreements, including the Oslo peace agreement, was absolutely necessary – this is the only way to protect their territories.

“It is not our fault that we are now on the edge of a new stage, a new great confrontation with Israel. Only by breaking all obligations with Washington and Tel Aviv, Palestine has the chance to defend its right to exist, the right to own land. After all, we said that we would not allow the implementation of the Deal of the Century. The Israeli government only heard itself and its greed. But this was only the first step: the further the Israeli side goes, the more serious the Palestinian response will be,” he said. “There is nothing else left for us, considering how quickly Israel extends its hands to our land. They were the first to bring the situation to a dangerous dead end.”

If Israel annexes the West Bank, hopes of creating an Arab state within the 1967 borders will be extinguished.

While the U.S. supports Israel’s annexation, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday in a telephone conversation with Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazim confirmed the readiness of Russia to further promote the resumption of the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis. Russia is trying to prevent the annexation and, through diplomatic means, gather an international quartet with the participation of the UN.

Effectively Russia could be using this as an opportunity to present itself as a peace broker in the Palestine-Israel conflict. Whether this will be successful or not remains to be seen, but is necessary when it appears there is a strong chance that the Palestine-Israel conflict can breakout extremely violent again in the coming weeks amidst the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

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