



Potential Start Date for Controversial Israeli Annexation Plans Arrives

This week marked the target date for embattled Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to proceed with his plans to annex parts of Palestinian territory in the occupied West Bank. The annexation plan has been met with widespread condemnation from the international community, and has lukewarm support from the Trump administration in the United States. During his re-election campaign, Netanyahu promised to unveil the specific plans for annexation on July 1st. However, that date passed without a clear resolution. In addition to the international community's opposition to the move, Netanyahu has also encountered resistance from within the Israeli government. Political leaders and left-wing Israelis have voiced their opposition to the move, with Netanyahu's coalition partner and Israel's Defense Minister Benny Gantz among those critical of the plan.

Israel's annexation plans began in earnest upon the release of the White House's widely-criticized Middle East peace plan in January. That proposal reversed long-standing U.S. policy toward the West Bank, and allowed for Israel to "incorporate" settlements. While most of the world considers Israeli settlements to be illegal under international law, the Trump Peace Plan would accept all existing settlements, and give Israel control over 30% of the West Bank. Despite the Trump Administration essentially signing off on annexation, Benjamin Netanyahu has encountered pushback from several key entities. Correspondingly, the date of implementation for Israel's annexation has been pushed back.

On July 1st, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrote a front-page op-ed for the Israeli publication Yediot Ahronot in which he denounced annexation and warned that the British government wouldn't recognize Israeli sovereignty over territory taken unilaterally. Johnson wrote that annexation wasn't "in Israel's long-term interest" and signed on to a list of world leaders against the plan. Israel's defense minister and Netanyahu's coalition partner, Benny Gantz, is also against the proposed annexation, saying that Israel should be focused on combating the coronavirus and other domestic problems before worrying about annexation. The Trump Administration has reportedly made it clear to Netanyahu that he needs Gantz's approval on annexation before going through with the plan.

Earlier this week, a group of envoys were sent to Jerusalem by the United States to negotiate the details of the annexation. However, these negotiations ended in stalemate with no clear solution found. Benjamin Netanyahu is keen to press forward with annexation while the Trump Administration remains in the White House, with 2020 Democratic challenger Joe Biden criticizing annexation and saying he would not support it.

In the Middle East, the proposed annexation has caused outrage. Palestinians gathered to protest the plan in Gaza City, and demonstrators referred to annexation as another Nakba. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said that the Palestinian Authority had terminated all agreements with Israel and the United States in light of the annexation, and Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said that Palestine would unilaterally declare a state along pre-existing borders if Israel went ahead with annexation. Additionally, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates reportedly engaged in diplomatic outreach to Israel, asking them to reconsider. The Arab League and the United Nations are also in opposition to the move, with U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres calling annexation a severe violation of international law.