



The Jewish Federations[®] OF NORTH AMERICA

FAQs: Israel's Changing Policies on the West Bank

The Government of Israel is discussing whether to incorporate land currently governed by Israel's Judea and Samaria Civil Administration (JSCA) into the State of Israel. The JSCA is a formally independent body accountable to the Israeli military. Press reports have indicated this decision could be made as early as July 1.

Israeli government officials who support this change believe that it will lead to further negotiations with Palestinians. They also argue that inaction, maintaining the status quo, will be harmful. Those who oppose the move claim annexation would negatively impact future negotiations with Palestinians and bring condemnation from around the world.

'Annexation' vs. 'Applied Sovereignty'

"Annexation" is used in mainstream media to describe what Israelis call "applied sovereignty." It suggests that the same Israeli law that governs all of Israel replace the JSCA currently in place. This language has become politically charged, but many use these terms interchangeably.

Applying Israeli sovereignty to the West Bank, or areas within it, has been proposed several times since the 1967 Six-Day War, after which Israel took control over the West Bank. [View 1967 border map here](#). Today, there is no clear idea about what plans are being discussed.

Some reports suggest that Israel will apply sovereignty over 30 percent of the West Bank. Others are more conservative and suggest "a more symbolic annexation of a small amount of land"¹ or just 128 existing settlements² or even a smaller number of settlements closer to Israeli territory³.

Why is Israel talking about this now?

In late January 2020, President Trump unveiled a plan to address the Israeli Palestinian conflict, called the [Peace to Prosperity Plan](#). It includes a "conceptual map" and suggests that Israelis and Palestinians live within contiguous territories made possible by land swaps "with land reasonably comparable in size to the territory of pre-1967 West Bank and Gaza."⁴ Included in the President's plan was the creation of a joint U.S. and Israeli committee that would together determine specific future boundaries and maps. It has been reported that the committee has not completed their work.⁵

¹ <https://www.businessinsider.com/netanyahu-plans-to-annex-30-percent-of-west-bank-axios-2020-6>

² <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/05/israel-annexation-west-bank-united-states-election.html>

³ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-to-initially-annex-3-settlement-blocs-not-jordan-valley-officials/>

⁴ Approximately 97% of Israelis in the West Bank will be incorporated into contiguous Israeli territory, and approximately 97% of Palestinians in the West Bank will be incorporated into contiguous Palestinian territory. Land swaps will provide the State of Palestine with land reasonably comparable in size to the territory of pre-1967 West Bank and Gaza ([Peace to Prosperity](#), Pg. 11).

⁵ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-highly-unlikely-to-back-july-1-annexation-toi-told-mapping-far-from-done/>

Weeks later Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu announced his intent to apply Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan Valley and West Bank settlements.⁶ However, this move was stalled until a new Israeli government was instated.⁷ Now, with the new government in place, the conversation is moving forward but it is not clear how it will end.

In February U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman made clear the Administration's position on a unilateral Israeli decision in a tweet: "As we have stated, the application of Israeli law to the territory which the Plan provides to be part of Israel is subject to the completion [of] a mapping process by a joint Israeli American committee," he wrote. "Any unilateral action in advance of the completion of the committee process endangers the Plan & American recognition."⁸

Is there support for a new West Bank policy?

Among Israelis: Based on numerous polls the symbolic annexation of a smaller amount of land has higher support among Jewish Israelis, though it's not a priority.⁹ Few Arab Israelis support annexation.¹⁰

Among Palestinians: The Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas rejected the Prosperity to Peace Plan when it was announced in January, and in early May took another step to protest any unilateral annexation by declaring an end to the long-standing coordination between the PA and Israeli officials.¹¹

Among Europeans: France has already called on other European countries to respond strongly if any annexation goes forward.¹² Additionally, Belgium, Ireland and Luxembourg want to discuss the possibility of punitive economic measures.¹³

Among Arab Countries: United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have warned that applying sovereignty would endanger "warming ties" and "resuming peace talks" between their respective nations.¹⁴ Jordan may freeze its peace agreement, which was signed with Israel in 1994.¹⁵

Among Critics: Israel's building of Jewish communities in the West Bank has been labeled by some as "creeping annexation." Critics of Israel argue this building is part of a purposeful strategy aimed at usurping land. The argument bolsters the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.¹⁶

⁶ <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/1591795375-report-netanyahu-planning-to-immediately-annex-three-jewish-settlements-but-not-jordan-valley>;

<https://www.ipost.com/Israel-News/Prime-Minister-Netanyahu-expected-to-announce-annexation-of-Jordan-Valley-601207>

⁷ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-says-settlements-jordan-valley-will-only-be-annexed-with-us-consent/>

⁸ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-israeli-mapping-committee-for-trump-peace-plan-said-finalized/>

⁹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/fewer-than-half-of-israelis-back-annexation-even-fewer-think-it-will-happen/>, <https://www.ipost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/half-of-israelis-support-annexation-25-percent-even-with-no-us-backing-poll-630129>; <https://www.timesofisrael.com/more-israelis-oppose-west-bank-annexation-than-support-it-survey/>

¹⁰ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/fewer-than-half-of-israelis-back-annexation-even-fewer-think-it-will-happen/>

¹¹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog-may-19-2020/>

¹² <https://www.israelhavom.com/2020/05/12/france-pushing-for-tough-eu-response-to-any-israeli-annexation-move/>

¹³ https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/france-belgium-ireland-and-luxembourg-aim-for-eus-punishing-response-to-annexation/

¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/world/middleeast/west-bank-annexation-israel-uae.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-annexation-jordan/jordans-king-says-regional-stability-put-at-risk-by-israeli-annexation-idUSKBN23N3EK>

¹⁶ <https://time.com/5675909/west-bank-palestinian-response/>