

11 European ambassadors warn Israel against West Bank annexation

Envoys from UK, France, Germany, other states say move would violate international law, harm regional stability, Israel's international standing.



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu points at a map of the Jordan Valley as he gives a statement, promising to extend Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea area, in Ramat Gan on September 10, 2019. (Menahem Kahana/AFP)

Eleven European ambassadors to Israel on Thursday warned Jerusalem of severe consequences if it moves ahead with plans to annex parts of the West Bank as part of a government coalition deal.

The envoys from the UK, Germany, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, and the EU issued a formal objection to the

Foreign Ministry against the move, Channel 13 reported.

The ambassadors made the protest during a video conference with the Foreign Ministry's Europe deputy, Anna Azari.

"We are very concerned about the clause in the coalition agreement that paves the way for annexing parts of the West Bank. The annexation of any part of the West Bank constitutes a clear violation of international law," the ambassadors said. "Such unilateral steps will harm efforts to renew the peace process and will have grave consequences for regional stability and for Israel's standing in the international arena."

The envoys also demanded a freeze on government plans to allow construction in the Givat Hamatos neighborhood in East Jerusalem.

Also on Thursday, the Arab League said that the planned annexation constituted a "new war crime" against the Palestinians during a virtual conference chaired in Cairo.

"The implementation of plans to annex any part of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, including the Jordan Valley... and the lands on which Israeli settlements are standing represents a new war crime... against the Palestinian people," Arab foreign ministers said in a joint statement.

The Arab League also urged the United States to "withdraw its support in enabling the plans of the occupying Israeli government."



In this February 18, 2020 photo, a view of the West Bank settlement of Ma'ale Efraim on the hills of the Jordan Valley (AP/Ariel Schalit)

On Monday, the United States said it was ready to recognize Israel's annexation of key parts of the West Bank, but said the offer was contingent on an offer of statehood to the Palestinians.

"As we have made consistently clear, we are prepared to recognize Israeli actions to extend Israeli sovereignty and the application of Israeli law to areas of the West Bank that the vision foresees as being part of the State of Israel," a US State Department spokesperson said when asked if the US would allow Israel's new government to move forward with the process.

"The annexation would be in the context of an offer to the Palestinians to achieve statehood based upon specific terms, conditions, territorial dimensions, and generous economic support. This is an unprecedented and highly beneficial opportunity for the Palestinians," the State Department spokesperson said.

The Palestinians have refused to negotiate with the Trump administration, considering it biased. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas threatened last week to cancel all agreements with Israel and the US if Israel moved forward with annexation plans.

US President Donald Trump in January unveiled a peace plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Rejected by the Palestinians and condemned by much of the international community, the plan gives Israel the green-light to annex Jewish settlements and other strategic territories in the West Bank.

An Israeli coalition government agreement reached last week includes a framework for implementing the annexations outlined in the plan, starting in July.



Blue and White leader Benny Gantz (left) and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sign their unity government agreement on April 20, 2020. (GPO)

Under the US proposal, the Palestinians would be granted a sovereign but demilitarized state in the remaining parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, along with promises of major investment.

The Palestinian state's capital would be on the outskirts of Jerusalem, which would remain fully under Israeli sovereignty.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that he was "confident" Trump would let him fulfill his election promise to apply Israeli sovereignty over parts of the West Bank "a couple of months from now."

According to the wording of the “emergency government” deal between Netanyahu’s Likud party and Benny Gantz’s Blue and White faction, starting July 1, 2020, Netanyahu “will be able to bring the agreement reached with the US on the application of sovereignty [in the West Bank] for the approval of the cabinet and or the Knesset.”

In addition, “the law will be passed as quickly as possible... and will not be disrupted or delayed by the chairmen of either the House or the Foreign Affairs and Defense committees.”

The Netanyahu-Gantz deal stipulates that any Israeli action would need US backing, and must take into account Israel’s peace treaties with neighboring Jordan and Egypt, the only two Arab states that have formal peace treaties and diplomatic relations with Israel.

Netanyahu’s right-wing base is eager to move forward with annexation while the friendly Trump administration is in office.

Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan during the 1967 Six-Day War. The Palestinians seek those territories as part of a future independent state. The annexation of West Bank settlements would infuriate the Palestinians and Israel’s Arab neighbors.

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