**The Dangers of Annexing the West Bank**

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The commanders, I among them, can see the reality taking form right in front of us. We seek only to warn the Zionist public against the unilateral annexation that the government is initiating. In the name of messianic nationalism, these steps threaten the Zionist vision of a democratic state for the Jewish people with equal rights for all.

Israelis can’t know for certain what it would look like if and when a two-state solution is adopted, but a “one state” future can already be seen in “united Jerusalem.” Once a developing city with a decisive Jewish majority recognized de facto by the international community, it has become a city marred by rifts and violence, a desperately poor city losing its Jewish majority and the international recognition it wants so badly.

In 1967, the government annexed 70 square kilometers on which 69,000 Palestinians lived at the time, constituting just 26 percent of the combined city’s population. By 2015 these numbers had reached 320,000 and almost 40 percent.

Because of Jewish migration from the city, because of its many tensions, within two decades Israel’s capital will clearly become a city with a Jewish minority. If the Palestinians change their policy and decide to take part in local elections, the mayor and most of the city council will be Palestinian.

The most recent socioeconomic index from the Central Bureau of Statistics shows that out of 255 local governments, Jerusalem ranks 195th, tumbling dozens of places since the last report in 2008. According to the last poverty report, almost 50 percent of Jerusalemites – and 60 percent of the city’s children – live below the poverty line, amid rising numbers of poor among the city’s Arabs. Again, based on demographic forecasts, “united Israel” would also slide in the socioeconomic indexes. With a poverty rate of 45 percent, it wouldn’t remain in the OECD for long.

The number of terror attacks in the city fluctuates annually, but the city’s position as the top target is stable. The day-to-day friction and Palestinians’ freedom of movement in Jerusalem create opportunities for terrorism, reflected in the fact that the city’s Palestinian residents share in the struggle to create a state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

A unilateral annexation of the West Bank wouldn’t make the Palestinians forgo their national dream. In the absence of separation and a security fence, it would be all the easier for them to ply violent resistance throughout “united Israel.”

Much the same would happen with “united Israel” if we succumb to the annexation longings of Habayit Hayehudi’s Naftali Bennett and Bezalel Smotrich. At the time of annexation, the proportion of Jews would be about 60 percent, but within 15 years the country would have an Arab majority. We would wake up into the reality that David Ben-Gurion warned about in 1947 even before Israel existed: “There can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent.”

There are some hard questions that the proponents of annexing the West Bank have to answer. What about Gaza? Can we simply ignore its 2 million people and claim, as Bennett does, that it can survive as a state on its own? What about the UN report predicting Gaza’s socioeconomic collapse by 2020?

What about the Palestinian refugees? Could Israstine, a country with two peoples living together, prevent the refugees from returning, at least in part? What sort of army would a country like that have? Who would serve in it? Would the draft that doesn’t apply to Israeli Arabs remain the law of the land? Would Israeli Arabs be allowed to volunteer for the army? Would we let them have guns?

Who would finance the welfare systems of the binational state? Who would take care of the millions who joined the circle of poverty? Would the younger generation agree to “shoulder the burden” – serve in the army and finance the welfare of the Arabs while living in fear of terror attacks? Might they not prefer to live elsewhere, which actually is happening in Jerusalem today?

These questions are largely rhetorical because “united Israel” would mean perpetual civil war, apartheid and socioeconomic implosion. But these are the very questions that Benjamin Netanyahu is trying to sweep under the rug of his messianic-nationalist government. Its blindness and obtuseness prevent it from heeding the words of the philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz.

Immediately after the Six-Day War, Leibowitz wrote that annexing the territories would destroy Israel as the state of the Jewish people. It would bring destruction on the entire Jewish people, bring down Israel’s socioeconomic structure and sully the people – Jews and Arabs alike. And all that would happen even without the Arabs becoming a majority.