**Bennett's Suicide Attack**

**Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, January 19, 2020**

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Defense Minister Naphtali Bennett's announcement at a The Kohelet Policy Forum conference regarding the initiation of a mechanism for establishing settlements in Area C, indicates that since launching his plan for annexing Area C in 2012, he has learned nothing and forgotten nothing. All his words on the matter are a series of continuous lies and deceptions, meant to justify a messianic move that lacks any political and practical feasibility.

Unlike what Bennett told EU ambassadors at a meeting two weeks ago - Area C is not a "State of Israel territory", but occupied one. Thus reiterated in 2005, the Israeli Supreme Court - which is itself a target for defrauding by Bennett, Ayelet Shaked and their friends – "First, the law, jurisdiction and administration of the State of Israel do not apply in these areas. They were not "annexed" to Israel. Second, the applicable legal regime in these areas is governed by public international law dealing with belligerent occupation".

The same goes for the common misconception about "state lands." These do not belong to the State of Israel, but to the state that is to be established in these territories. Israel's duty is to preserve the land until that moment comes, and it is not within its power to annex it. According to the United Nations resolutions of November 29, 2012, and November 29, 1947, these will be the territories of the Palestinian state.

Bennett also told the ambassadors that he wanted to curb "the Palestinian takeover of Area C. That this is an orderly and well-funded plan to rob us of land". Rob who? Had the Minister contacted the Coordinator of Operations in the Territories, he would have invariably informed him that 52 percent of Area C is Palestinian privately owned land that Israel recognizes. The rest of the area is "state land," and it is largely used for IDF firing exercises areas in the Judean Desert and in the Jordan Valley. The minister has a peculiar claim, since his words imply that the Palestinians are stealing their own land, that is duly registered as theirs.

The Coordinator of Operations in the Territories could at the same time make it clear to the Minister that, according to the Interim Agreement, the status of the small Palestinian villages in Area C is different than he believes. Had he bothered to read the binding interim agreement, as long as it had not been abolished, he would have found - in the Appendix "List of the small villages in Area B" - that no less than 83 such villages are in fact Area B status.

In other words, Bennett wants to annex Palestinian villages that are in Area B, which have been transferred to the Palestinian Authority's jurisdiction. He also would have learned that 24 personal and functional civilian powers in respect of Palestinian residents of Area C were transferred to the Palestinian Authority 25 years ago. A simple aerial photograph would have revealed to the minister another fact - most of the construction in Area C is a product of the inevitable "overflow" of construction in villages bounded by Areas A and B 25 years ago. Most of it on privately owned Palestinian land. One can assume that the Minister has heard of the concept of an increase of population and of the natural increase in the Palestinian population. Perhaps he will recognize that 25 years ago, when the Interim Agreement was signed, only 115,000 Israelis lived in the West Bank, and there are currently 427,000. 80% of the population growth is a product of natural growth. In addition, the Coordinator should remind the Minister that Israel has undertaken to transfer most of Area C to the PA within 18 months. It began the process, but it was completely discontinued in a 1998 decision by the first Netanyahu government. Until then, Israel has also pledged that it will review security arrangements every six months, "with due consideration of Palestinian plans for the establishment of economic ventures".

Bennett and Shaked's call to annex C areas shows how little they value the Israeli public's wisdom. Unlike the ridiculous video released by the two titled "The Stability Initiative" - with Areas A, B and C presented as three perfect rectangles - the reality on the ground shows that Area A and B are made up of no less than 169 "islands" devoid of any territorial continuity, separated by dozens of corridors under the status of Area C, where Israeli settlements are scattered. Any attempt to create a road system that connects these areas, as Bennett suggested in his plan, will require tens of billions of dollars in Israeli investment.

Presumably Bennett does not seek to annex Area C in order to leave them beyond the security fence. That is, Bennett's Israel will have to dismantle the fence, where more than 20 billion NIS of Israeli taxpayer money has been invested to date, and build a new fence - this time along the new border, which will stretch for about 1,800 km (!) - at a cost of 32 billion NIS, and will be maintained at a fixed annual cost of 4 billion NIS, all from Israeli taxpayer money, of course.

Bennett also pledged at the time, in a television interview, that he would not take the land of the Palestinians in the annexed territory and allow them to go out to cultivate the land in Israel. This actually means building hundreds of agricultural gates at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars, and assigning dozens of Army fighting companies to manage these gates daily.

There is no underestimating the nationalist-messianic determination of Bennett and his team of aides, who he chose to surround himself with, and dismiss it on the grounds that this was an election ploy for his voters. Approved programs, even on very shaky legal basis, are just waiting for the right time to run under the title "An Appropriate Zionist Response." Until then, the determined team surrounding the minister, with his full backing, and in complete paralysis of the prime minister, will make the overall mechanism it proposes to establish the settlements in Area C to the actual annexation of Area C.

In the current era of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, there is no telling what the magnitude of the security, political and legal implications Israel will face from the Palestinians, the Arab world and the international community, in response to these moves. At any rate, Bennett and his Nationalist- messianic followers are unmoved by this. Bennett sees the regional and international situation today as an opportunity to be exploited. We will all pay the price - the blind, the foolish and the stupid, as well as the handful of sober.