**This Will Be the Heavy Price of Annexation for the Israelis,** Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, May 22, 20202

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With the government established and the subsiding coronavirus epidemic, and against the backdrop of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s visit and the threats of the European Union, the issue of annexation has again been proudly hailed as the flagship of the new government. Most of the public, which may not know the practical implications of unilateral annexation on our daily lives, is not aware of the threats embedded in such a move, including destabilization and the almost certain escalation in Israeli-Palestinian hostilities.

More than 60 bills and plans for annexing territory in Area C have been brought before the Knesset since 2016, but only three of these included a map. I wish to analyze and assess Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s plan to annex the Jordan Valley, which is based on U.S. President Donald Trump’s plan. According to the map presented by Netanyahu, he intends to annex 1,200 square kilometers (463 square miles), which is 20.5 percent of the West Bank’s area. What are the ramifications of this move for people’s daily lives?

First of all, 23 percent of the area to be annexed, almost 70,000 acres, is privately owned Palestinian land. If Israel does not amend its laws regarding the property of “absentee” land owners, all of these Palestinians will lose their land, which will gradually be transferred to Israeli settlements. If Israel amends this law, as it did with regard to East Jerusalem, it will still be able to expropriate land for “public use,” which in this case will be exclusively the Jewish public. This is what happened in East Jerusalem, where the state confiscated around 7,000 acres, mostly under Arab ownership, and on this land built 60,000 housing units for Jews and only 1,000 units for Arabs.

Until the dispossession is enacted, Israel will have to give the Palestinian owners access so they can continue to cultivate their land, as is currently happening along the “seam” between East and West Jerusalem. This will be done by using dozens of gates; soldiers will be deployed to operate them.

**FOR THE SAKE OF COMPARISON, THE LAND UNDER PRIVATE PALESTINIAN OWNERSHIP IN THE JORDAN VALLEY IS SEVEN TIMES LARGER THAN ALL THE PRIVATE LAND SITUATED TO THE WEST OF THE SEPARATION BARRIER, WHICH ALSO RELIES ON SUCH GATES. THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES IS ALREADY NOT EXCELLING WHEN IT COMES TO RESPONDING TO PROBLEMS THAT REQUIRE USING THESE GATES, DESPITE ALL THE AFFIDAVITS SUBMITTED TO THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE. A PALESTINIAN BATTLE OVER THESE LANDS WILL BEGIN.**

Furthermore, the map shows 12 Palestinian villages with 13,500 inhabitants in Area B, living on 1,050 acres. These will be annexed to Israel. The Palestinian Authority will instantly lose its authority and responsibility for these villages, and all the authority it received in the Oslo Accords will be assumed by Israel.

Israel will have to give these people resident status, as it gives Palestinians in East Jerusalem, followed by citizenship. It will need to provide all services for the villages as well. Israel is not prepared for this at this point. Another Palestinian battle over municipal services and transfers from the National Insurance Institute will commence.

Thirdly, the area of Jericho (currently in Area A) and its environs will become a Palestinian enclave surrounded by an area that is under Israeli sovereignty. This enclave will cover 17,300 acres, on which 43,000 Palestinians live in six different communities. Every exit from and entry to the enclave will require passing through Israeli checkpoints, and people crossing through Israeli territory will be accompanied . Jericho, a tourist center and the West Bank’s main area for growing dates, will in practice be cut off from the rest of the West Bank and will quickly decline economically. A Palestinian battle over livelihood will begin.

Fourthly, the annexation will add a new 124-mile-long border between the Jordan Valley and the rest of the West Bank. This is as long as Israel’s border with Egypt. To this another 37 miles of border around the Jericho enclave will be added – almost the length of Israel’s border with the Gaza Strip. In the absence of a fence, a chase after terrorists and illegal residents will begin.

A further point is that the annexed area is traversed by two main north-to-south routes – Highway 90 in the valley and Highway 80 (the Alon Road) – as well as by a east-to-west route, Highway 1, in its eastern-most stretch. All these will be removed from the Palestinian transportation network, which, in the absence of alternate routes, will be concentrated on Highway 60, on the ridge and its western slopes. A Palestinian battle over freedom of movement will commence.

Furthermore, West Bank residents traveling to Jordan, if allowed by the kingdom, will pass through territory under Israel’s sovereignty, with all the security implications this has. Moreover, the Dead Sea, the cliffs along its coastline and the Ein Feshkha (Einot Tzukim) nature reserve will be removed from areas accessible by Palestinians for recreation and tourism. Their battle for some air to breathe will begin.

Where does Netanyahu and his associates’ eagerness to annex come from? All the reasons they give are but pretexts that are ungrounded in reality.

There has been no change in the security threat on our eastern border. Jordan is meticulously abiding by the peace treaty with Israel, continuing to provide Israel with quiet along the border, as well as strategic depth up to the Iraqi border. Syria and Iraq, which are contending with the results of the civil war, lack a significant military capability that threatens Israel, and they are not expected to have one in the short and mid-term range. The Palestinians are rigorously implementing security coordination with Israel.

There are 28 tiny settlements in the area to be annexed, home to 13,600 settlers. Their built-up area is very small and they cultivate less than 20,000 acres, which they don’t own. The average age is high because residents there are part of the first wave of settlement in the West Bank, arriving in the first decade that followed the Six-Day War. Surveys show that this population would prefer to leave if a peace deal were signed, in exchange for fair compensation, to the dismay of the head of the area’s regional council, who is also the head of Yesha, the Judea and Samaria Regional Council. Annexation won’t change their situation, except in terms of planning and construction. But so far, this is not what has stopped the growth of Jewish population in the Jordan Valley, which for 50 years has not numbered more than a few thousand residents.

The burden on the IDF will grow substantially and unjustifiably. The army will have to add substantial forces to secure borders and crossings between the valley and the rest of the West Bank, and around the Jericho enclave. It will have to accompany Palestinians entering Israel, operate gates to agricultural land and secure the border with Jordan due to a destabilization in relations with the kingdom.

The aim of those wishing to annex is clear. It is to annul the Oslo Accords and to foil any chance for a two-state solution for two peoples, in violation of international law and of treaties Israel has signed. It’s obvious that their wish is to displace the Palestinians eastward to Jordan at an opportune moment, and fulfill their messianic ultra-nationalist dreams. In the words of Naftali Bennett, the aim is “to make Judea and Samaria part of sovereign Israel.”

The price Israel will have to pay in the short term for this messianic adventure, which is feeding on a sense of intoxication with power, will be intolerable for Israeli society. In the long run it will destroy the Zionist vision. The U.S. will lose the pillar supporting its Middle Eastern policy – stability, based on peace accords Israel signed with Egypt and with Jordan.

*Dr. Shaul Arieli has written several books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as “A Border between Us and You” and “All of Israel’s Borders.”*