**West Bank Annexation Is Doomed to Fail. Just Look What Happened in East Jerusalem,**

**Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, June 5 2020**

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One of the arguments made by those who support annexation and dismiss the idea of a final status accord is: “We annexed East Jerusalem and the world said nothing.” Some persist in praising the achievements of the annexation, citing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s remarks on Jerusalem Day 2015: “Our capital Jerusalem has been reunited. ... Its division caused it to wither; its unification led it to prosper.”

After all the celebrating of Jerusalem’s “unification” and “prosperity,” the question must be asked: Was the annexation of East Jerusalem such a big success that it means we should take the risk involved in annexing territory in the West Bank? Or, as indicated by recently published statistics from the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, does Netanyahu’s proclamation reflect a false reality?

More importantly, perhaps, Jerusalem’s development and the city’s demographic and economic trends can tell us something about what Israel can expect should Netanyahu’s promise “to gradually apply Israeli sovereignty to parts of Judea and Samaria” be fulfilled, ultimately leading to annexation of the entire West Bank and to one state.

After the Six-Day War, the Levi Eshkol government chose not to suffice with the unification of the city that had been partitioned in 1949, but to add to the six square kilometers of East Jerusalem another 64 square kilometers that encompassed more than 20 Palestinian villages that had never been part of Jerusalem. This was in line with the explanation offered by Rehavam Ze’evi, head of the ministerial committee on expanding Jerusalem’s borders, to Justice Minister Ya’akov Shimshon Shapira, about the proposed annexation in 1967: “Adding extensive territory to be included in Jerusalem will enable its expansion … into a metropolis.”

This was the opening shot in the process of transforming the Hebrew city, which had doubled its population within 19 years and had a 99-percent Jewish majority, into a city with an Arab minority comprising 26 percent (70,000 people) of the population that has since grown to nearly 40 percent (350,000) and is on track to become a majority 15 years from now. Some dismiss this concern by citing the decline in the fertility rate for Muslim women in the past 20 years from 4.5 children to 3.2 children, while the fertility rate for Jewish women has risen from 3.8 children to 4.4 children. But they fail to take into account that, since 1992, “united” Jerusalem has seen a negative migration rate of 6,000-8,000 Jews per year. And 44 percent of those who have recently left the city are young people aged 20 to 34.

Most of the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem do not exercise their right to vote in municipal elections and boycott them instead (the voting rate is less than 2 percent). Israel is trying to prevent a situation in which those who are interested in obtaining Israeli citizenship could participate in general elections – by rejecting their applications for citizenship. In 2019, there was a big jump in the number of citizenship applications that were approved, from an average of 300 a year to 1,200, but this was offset by a similar leap in the number of rejected applications – from a yearly average of 300 to 1,400. Only 20,000 Palestinians in Jerusalem hold Israeli citizenship.

Inside the Green Line (and with East Jerusalem), Israel has a solid Jewish majority of 79 percent. Any Jewish migration to the West Bank (though the Central Bureau of Statistics does not foresee any increase here) will not change the fact that, within the territory of what was Mandatory Palestine, there is a non-Jewish majority. If Israel annexes the West Bank (and later, possibly, Gaza), it would have to make one of two choices: to be a “dictatorship of the minority,” as David Ben-Gurion described the apartheid regime in 1949, or to become a democratic Arab state with a Jewish minority.

The two economically weakest groups in Israel, Arabs and Haredim, have gradually made Jerusalem the country’s largest impoverished city. The rate of participation in the workforce in Jerusalem is just 68 percent, compared to the national average of 81 percent. The average monthly wage in Jerusalem is 8,700 shekels ($2,500), while the national average stands at 10,600 shekels. According to the CBS, the city is ranked at the second-to-lowest socioeconomic level, and is among the 50 least livable cities, along with Bnei Brak and Jisr al-Zarqa.

The same would hold true if there is a one-state solution. Israel, a developed country, would have to absorb a population that lives at a Third World level. The difference in per capita GDP – $45,000 versus $3,500 – practically says it all.

The annexed territories would most likely also suffer from the same kind of discriminatory policy that has been the lot of East Jerusalem, as Teddy Kollek admitted in a 1990 interview in Ma’ariv: “We said again and again that we would equalize the Arabs’ rights with the Jews’ rights in the city. It was empty talk. … They were and they remain second- and third-class citizens. … For Jewish Jerusalem, I did something in the last 25 years. For East Jerusalem? Nothing!” To which Ehud Olmert added in 2012: “No Israeli government since ’67 has done even the slightest bit of what is needed in order to actually unify the city … including the government that I headed.” And last month, when current Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Leon talked about upcoming development for Jerusalem, the Arab neighborhoods were hardly mentioned.

Territory that is annexed in the West Bank, and is populated by Palestinians, will likely receive the same type of treatment from the government and the municipality as the Jerusalem neighborhoods that were left to the east of the security and separation barrier. Kafr Aqab and the Shoafat refugee camp became a “no man’s land” where a third of Jerusalem’s Arab population lives in conditions fostered by inadequate budgets, inadequate city services and a lack of law enforcement.

Even with this discriminatory policy, Israel will not be able to avoid National Insurance Institute social-support payments, or major expenses in the fields of education, health and welfare for a population that ranks in the lowest socioeconomic cluster. On the positive side, the annexation of East Jerusalem enabled Jews to resume exercising their right to freedom of worship at the holy sites, chiefly the Western Wall. This change could be preserved by adopting previous proposals that were made in negotiations on the future of Jerusalem. Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas proposed that the Western Wall, Jewish Quarter, half of the Armenian Quarter and the rest of Mount Zion remain under Israeli sovereignty. Alternatively, in the 2001 Taba talks and 2008 Annapolis talks, Israel proposed that a special administration be established for the “holy basin,” which would preserve freedom of access and freedom of worship for all faiths.

It is impossible to elaborate here on all the negative effects caused by the annexation of the territory that would come to be known as East Jerusalem. But the lesson must be learned, and we should have no more celebrations of this imaginary “unity” and “prosperity.” As Meron Benvenisti once aptly described it: “As the feeling deepens that the ‘unified city’ is actually riven by barriers of hate, extremist and zealous officialdom ramps up its efforts to cultivate the anniversary of its conquest as an event of defiance, xenophobia and denunciation of traitors.” (Haaretz, October 4, 2012).

We must avoid having Israel’s fate mirror that of a Jerusalem and not turn it into an impoverished country, beset by tensions and violence, with an Arab majority, and one that will become a pariah state due to the apartheid regime it will impose on the homeland of the two peoples, as it did in the capital.