## Biden must prevent Israel’s march toward annexation – Responsible Statecraft FEBRUARY 11, 2021

<https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/02/11/biden-must-prevent-israels-march-toward-annexation/?fbclid=IwAR3xSzCYLAsrbTvsyTa_54RzVe2Pl_0-uLoZ9QoI0Q-ayM08eQj2mOwMRR4>

Although former President Donald Trump no longer has the capacity to influence the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli government continues to ride the wave of Trump’s “peace” plan and President Biden must take action to stop them.  
  
Indeed, the Netanyahu government is still working to implement the plan’s vision, steadily paving the way to annexing vast swathes of the West Bank. In real and significant ways, this is progressing despite Netanyahu’s purported “[postponement](https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200928-uae-envoy-says-israel-postponed-west-bank-annexation-for-normalisation-deal/)” of annexation as part of a series of normalization agreements.

Until the Biden administration articulates a new plan or map — or at least reveals consequences for Israel’s annexation projects — the Israeli government will continue to advance policies that entrench the occupation, expand settlements and lay the groundwork for unilateral, de jure annexation.

The Netanyahu annexation agenda is advancing in key three areas: The unlawful expansion of settlements and the “laundering” of illegal outposts, domestic legislation extending civilian law into occupied territories, and the construction of permanent transportation infrastructure designed to splinter any future Palestinian state.  
  
As is becoming clearer, the only way for Israel to remain a democracy and a homeland for the Jewish people is to abandon the messianic plan of retaining control of the entire West Bank and allow Palestinians to live with independence and freedom in a state of their own. Each of these steps undermines that future.

In the first area, the expansion of settlements and the laundering of illegal outposts, Netanyahu recently approved the construction of nearly 6,000 housing units in settlements and outposts. The vast majority of permits have been given to the small and isolated settlements which are located outside all of the State of Israel’s policy proposals for a permanent border with Palestine. Obviously, this will only frustrate the success of any potential negotiations over borders, if such negotiations can occur at all following such acts of bad faith. This, of course, is the point.

Just over 60 percent of the approved housing units are outside the proposal presented by Israel at the Annapolis Conference in 2008, which was intended to allow Israel to retain under its sovereignty 85 percent of Israelis living beyond the Green Line. Nearly 90 percent of the housing units are located east of the built security barrier, and 68 percent are located east of the planned barrier. Eighty percent are even east of the optimal permanent border formulated in an in-depth study by the Israeli group “Commanders’ for Israel’s Security,” which will allow 80 percent of Israelis across the Green Line to remain under Israeli sovereignty. This is in addition to the planned construction in the [“Givat Hamatos”](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/11/20/netanyahus-cruel-booby-trapped-inauguration-gift-joe-biden/) neighborhood in south Jerusalem, in “Mevaseret Adumim” (E1) in [Ma’ale Adumim](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/map-of-the-e1-corridor" \t "_blank), and in [“Givat Eitam”](https://peacenow.org.il/en/peace-now-submits-petition-to-block-allocation-of-a-nahla-e2-land-to-build-settlement#.XsuibAs4-PU.twitter) in Efrat, each positioned to cut off Arab Jerusalem from the surrounding Palestinian area.

These approvals continue to shift the goal-posts on territory and will continue to displace Palestinians and prevent them from achieving self-determination and independence. It’s perhaps the clearest policy to signal that Netanyahu has no genuine interest in securing a peace agreement and will continue to undermine the prospects for peace unless President Biden takes steps to reign in the behavior.

The advancement of civil legislation in the West Bank is the second plank of the plan. Recently, the de facto method of annexation has been deepened by promoting direct Knesset legislation in the occupied territories, in contrast to past use of military orders.  
  
In 2017, the government [determined](https://www.loc.gov/law/help/israel-settlement/judea-and-samaria.php) that the Ministerial Committee on Legislation would not advance legislation without examining whether it is necessary to apply any proposed law to Israelis living in the territories, and how it can do so. In 2016, the Judea and Samaria Subcommittee was established in the Knesset, dealing with civilian issues concerning the territories and dealing with the advancement of settler affairs.

In the 20th Knesset, eight laws and legislative amendments were [enacted](https://www.yesh-din.org/en/legislation/) which extend Israel’s civil, legal control of the occupied territories. From a legal standpoint, occupied territory beyond the Green Line is now becoming increasingly indistinguishable from territory within the border, and laws are being passed or modified with the expressed aim of benefiting the settler movement. Recently, a preliminary reading of the “Regulation of Young Settlement” law was also [approved](https://www.timesofisrael.com/knesset-advances-legislation-to-legalize-provide-utilities-to-wildcat-outposts/), which will operate to launder the illegal outposts as “young settlements.”

The third area, construction of transportation infrastructure, continues to advance despite a dire economic situation in Israel. Transport Minister Miri Regev [announced](https://autos.yahoo.com/roads-pave-way-massive-growth-061853517.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAEGWHhDPR-tn9a9i_2Cwdh3GAyYUE1qvhs--IKPNEhr158nco_BCnfa8CtRgxAACm3n4KggVdJJUulnID_WynNZtmk7QeFgG_hjXX_VFStK_yzoqhejC1KsqRJ-Qq58-OaFrNmjOBZscClOr4W1UWYrueNegdLk-o2GxHF4ZVaQD) a series of new transportation projects in the West Bank in December at a total cost of about 400 million NIS, or roughly $120 million. This decision follows the strategic master plan for transportation, which Regev [launched](https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/miri-regev-present-master-transportation-plan-for-yesha-council-648587) in November and includes large scale projects on occupied territory. There no longer seems to be any facade about the true intention of infrastructure projects beyond the green line. “We are not taking our foot off the gas. We are applying de facto sovereignty,” Minister Regev [said](https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/miri-regev-present-master-transportation-plan-for-yesha-council-648587) during the announcement.

These infrastructure projects often appear designed not to service a real need, but to further entrench Israeli control over strategic locations in the West Bank. Indeed, 60 percent of workers in Israeli settlements travel daily to work within the Green Line anyway.

These three elements of Israel’s annexation project will continue — just as they would under the Trump administration — unless the Biden administration advances a clear alternative plan and outlines consequences for the Netanyahu government’s annexationist agenda. The ultimate outcome of this creep toward annexation will be either an Israel that can no longer be accurately described as democracy, or a divided, one-state democracy which ceases to be a homeland for the Jewish people. Either way, this would mark the death of the liberal-democratic Zionist dream enshrined in Israel’s Declaration of Independence. If President Biden is a true friend of Israel, he must take action to protect Israel and advance Palestinian self-determination now.