

Introduction

After centuries of persecution and the events of nationalism in Europe, Anti-Semitism, and Zionism movement in the early 90s ignited an idea among the Jews for a distinct national identity and a state of their own. They saw Palestine as their historic land and only hope where they could establish a Jewish state. [The Balfour declaration](#) of 1917 laid the foundation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine where Jews would be living alongside the Palestinians and Arabs who were already living there. The end of World War I saw the fall of the Ottoman Empire and Britain taking over Palestine, what they called British mandate for Palestine in accordance with the mandate system.

The Holocaust and the end of World War II witnessed mass immigration of Jews from all over the world to Palestine and an intense push for the creation of the state of Israel as a sole Jewish homeland. The mass migration further took the shape of conflicts between the Jews and ethnic Arabs. The increasing sectarian violence between Jews and Arabs in the region led to the United Nations (UN) intervention. In 1947, the UN approved the division of the British mandate region into two states, one for Jews (Israel), other for Arabs (Palestine), and declared Jerusalem as an international zone. The Arab nations saw both the Balfour declaration and UN plan as a betrayal and a sign of Western colonization. As soon as the Britishers left they declared war on the newly formed state of Israel.

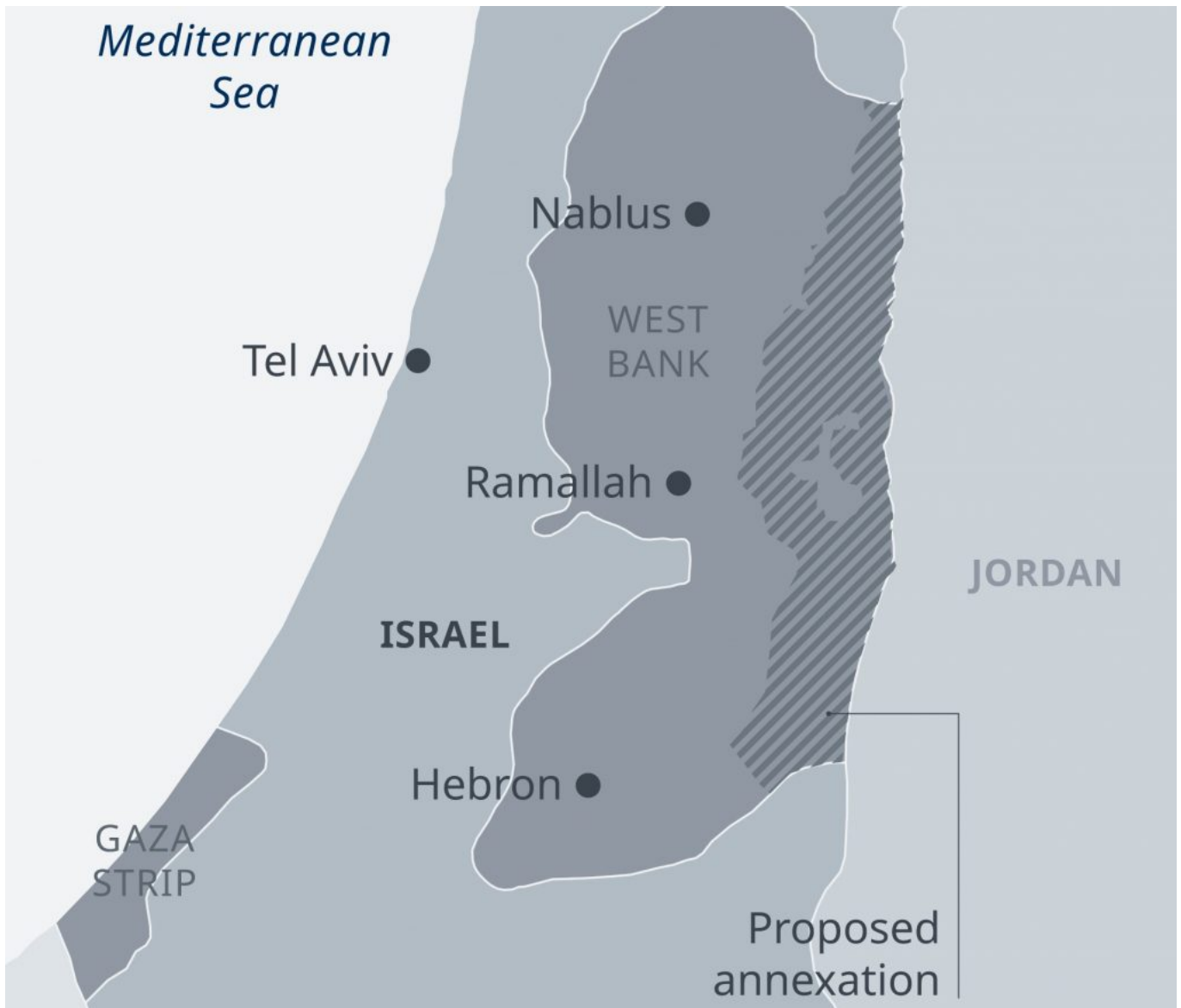


Image source: DW

In the aftermath, Israel won the Arab - Israeli War of 1948 and extended its borders well ahead of the international boundaries declared by the UN excluding Gaza (came under Egypt's control) and West Bank (came under Jordan's control). In 1967, Israel fought a six-day war with its neighbouring countries and further seized Jerusalem, West Bank from Jordan, Golan Heights from Syria, and Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. In 1973, Yom Kippur War Egypt and Syria tried to regain their territory but failed to do so.

This event marked the US intervention in the region and gradual peacemaking between

Israel and other Arab states. In 1978, Israel and Egypt signed [Camp David Accords](#) in the presence of the United States (US) under which Israel gave the Sinai Peninsula back to Egypt in exchange of a diplomatic victory in the form of formal recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. In the upcoming decades with almost all the Arab neighbours coming to peace with Israel, the conflict took a domestic dimension in which the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) resorted to acts of terror and declared war on Israel for establishing the state of Palestine. In the next few decades, a lot of Jews later came to know as Settlers moved and settled in occupied West Bank territories citing religious and political reasons. This led to the first Intifada (Arabic: Uprising) from 1987 - 1993, to which Israeli forces responded intensively. Simultaneously, Gaza witnessed the rise of HAMAS, an extremist group that challenged PLO operating procedures claiming it to be more secular and peaceful.



Image source: AP

In 1993, both Israel and PLO signed [OSLO Accords](#), a US-brokered peace deal under which Israel recognised PLO as a Palestinian authority, right for self-governance and ceasefire. To disrupt the peace process HAMAS carried out various terror attacks in Israel and the far-

right Israeli also resorted to violence. In 2000, Camp David-II talks under US supervision failed and a second Intifada started that continued till 2005. Post-intifada-II Israeli policies towards Palestine tilted rightwards. In the next decades, many talks were held both at the domestic and international level for a two-state solution and to resolve the conflict but with no success. Post Obama administration the overall politics under the Trump administration in the US and Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel has witnessed a rightward tilt. To prove itself as a strategic anchor in the Middle East, after 3 years under making, in January 2020, President Trump came up with his vision of peace [The Deal of the Century](#) claiming to resolve the long awaiting Israel- Palestine conflict.

The vision of Peace and Global Response

The vision of conflict resolution of the Trump administration is aimed to normalize the relation between Israel and Palestine and to jointly pursue a stable and prosperous region. The irony of this deal is the declaration stage never saw a Palestinian representative; even when under-making Palestinian authorities were never consulted. But the presence of ambassadors of Oman, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during the declaration of the deal seemed to be an endorsement and victory for Israel on the diplomatic front.

The [overall analysis](#) of the plan seems to put the golden ball in Israel's favour. The deal legalised all the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and gave Israel a majority of West Bank including the Jordan Valley leaving Palestinians with only 15% of their historic land. It recognizes Jerusalem as an undivided capital of Israel though a contradiction remains by declaring Al-Quds as a capital of the future state of Palestine. Al-Quds is an Arabic word for Jerusalem; the deal declares few eastern territories of Jerusalem as Al-Quds that directly confronts the undivided Jerusalem claim of Israel. It denies the future state of Palestine to have any military establishments and also denies the right to return to Palestinian refugees. The economic framework of the deal promises the future state of Palestine an aid of [\\$50 Billion](#) over a period of ten years.

Most of the territories given to Palestine are in small fragments. The fragmented nature of territories will create Israel's checkpoints as a barrier during movement. Israel has been given the control of security from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. This simply shows how the plan is serious discrimination against the Palestinians and direct denial of UN plans and international laws. Citing the fact that the Trump administration has always supported and had recognised Israel's sovereignty on Jerusalem and Golan Heights, biases in the deal becomes somewhat inevitable. PM Netanyahu has very well exploited this blind ideological support, especially by declaring the annexation of the West Bank as the main

task of his government and a historic opportunity since 1948. The US support of West Bank annexation has an additional dimension too; this support actually strengthens the Evangelical Christians communities' support for President Trump in the upcoming 2020 Presidential election.



Image source: The Jerusalem Post

Though PM Netanyahu has US support for annexation, the international community views this illegal under international law. The UN has called the annexation plan the most serious violation of international law and a decision that will grievously harm the two-state solution. [The UN has urged the European Union](#) to use its economic weight, diplomatic expertise and investment leverage to deter Israel. European Union has warned Israel of possible sanctions on the annexation issue, though this requires unanimity among member states. Germany that will be taking over the rotational presidency of the European Union of 1st July has also discouraged Israel's annexation plan and has urged the coalition government to set up negotiations rather than going for unilateral annexation. France has urged its EU partners to take a tough stance and likewise the UK has also planned to stop granting Israel preferential access to its market. Canada has also joined the league of the EU and other nations in condemning the annexation plan, declaring it as a violation of UN resolutions and international law. Unlike Western countries, the Middle East saw both favour and condemnation of the annexation plan. On one side the presence of Oman, Bahrain and the UAE ambassadors during the declaration of the deal of the century shows support for Israel, on the other side the Arab league clearly defied the annexation and in a [meeting](#) planned to

provide legal and financial support to the Palestinian government. The King of Jordan has also warned Israel of a massive conflict in case they execute the annexation plans.

The Greenlight Dilemma and the US as Strategic Anchor

Currently, PM Netanyahu's plan of annexing 40% of the West Bank seems to be hanging in the balance. The differences between PM Netanyahu and the Defence Minister Benny Gantz had made it difficult to execute the plan amicably. Gantz has always opposed unilateral annexation and this has given the US a reason for not giving a green light to annexation. The US administration has said that they are unwilling to give their nod for the unilateral takeover of the West Bank and Jordan Valley without Gantz's support. The US initially suspended talks with Israel on the annexation issue but then continued with a three-day key meeting in the White House that too ended up with no final conclusion. But things seem to be much deeper after some of the recent events that include impeachment, abysmal mishandling of COVID-19 pandemic, Black lives matters protests and trade war, Joe Biden democratic rival of President Trump have got an upper hand for upcoming elections.

Also, the increasing criticism of the international community has forced the US to weigh its plan before giving a "GO" to Israel. Stepping back from its own plan is not an option now; therefore the US can't close its doors for annexation but citing the international response it could manoeuvre the annexation plan. This manoeuvring can be opting for a gradual or a phase-wise annexation rather than going for the larger annexation at once. Though the US is being viewed as the main anchor for annexation, but the annexation seems inadmissible even by Israelis and mainly Settlers. Many Israelis have objection with President Trump's deal proposal that gives recognition to the state of Palestine and Al-Quds (some eastern territories of Jerusalem) as a capital. Recognition of the state of Palestine will also cover some [15 Jewish settlements](#) in the West Bank. They also fear that any recognition of the state of Palestine will limit the Jewish future extension.

What If Annexation Happens?

A successful annexation could change the geopolitics of the region dramatically. Successful execution of the plan will give Israel security control of the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. This will also limit the Palestinians' access to the salty waters of the Dead Sea and its mineral-rich beaches. It will also curtail the freedom of movement of the Palestinians. With resource-deprived regions falling under the future state of Palestine this could act as a catalyst for future conflicts possibly Intifada-III. Previous trends show that major conflicts in the region have led to Intifada-I and II. The HAMAS role cannot be

ignored, as the possibility of [FATAH engaging with HAMAS](#) seems inevitable.



Fatah/ Image source: Al Jazeera

For Israel, any formal annexation will lead to international condemnation, possible legal penalties and sanctions. Egypt and Jordan are the only two countries who have a formal peace agreement with Israel and are critical security contributors. Though Israel holds very firm diplomatic relations with both the countries, the annexation of Jordan Valley can hinder their relations. King Abdullah II and his foreign minister had already made a remark of possible conflicts if the Jordan Valley is annexed. For Israel, the Iranian nuclear development, oil warfare, terrorism financing, and regional proxies are the biggest threat in the region. The collapse of formal or informal peace agreements with the neighbours will make Israel more vulnerable. A successful annexation will also impact the economic framework of Israel as it will bring the burden of infrastructure cost, operational costs and will also demand a high budget. In the whole process, the US will try to manoeuvre the deal so as to regain its losing strategic hold in the region on the expense of international laws and UN resolution.

Conclusion

As the majority of reactions towards unilateral annexation are not in favour of Israel and with the organisation like HAMAS declaring it as a declaration of war, Israel should resort to negotiations. The peace plan of Trump's administration is very unlikely to contribute or to establish joint stability in the region but it can increase the risk of a surge in internal conflicts between Israel and Palestine. Citing the response from the International community, Israel should take on negotiations rather than going forward with unilateral annexation. Currently, PM Netanyahu with US support can execute the plan but an administration change in US politics in the upcoming elections can turn the game for Israel. Israel probably can face strong reactions from the International community if annexation is carried out by sidelining the International laws and UN resolution. With the clock ticking to the eleventh hour, Israel's move can actually change the geopolitical dimension of the decade's long conflict.

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