



Annexation: Frequently Asked Questions

June 2020

Annexation FAQ

Overview

The Israeli government has announced its intentions to formally annex parts of the West Bank in July 2020—with the explicit support of the U.S. Administration. If carried out, this unilateral move will further endanger the lives and livelihoods of Palestinians, while foreclosing options for a secure and viable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Specifically, unilateral Israeli annexation will destroy any hope of establishing an independent Palestinian state. It will formally and indefinitely entrench extreme injustice for Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and beyond. Israel will likely face increased insecurity as well as international scorn and isolation, including from once enthusiastic supporters.

These Frequently Asked Questions provide a deep dive into the issue, its implications, and how Pro-Israeli, Pro-Palestinian, Pro-Peace Americans should respond.

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1. What is annexation and what is Israel trying to annex?

"Annexation" refers to a state forcibly acquiring new territory.

Israel is discussing annexing parts of the West Bank. But the West Bank is not part of Israel.

Israel came into control of the West Bank during the 1967 War. However, Israel never annexed it—or made it part of Israel. Instead, Israel’s military has occupied the West Bank—controlling the millions of Palestinians living there and all goods and people entering and leaving. Israel also began building Jewish-only Israeli villages, towns, and cities in the West Bank, which are often called “settlements.” Ultimately, Israel currently controls everyone living there, though the Palestinian residents do not have Israeli citizenship or the right to vote in Israeli elections.

If Israel were to annex all or part of the West Bank, it would declare and behave as if these areas were officially part of Israel.

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2. Is annexation legal?

No. Particularly after World War II, international law clearly prohibits the acquisition of territory by force. Since Israel came to control the West Bank by force, broad international consensus holds that Israel cannot annex all or part of it.

Israel could acquire parts of the West Bank or other land elsewhere just like any other state, but would need to do so as part of a negotiated agreement rather than as a unilateral act.

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3. Which areas of land would be annexed and why are they important?

As of the time of this writing, we do not know precisely which lands are slated for annexation.

President Trump’s “Deal of the Century” allows for Israeli annexation of roughly 30% of the West Bank as a part of an overall agreement. Palestinians have strenuously denounced both the U.S. plan and the ideological aims of the Trump administration and have refused to negotiate. [Here is a comprehensive FAQ of the Trump Administration’s](#)

Plan. For now, the U.S. appears to have given Israel the green light to annex territory as it sees fit. There are three possibilities for what land will be annexed:

1. The Jordan River Valley
2. The largest existing blocs of settlements
3. A combination of both

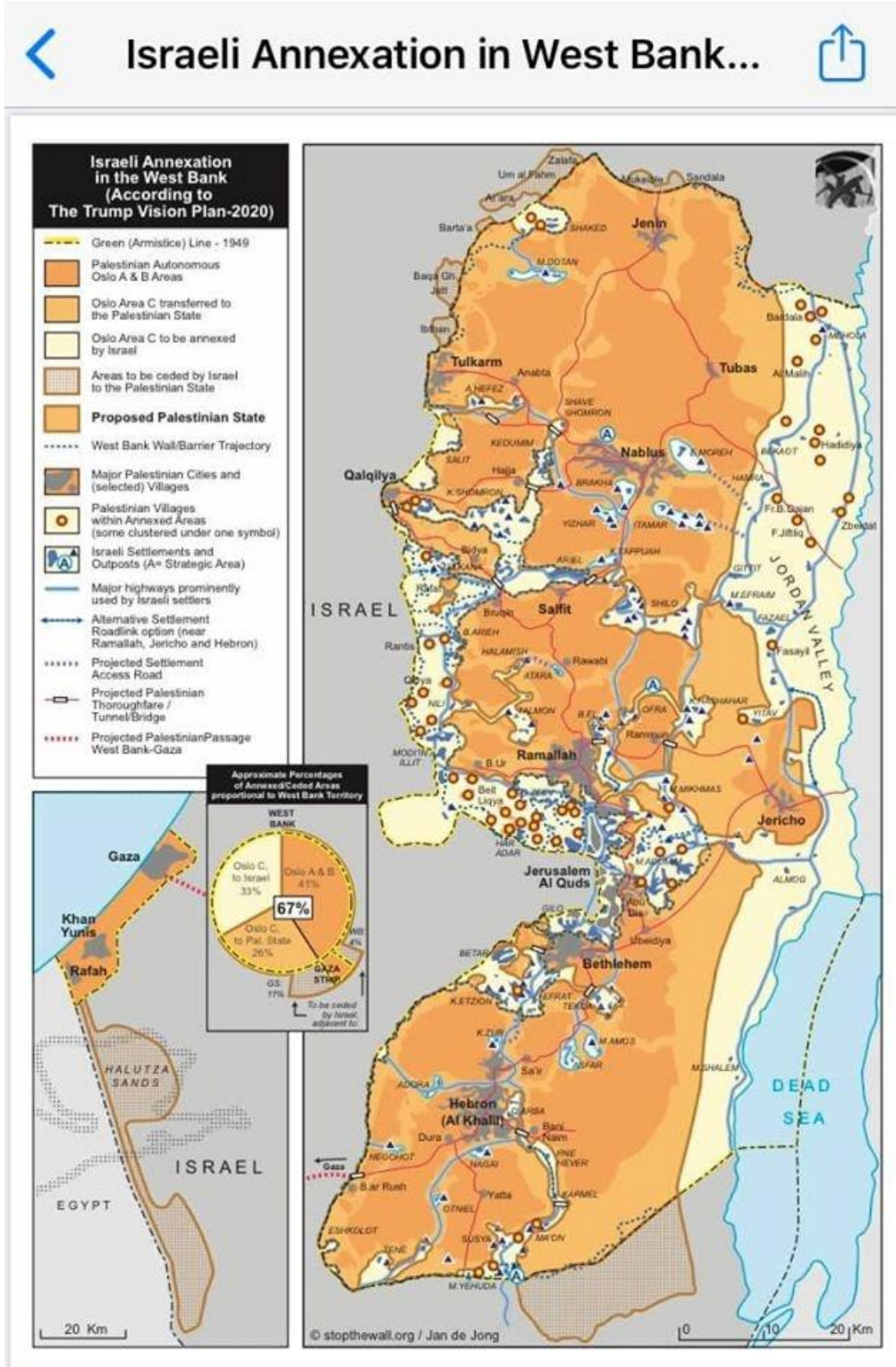
According to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's most recent statement, the government would initially annex about three percent of the West Bank, including 132 settlements that are home to some 450,000 Jewish Israelis. He also alludes to future additional rounds of annexation that are currently undefined. In this way, Netanyahu is striving to satisfy Israel's right wing while keeping at a minimum the anger of his opponents and of the international community. This move seems to manage pressure from Israelis who want to annex large parts of the West Bank alongside those who want to limit annexation to the already existing settlement blocs.

Even a limited annexation of the larger settlement blocs is problematic, however. Israeli settlements often fragment Palestinian communities and cut them off from scarce resources like arable lands, room for development, and access to water. While some settlements may become part of a future Israeli state under a negotiated solution, unilateral annexation makes an agreed upon solution much harder to achieve in the future while simultaneously taking the land and resources necessary for Palestinian independence. These lands and resources are often owned by local Palestinian communities and are confiscated in violation of international law, without consent or compensation.

Successive Israeli governments have for decades discussed annexing the Jordan Valley, which comprises nearly 30% of the West Bank. Since 1967, Israeli proposals have insisted on Israel retaining control of the Jordan Valley for security reasons—effectively cutting the Palestinian territories off from direct access to Jordan. Palestinians have consistently rejected these proposals, asserting that Israeli control over the Jordan Valley would not just restrict access to the resources and space needed for a truly independent Palestinian state, but that it would also effectively surround Palestinians with the Israeli military. This would indefinitely extend the current reality on the ground: restrictions on Palestinian independent travel and export opportunities with Jordan.

The Israeli government also has plans to build in the "E1" area near East Jerusalem. Building in E1 was once viewed by the U.S. and other observers as a potentially "fatal blow to the two-state solution."

Israel appears scheduled to annex this area, as well as two other settlement blocs south and north of Jerusalem. This would expand Israeli control over what is known as “Greater Jerusalem,” while further restricting Palestinian access.



Source: Jan de Jong

4. But aren't Israeli settlements in the West Bank already part of Israel?

Not formally. After the 1967 War, Israel began a process of building villages, towns, and cities along with factories and military installations, in the newly-occupied territories. These communities of Jewish Israeli citizens outside of Israel are known as “settlements.”

Today more than 600,000 Israeli civilians live in these West Bank settlements, including more than 200,000 in East Jerusalem, which Israel annexed in violation of international law following the 1967 War.

Over the years, Israel built a vast infrastructure to service the settlements: from highways to water carriers to electrical grids and military bases. While it applies Israeli civilian law to many aspects of life for Israelis living there—including the right to vote in Israeli elections—Israel never officially declared these communities to be part of Israel. While a growing number of Israelis perceive settlements in the West Bank and especially those located close to the Green Line as part of Israel, they technically fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defense, especially when it comes to zoning laws, land registration, and development.

Should Israel attempt to formally annex these territories, this jurisdiction will change, and these communities will be treated like municipalities in Israel proper.

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5. What are the reasons Israel gives for wanting to annex the West Bank?

Regardless of their positioning on annexation, successive Israeli governments have maintained that controlling some or all of the West Bank serves the following Israeli interests:

1. *Security*: Some Israeli military strategists consider controlling some or all of the West Bank as vital to protecting Israel's security interests. It is important to note, however, that a significant number of former senior military and security officials have long opposed annexation and occupation and have been proponents of a two-state solution.

2. *Scarcity*: The West Bank contains important, scarce resources such as water and fertile agricultural land. A large part of the agricultural profit is used for international export and benefits the Israeli economy.
3. *Jerusalem*: While Israel attempted to annex East Jerusalem and areas around it in 1967, international law maintains that this area is in the West Bank. Annexing the settlements around Jerusalem ensures Israeli sovereignty over the city, which is important for religious, historical, and political reasons.
4. *Religious significance*: Israel refers to the West Bank by its Biblical name, Judea and Samaria. Many of the most significant sites in Judaism, like Shilo and Hebron and Jerusalem's Old City, are located there. Some Israelis believe that Jews must populate and maintain control over these holy places.
5. *Changed realities*: Since 1967, Israel moved more than 600,000 civilians into more than 150 villages, towns, and cities in the West Bank. Many Israelis argue that dismantling all of these settlements would be impossible and already perceive many as parts of Israel. A new generation was born and raised in these settlements, and is increasingly pressuring the government to prevent any situation in which they would be uprooted from their homes by formally annexing the settlements.

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6. What reasons do Palestinians and the international community give for opposing annexation?

Variations on the following points opposing annexation are made by Palestinian leaders, world bodies, and many members of the international community:

1. *Illegality*: Annexation is illegal. Acquiescing to illegality undermines international law and order.
2. *Security and regional stability*: The international community worries that annexation will complicate relations between Israel and Arab countries, including Jordan and Egypt, as well as Gulf countries interested in isolating Iran. Because the Middle East is particularly unstable, fraying these relationships could have negative regional consequences. Jordan's security is of particular concern to strategists.
3. *Death of the two-state solution*: While many have long questioned the possibility of establishing a two-state solution due to Israel's expanding settlements, annexation would foreclose any credible path to a viable two-state solution. The Palestinian Authority may not only terminate security cooperation with Israel, it

may not survive annexation, potentially complicating paths to resolution of the conflict.

4. *Increased human rights violations:* Palestinians and international observers expect a rise in human rights violations against Palestinians, including accelerated land theft, property destruction, resource theft, and attacks on people and communities.

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7. What would annexation change for Israelis and Palestinians on the ground?

In practical terms, annexation would cement the current reality on the ground. It will also likely green light further settlement expansion, which in turn will result in continued and increased violations of Palestinian rights, including expropriation of land, destruction of homes, and arrests and violence from settlers and the Israeli army. Sanctioning the accelerated isolation of Palestinian communities and land profoundly and irreparably harms millions of people living under occupation. Palestinians, like those living in the Jordan Valley, may soon face further large-scale dispossession.

Annexation will also impact Israelis. Unilateral steps to annex the West Bank may lead to greater threats to Israeli national security, with possible attacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians. Former senior military and security officials fear annexation would lead to a collapse of the current security coordination with the Palestinian Authority—an arrangement that has for decades helped prevent attacks from extremists. It is also a serious threat to the fragile “cold peace” Israel has with Jordan and Egypt. This deterioration in regional relations would significantly and negatively impact both Palestinians and Israelis.

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8. What would annexation mean for the two-state solution and peace prospects in the region?

Some analysts believe there is no credible way forward to peace apart from the two-state solution: an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with its capital in East Jerusalem alongside an independent Israel. They argue that Israelis and

Palestinians want independence, self-determination, and the realization of their national aspirations in the same homeland, and that without a broad movement for a unified single state, creating two independent states is the only way toward peace. Annexation is an imminent threat to this kind of solution as it would make a territorially contiguous state in the West Bank impossible.

Others counter that as a result of the continuous construction of Jewish settlements inside the West Bank, the two-state solution was already dead. Whether or not Israel proceeds with formally annexing these territories, the construction of settlements over decades have created irreversible facts on the ground that will not allow for the creation of two states. Today, the West Bank looks like a piece of swiss cheese, with Palestinians living in the holes and Israelis controlling the surrounding cheese.

Beyond the viability of the two-state solution, unilateral moves towards annexation would undermine any legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority and destroy any hope for future negotiations. Therefore, everything must be done to resist not only annexation but the continued expansion of settlements that undermine the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

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9. Why do some Israelis say this step means the end of Israeli democracy?

Historically and in this current debate, many Israeli Jews oppose annexation because of demography: annexing the West Bank into a democratic state would give millions of non-Jews the right to vote. This would upset Israel's "demographic balance" and force it to choose between maintaining its Jewish character and its liberal democracy.

Currently, Israel retains ultimate control over all the people living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Roughly half are Jewish Israeli and half Palestinian. However, most Palestinians located in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip live under a different set of laws. With few exceptions, they are not Israeli citizens.

Until now, the creation of a Palestinian State in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was seen as a way for Israel to avoid the "demographic threat" of adding millions of Palestinians to the populace, thereby maintaining a Jewish majority in the country and preserving Israel as a safe haven for Jews from all over the world. The current U.S. plan, which does not envision or allow for a truly sovereign Palestinian state, creates an

opportunity for Israel to draw borders for annexed territory in a way that would grant citizenship to only a relatively small number of Palestinians.

It is important to note that Palestinians fundamentally reject this demographic logic. Whether citizens of Israel, residents of the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, or Palestinians dispersed in other parts of the Middle East or elsewhere, Palestinians assert that their fundamental human rights should be guaranteed whether they are 51% or 1% of a population.

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10. I've heard this term "creeping annexation." How is that different from formal annexation?

"Creeping annexation" refers to Israel's steady expansion onto more and more Palestinian land through: the steady expansion of Jewish settlements and outposts; construction of national 'bypass' roads; constructing military, water, electrical, and other infrastructure; applying different laws to Israeli and Palestinians in the same territory; and flying the Israeli flag in occupied territory. It differs from "formal annexation" because Israel is in practice controlling more land without declaring it part of Israel. Formal annexation involves taking that last step: legally declaring the land part of the Israeli state.

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11. But Israel has already annexed East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. And the sky hasn't fallen. What's the big deal?

Israel attempted to annex both East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Both of these moves were quickly and repeatedly condemned by the international community. While Israel at least theoretically treats these areas no differently than other parts of Israel, the international community continues to reaffirm that it will not recognize these lands as part of Israel absent a negotiated agreement with relevant parties.

The United States, however, recently changed its long-standing position and recognized Israeli annexation of both the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem. The international

community again reiterated its condemnation of this move as a dangerous precedent and inconsistent with international law.

While U.S. recognition of Israeli annexation has previously had little long-term impact, we believe the consequences of this attempted annexation will be significantly different. Because of the near-universal consensus of the international community, annexation will end any credible path towards the two-state solution, opening the possibility of the following outcomes:

1. *Greater vulnerability and loss of livelihood for millions of Palestinians:* With annexation made formal, millions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza will lose more land and face even greater restrictions on their freedom of movement.
2. *International isolation of Israel:* Efforts such as BDS (the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement) or other forms of sanctions against Israel will gain steam. Other voices that see Israel as an illegitimate state may gain support. So while some Israelis argue that annexation is beneficial for Israel's security and its religious connection to the land, this move is also likely to create long-lasting damage on how the country and its people are perceived by the international community, including among former supporters.
3. *The authority of the Palestinian leadership will be undermined on an international stage:* The roles and responsibilities of the Palestinian leadership in the event of annexation are yet unclear, but they will most likely lead to fundamental changes in the Palestinian negotiating position and will likely involve abandoning the two-state solution. It may lead to the abolishment of security coordination with Israel, governmental chaos, or in the worst case scenario, a total collapse of Palestinian institutions.
4. *Sow division among historical pro-Israel constituencies:* American Jews have historically been an important source of support for Israel. Because traditionally a large majority of American Jews are Democrats, many are feeling increasingly estranged from an Israel they see shifting more and more to the right. The act of annexation would cement this estrangement and may lead to a long-term loss of Jewish allies abroad.
5. *Threat to the peace treaty with Jordan:* Jordan fiercely opposes the unilateral annexation plan and threatens to reconsider its ties with Israel. The collapse of this relationship could be a major blow to Israeli security interests.

12. Why is now an important moment for annexation?

Today, a new right-wing unity government is in place in Israel and is pushing for annexation. In the U.S, the current Administration is actively supportive of the move.

Yet there is much dissension about the wisdom of annexation and the damage it may bring upon the State of Israel and its consequences for Palestinians. Many people argue that even without this official move, Israel is already enjoying all the benefits in terms of security and access to resources and religious sites. So why annex and face the risk of international condemnation and or potential sanctions?

The Israeli Prime Minister is currently under indictment facing corruption charges. By initiating the historic move of annexation, Netanyahu strives to manifest his own power and create a political legacy that may last far beyond his time as prime minister. He is seeking to respond to pressure from the religious Zionist camp in Israel that has long advocated for applying sovereignty over 'Greater Israel', meaning parts or all of the West Bank. A key player in these calculations is the Trump Administration, which has proved itself as a faithful ally and supports this move to serve its core evangelical Christian voter base.

Simultaneously, the opposition to this move among the Israeli public is weak. As recent voting trends have shown, an increasing number of Israelis simply do not trust Palestinian intentions or aspirations for peace and have come to believe that annexation is a more secure, achievable alternative to establishing a contiguous Palestinian state that would entail evacuating thousands of their Israeli compatriots.

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13. Why do some Israelis and Palestinians believe that official annexation is actually a step that will be helpful long term?

Some pro-human rights Israelis and progressive Palestinians now argue that while formal annexation threatens Palestinians in the short term, it might be a clarifying moment that is good in the long term. The logic of this perspective says that if Israel formally annexes these territories, the situation will be clear: Israel controls everything

and everyone between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea; there are different laws for different peoples; “occupation” was never temporary but is permanent; and everyone must focus on protecting Palestinians and ensuring they have equal rights.

They argue that Israel never intended on creating a Palestinian state. By engaging negotiations and talking about a two-state solution, Israel, the Palestinian Leadership, and the international community held out the false promise of resolution to this conflict. Annexing the territories would make clear that there is one, permanent sovereign within this territory. No longer would the struggle be about getting Israelis and Palestinians to a negotiating table that would never deliver. Instead, the struggle will be for equal rights, ensuring that everyone under Israeli control has the right to vote, movement, own land, etc. One person, one vote.

For these analysts, they believe that Israeli annexation will ultimately undermine the Israeli political right and be more likely to lead to Palestinian freedom.

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14. Where does the United States fit in all of this? What has been this Administration’s particular approach to Israel/Palestine?

The United States has long assumed the role of Middle East peace broker, particularly since the signing of the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, but also going back to the Israel-Egypt peace agreement negotiated at Camp David by President Jimmy Carter in 1978.

President Trump assumed office promising to make the “Deal of the Century” to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the same time, a number of his key supporters have encouraged him and his Administration to take positions in line with those of right wing political movements in Israel.

In particular, the President’s evangelical base has made clear its desire to see the U.S. move its embassy to Jerusalem and to pursue policies that would prevent the eventual creation of a Palestinian state.

As the President’s son-in-law and others began to discreetly formulate a U.S. peace plan, they simultaneously engaged in a number of policies and provocative actions designed to place pressure on Palestinians while appealing to domestic U.S. constituencies. These

moves were widely seen as anti-Palestinian and included closing the Palestinian diplomatic mission in Washington D.C., cutting aid to Palestinians, recognizing Israeli sovereignty in the occupied Golan Heights, and no longer categorizing Israeli settlements as illegal.

In light of the upcoming American elections in November and the uncertainty around his reelection, Trump's unconditional support for Israel is crucial to secure the support of his evangelical voters. This timing, coupled with Netanyahu's indictment process, provides a window of opportunity for annexation.

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15. What could the United States Government do to stop or limit annexation?

U.S. persuasion and pressure, whether in private or public, can be a critical factor in Israeli decision making. Israel is the largest recipient of U.S. military aid, receiving \$3.8 billion per year, and is the beneficiary of U.S. political support. Many in both countries also perceive a common bond between the two nations.

American interests are furthered by honest progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If the U.S. is truly committed to the security, dignity, and freedom Israelis seek, this is only possible when the security, dignity, and freedom of Palestinians is also ensured. The U.S., if it so desired, has the leverage necessary to advance solutions that would ensure a future for both Israelis and Palestinians and to work to prevent those that undermine this future.

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16. For Christians: Why should Christians care about this?

The virtually blank check the United States is giving Israel to pocket gains offered in the President's plan is an effort of the Trump Administration to be responsive to a core demand of his most loyal constituency, evangelical Christians.

Evangelical leaders close to the President have made clear how important it is to them and millions of their followers that the Administration be "pro-Israel." Their definition of

pro-Israel includes using American influence to foreclose any option for an independent Palestinian state and rejects efforts to make peace that might result in Israeli territorial compromises.

A growing number of American Christians, however, disagree with this assessment, believing that to be pro-Israeli requires them to also be pro-Palestinian and pro-peace. They have taken seriously Jesus' words that "blessed are the peacemakers," and have committed themselves to the mutual flourishing of Palestinians and Israelis alike. Their voices need to be heard.

These Christians often have relationships with Jewish Israelis and Muslim Palestinians that allow them to advocate for all the people of the land. They also feel special concern for the historic Palestinian Christian community whose existence in the land is further threatened by annexation.

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17. What can I do?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a vexing foreign policy challenge for the United States that functions more like a domestic political issue. American leaders often support policies and positions based on the popular support they enjoy amongst American constituencies.

U.S. policymakers and Members of Congress need to hear from constituents who support peacemaking and conflict resolution in the Middle East. Who believe that the flourishing of Israelis is directly tied to the flourishing of Palestinians, and the flourishing of Palestinians is directly tied to the flourishing of Israelis. Too rarely do they hear from anyone who is pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian and pro-peace. Below are some ideas of how to constructively engage in the conversation about annexation. Don't know who your representatives are or how to get in touch with them? You can [find that information here](#).

- **Call your Member of Congress now:** Call your Member of Congress's office to let them know about your own experiences and relationships with Israelis and Palestinians and your conviction that there is no one-sided solution to the conflict. Tell them you oppose American support for annexation and demand support for Palestinian rights now.
- **Virtually meet your Member of Congress:** Organize a few Telos trip alum in your town to meet with your Member of Congress or their staff and use the

resources [here](#) to discuss with them the implications of annexation for the people on the ground

- **Write your Member of Congress:** Send our [pre-drafted letter](#) to your representative to make your stance known.
- **Join other Advocacy Initiatives:** Reach out to local Palestinian and American Jewish communities and organizations who oppose annexation and unite in your struggle for justice. Consider volunteering your time to support their efforts. Building alliances across religious and ethnic groups is key!
- **Share your story:** Let friends, family, and members of your community know how your perspective of the situation on the ground shifted after your Telos trip. Be vocal about the stories of the people you met there and how they helped you understand the nuances of the political reality in Israel and Palestine. Use your experience to challenge narratives that prioritize the needs of only one people at the expense of the other.
- **Host a conversation:** Host a film screening or book club using some of the recommended resources on [our website](#). Invite family and friends and discuss what a comprehensive peace would mean for Israelis and Palestinians alike.
- **Vote!** Research the foreign policy proposals of candidates running for office and exercise your democratic right to vote for the individual who best represents your interests. Remember, this issue acts like a domestic policy issue, so nearly every candidate will have a position on it.
- **Raise some noise on social media:** Actively seek out and *share* important news and pro/pro/pro perspectives from the region, especially the stories of those you met in Israel/Palestine. Invite your friends to follow Telos. Remember, healthy movements multiply.

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