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In 24 hours, Palestine faces an existential threat



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JUNE 30, 2020 00:02 IST



India needs to ask itself whether it supports the Israeli annexation plan that is in contravention of international legality

On June 24, the UN Secretary General António Guterres told a virtual meeting of the United Nations Security Council that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at a “watershed moment” and that the Israeli plans to annex parts of the West Bank have alarmed the Palestinians, many Israelis and the international community. Such

annexation would be “a most serious violation of international law”. He called upon the Israeli government to abandon its annexation plans and asked the Middle East Quartet (the United States, Russia, the European Union and the UN) to resume its mandated mediatory role.

A violation

The UN Secretary General’s alarm has been sounded in the context of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s reported plan to annex on July 1 around 30% of the Occupied West Bank. This will include annexation of all the existing (post-1967) settlements in addition to areas surrounding them and access roads. This, from published accounts, has the approval of the Trump Administration.

Under international law, annexation is forcible acquisition of territory by one state at the expense of another state. According to Prof. Nathaniel A Berman of Brown University, U.S., such an act even if sanctified by Israeli law is illegal under international law and would violate the universally acknowledged principle of the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force”. This, according to him, is the accepted position of all international legal bodies including the International Court of Justice.

Also read: [UN says committed to supporting Palestinians, Israelis resolve conflict as Trump unveils peace plan](#)

The same position has been taken by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights). In a statement on June 16, it described the annexation of occupied territory as a serious violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the Geneva Conventions, and contrary to the fundamental rule affirmed many times by the UN Security Council and the General Assembly that acquisition of territory war or by force is inadmissible. It pointed out that the 53-year-old Israeli occupation is a source of profound human rights violations of the Palestinian people and said “these human right violations would only intensify after annexation. What would be left of the West Bank would be Palestinian Bantustan, islands of disconnected land completely surrounded by Israel and with no territorial connection with the outside world. Israel has recently promised that it will maintain permanent security control between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. Thus, the morning after the annexation would be the

crystallisation of an already unjust reality: two peoples living in the same space, ruled by the same state, but with profoundly unequal rights. This is a vision of a 21st century apartheid.”

Also read: [Mike Pompeo meets Netanyahu to discuss West Bank annexation](#)

The statement concludes that despite the dismal record of Israel’s past violation of international law, “accountability and an end to impunity must become an immediate priority for the international community”.

The Israeli pulse

Despite Mr. Netanyahu’s bravado, an opinion poll conducted by the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, in March last year showed that while 28% of the Israelis opposed annexation, 11% supported full annexation with political rights for the Palestinians and 16% full annexation with no political rights for Palestinians. In addition, 15% were for partial annexation and 30% expressed no views.

Also read: [Two States only just solution for Israel-Palestine conflict: UN chief](#)

An interesting, unprecedented, entrant in the debate is an opinion article, titled “It’s either Annexation or Normalization”, written in Hebrew by the United Arab Emirates Ambassador in Washington and published in an Israeli newspaper, *Yediot Ahronot*. It urged the Israeli government to desist from the contemplated move.

The effect of the plan

What would be the consequences of such a move? Would Palestinians living in annexed areas, and owning around 23% of its land retain their private property? Would they be enshrined in a legal framework of a two-class population divided by ethnicity and given Israeli residency as a category of “subjects” of the annexing entity? Would they be on a par with Israeli Arabs of Palestinian origin (Muslim, Christian and Druze) who together constitute about 20% of Israel’s population? Above all, will it take away from the Palestinians the right to have their own state under the right of national self-determination recognised times without number by the international community?

Would there be demographic consequences? Israel, by its foundational proclamations, “is not a Jewish state only because most of its inhabitants are Jews. It is state for the Jews wherever they may be, and for any Jew who wishes to be here”. Its official ideology of Zionism (somewhat analogous to other doctrines of strident nationalism of the 20th century) was described much earlier by Vladimir Jabotinsky as “a colonizing adventure and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force”.

Ever since the war of June 1967, the Israeli effort has been to procrastinate a settlement and change ground realities. Israel today is member of the international community and contributes to international cooperation. It has succeeded in normalising its relations with a wide range of countries. A concomitant of this is the observance of globally accepted norms of state conduct. A reluctance to do this is premised on the support of “powerful friends” and imperatives of geopolitics. Must this necessarily have permanence? The record of Palestinian resistance and of protest movements the world over show that injustice and denial of rights has no permanence and, as Jean Jacques Rousseau said a long time back, “the strongest is never strong enough to be always master unless he transform his power into right, and obedience into duty”.

For New Delhi

India has a substantive relationship, reaching strategic dimensions, with Israel. It is mutually beneficial. India’s amity with the Palestinian people, and its principled support to their cause, predates India’s own independence. On the global stage, we have invariably supported the UN Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions supportive of the Palestinians.

At this critical juncture, and now that we are back on the Horse Shoe Table, would we support an annexation in contraventions of international legality and of our own commitments?

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