



THE BLOGS

David Harel

Israeli envoy didn't give British Jews the full story on annexation



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On Sunday, I watched Israeli Ambassador Mark Regev address the Board of Deputies of British Jews at their first online meeting. He spoke of the pride the British Jewish community should feel in its close bond with Israel, yet he failed to give an honest answer when asked about the impact of annexing Palestinian territory in the West Bank, which is now on the agenda of the government he represents. As someone who grew up in the UK Jewish community this is a sad reality to witness.

The ambassador tried to paint unilateral annexation as reasonable, whilst reminding participants that Israel is the only democratic country in the region. He also said that while the Israeli government takes account of views of Jews outside Israel, the democratic process within Israel needs to be respected by diaspora Jewry, since it will ultimately be Israelis who pay the price for the decisions made.

There are others, however, who will also pay the price, whom the ambassador failed to mention: the Palestinians.

In moving from occupation (officially temporary) to annexation, Israel will have declared its intention to make permanent its rule of the entire territory between the river and the sea. This rule will not be democratic.

Even if Israel grants citizenship to Palestinians in the territory it annexes – unlikely, given the commitment to maintaining a Jewish political majority – the entirety of the West Bank will have been utterly transformed.

Israel is likely to attempt to annex as much territory as possible but

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this way, Israel will be able to formalise its control over the entire territory without having to threaten its political majority.

The un-annexed territory will thus comprise a series of fractured Palestinian enclaves and blocs under permanent Israeli security control. This is reminiscent of the Bantustan policy of Apartheid South Africa – fragmented blocs of territory with no real autonomy, all to entrench a reality of systemic discrimination.

Ambassador Regev suggested that the solution to the fundamental undermining of Israeli democracy through breaking international law and illegally annexing territory is simply to offer those Palestinians living in these areas citizenship. He failed to address the impact of annexation on Palestinians outside the annexed area, who will continue to live under Israeli control without citizenship or rights.

He further cited East Jerusalem as a shining example of where Israel has illegally annexed territory, but did not mention that Israel rejects the majority of citizenship applications by East Jerusalem residents, nor did he mention that those living in annexed East Jerusalem face the constant threat of having their residency revoked and being forced out their homes and pushed into the West Bank.

This is hardly a situation that someone who claims to take pride in the democratic character of Israel should be promoting.

Whilst he failed to put forward any convincing argument to support annexation, the ambassador successfully exposed what really drives the

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Kingdom, upon whose stability Israel's security relies, remain deeply opposed to any kind of plan in which unilateral annexation features.

If Ambassador Regev really does take the concerns of Anglo-Jewry back to Jerusalem, as he claims, he would do well to remind the government of Israel that Jews in Britain believe in democracy and in the rule of law.

It is quite clear from the growing frustration in the Anglo-Jewish community that a significant part of that community will no longer allow Jewish communal bodies to hide behind the facade of Jewish unity and remain silent in implicit support of current Israeli policy. The pretence that staying silent about the political status quo is somehow an apolitical act no longer holds in the diaspora.

If he is honest, the message the ambassador takes back to Jerusalem is that, not only does the rest of the world think annexation is illegal and immoral and will cause untold and irreparable damage to the Palestinian people, but it will also tear apart Jewish communities around the world, not the least in the UK.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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