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Germany needs to speak up against annexation

Israel's annexation of Palestinian territories would be a gross violation of international law. Germany needs to take a stand

Read this article in German.

Until 1 July 2020, an American-Israeli committee is deliberating on those parts of the occupied Palestinian Territories, which the Israeli government should then be able to annex unilaterally. In its coalition agreement in May 2020, the Israeli government stated that it has a concrete interest in doing so. It is still unclear when and to what extent Israel will decide to take such a step. However, just the intention alone sends a devastating signal.

A unilateral annexation of parts of the Palestinian Territories, no matter how large or small it might end up being, would not only be a flagrant breach of international law. It would also run significantly contrary to the already diminishing prospect of a peaceful two-state solution. Massive criticism has already been levelled at the project. Israel's left fears that a unilateral annexation could cement Israeli control over the Palestinian population and damage the democratic character of Israel.

Israeli security experts see a major security risk for Israel and a significant deterioration in its good relations with Jordan and Egypt. And internationally, with the exception of the Trump administration, there has been a barrage of criticism that extends to a clear demand for sanctions. An open letter, initiated by former Knesset members of the social-democratic family, has been signed by 1,080 members of parliament across all of Europe. It takes up the words of EU foreign minister Josep Borell to the effect that annexation cannot remain 'unchallenged'.

Germany's reluctance to speak up

German politicians have traditionally been reluctant to criticise Israel. Usually they just express concerns – and only after lengthy preambles and an emphasis on common values. It is questionable whether this is the right approach in the current situation. Obviously, the underlying values vis-à-vis annexation differ considerably. Germany has interest in an international order determined by the rule of law. A unilateral annexation and the ongoing Israeli occupation with the constant construction of settlements represent the opposite. Even from Israel, there is an increasing call for the promotion of a more open debate in Germany. The former Israeli ambassador to Germany, Shimon Stein, wrote in *der Tagesspiegel*, 'Germany must finally speak up'. The topic will be discussed in the Bundestag on 1 July.

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For us, as partners of social democracy in the conflict area, it is not always clear whether the severity of the situation is being correctly assessed. The basis of a social-democratic Middle East policy should be to advocate a life of freedom, security and social justice for all people who live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. This includes taking a firm stand for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, which has gone on since 1967. There are simply no good arguments for the occupation to continue.

Partners can be found in favour of such a policy and attitude on both sides, also within the social-democratic family. Their voices need to be heard and amplified. The best possible implementation of a just vision of peace is still a negotiated two-state solution. This includes the establishment and recognition of a viable Palestinian state next to Israel.

The two-state solution is far away

Many nations, including Germany, believe that the recognition of the Palestinian state can come about only once a negotiated solution with Israel has been achieved. These nations leave Palestinians' right to self-determination in the hands of Israel, which is currently headed by a government that includes those who openly oppose the Palestinian state's right to exist. However, the recognition of a Palestinian state could constitute a strong commitment to a two-state solution in view of the Israeli government's planned annexation.

In the current conflict situation, this two-state solution has receded into the far distance. Against this background, there is increasing support, especially among young Palestinians, for working towards a one-state solution, i.e. a binational state with equal rights for all citizens. This scenario will be poorly received in Israel because it would undermine Israel's decidedly Jewish character. Therefore one would think that it is in Israeli government circles that the greatest possible interest in a two-state solution would persist. Unfortunately, this is currently not the case. Instead, the right-wing nationalist settler movement has an ever greater participation in the government and is working towards a one-state solution – which, however, grants at most partial autonomy to the Palestinians, without equal rights.

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In the past, there have been multiple attempts to achieve a just and lasting solution for peace based on international parameters, such as UN Security Council resolutions. However, the failure of these attempts so far should not lead to the conclusion that we should now try something new, something that would force a 'solution' according to the rule of the strongest, in disregard for international law. Social democracy should decisively oppose any unilateral steps that stand in the way of a two-state solution, such as the planned annexation. Merely expressing concerns while otherwise leaving the matter with unconditional support for Israel would be highly counterproductive.

Germany's particular responsibility

Unconditional support for Palestinian self-government should also be examined against the background of authoritarian tendencies. Of course, the Palestinians should not have to earn their right to self-determination and a life in peace and freedom. But social democracy should continue to work for a democratic and socially just Palestine that can function alongside Israel in peace and self-determination.

Israel's security is of major importance for Germany and German social democracy. In that regard, a comprehensive understanding of security should be brought to bear, while keeping in mind that only an end to the occupation and sustainable peace with the Palestinians can lead to lasting peace in the region.

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July. It is assuming both the EU Council Presidency and the presidency of the UN Security Council. It should take on these responsibilities with a clear pro-peace and pro-human rights stance and use the situation of crisis to make a contribution to a just and lasting peaceful solution.



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