Israel's Potential Annexation in West Bank: What Will the Kremlin Do?



By Daniel Rakov on May 21, 2020

The Kremlin might soon encounter a dilemma: how to react if Israel moves ahead to impose Israeli sovereignty on parts of a territory that Israel commonly refers to by its biblical names, Judea and Samaria, and most of the rest of the world calls the West Bank.

After three indecisive election campaigns and a year and a half of a political crisis, Israel finally got its new government sworn in on May 17. Yet this does not promise political stability either for Israel or for the Palestinians. On the Israeli side, the implausible tandem of former rivals, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue and White party leader Benny Gantz, will soon face its first challenge if Netanyahu chooses to proceed with the annexation of parts of the West Bank, based on US president Donald Trump's controversial "Deal of the Century" program. According to the Netanyahu-Gantz coalition agreement, Netanyahu could initiate the annexation starting July 1, and Gantz will not be able to veto it if the Trump administration agrees with the annexation.

On May 13, US secretary of state Mike Pompeo rushed to Jerusalem—his first visit abroad since the pandemic shut down the world—to discuss the subject with Netanyahu and Gantz. While the annexation is believed to be popular with Trump's evangelical base, it might also unleash a renewed wave of violence in the Palestinian territories and make Washington feel isolated amid what is likely to be universal opposition from its regional and international partners. Furthermore, the timing is sensitive, coming as it does during an election season and in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, with the potential to jeopardize other perceived accomplishments of the Trump administration in the Middle East.

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