

Saving the Two-State Solution: Euro-Arab Coalition Stopping Israeli Annexation

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This document is part of a series of policy papers within a joint project of the Mitvim Institute and the Berl Katznelson Foundation, aimed at thinking about the day after the war.

Executive Summary

This policy paper proposes the formation of a Euro-Arab coalition to stop the Israeli government accelerated de-facto and possibly de-jure annexation of Area C or parts of it in the West Bank, which threatens to render a two-state solution unviable. Grounded in international and regional analysis, the paper argues that the Western deterrent has weakened once Trump entered the White House, thus only coordinated action between determined European and Arab states can shift this trajectory. The paper outlines a strategy based on clear delamination of red lines, with political, legal and economic consequences if further annexation takes place. The paper concludes that assertive, coordinated diplomacy can still reverse annexation momentum and preserve the credibility of the international rules-based order and the option for a two states solution. It will also help Israel remain liberal-democratic and Jewish country, with the option one day to coexist peacefully with a viable demilitarized Palestinian state.

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A. Introduction

The two-state solution has never faced greater peril as it does today. Since 2024 there has been a speedy expansion of settlements, multiplying new outposts, roads and land confiscation at an alarming pace. Palestinian communities are being driven away from their homes and land. "This is how you kill the Palestinian state de-facto," said Minister Smotrich. There is a growing sense of urgency as the Israeli government advances annexation and settlement as a full-scale national project, aligned with Smotrich's "Decisive Plan." Its aim is to erase the legacy of the Oslo process and make a two-state solution impossible to implement. This is reflected in large-scale unilateral actions aimed at changing reality on the ground, many of which carry the dangerous potential of becoming irreversible, entrenching a one-state reality.

At the same time, the Western coalition that once played a role in curbing de-facto annexation (i.e., unilateral moves such as settlement expansion, land confiscation, etc.) and deterring de-jure annexation (i.e., declaring sovereignty over parts of the West Bank)¹ - led by the United States and the European Union - has weakened significantly. The EU's attention is dedicated to Ukraine's war with Russia, to the Gaza war (on which it is split) and to Trump's abrupt change of international rules, including trade ones, which is fracturing the West. The Trump administration's silence on the West Bank so far is seen by Smotrich, Ben Gvir and the settler movement as a green light for speedy de-facto annexation, preparing for de-jure one.

Thus, this paper calls for the establishment of a Euro-Arab 'coalition of the willing' to counter annexation of the West Bank (and potentially parts of the Gaza Strip) by the Israeli government. This coalition would coordinate its policy based on its shared interest in preventing annexation in order to keep the two-state solution viable, and the ability to exert significant influence on the Israeli government or key constituencies within Israeli society, including the business sector and public opinion.

Although annexation and renewed settlement activity are also being discussed in relation to Gaza, this document focuses on halting developments taking place in the West Bank. The emphasis is on addressing the urgent challenges posed by de-facto and de-jure annexation in the West Bank, where these processes are rapidly

¹ Both de-facto and de-jure annexation form a direct violation of international law, particularly the prohibition on acquiring territory by force, but they do so using different practices. **De-facto annexation** refers to the gradual, unilateral entrenchment of Israeli control over parts of the West Bank through demographic, administrative, and infrastructural changes designed to integrate the territory into Israel's national systems and prevent the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. These actions create facts on the ground, some irreversible. **De-jure annexation** refers to the formal, official declaration by the Israeli government of sovereignty over parts of the occupied West Bank, incorporating them into the State of Israel under Israeli civil law. Unlike de-facto annexation, which operates through gradual control and structural changes on the ground, de-jure annexation constitutes a legal act that seeks to change the status of the territory in the eyes of Israeli law and potentially in international diplomacy (mainly Trump administration). Such move has not been taken yet by Israel.

advancing and are becoming embedded within bigger parts of the Israeli political spectrum.

The Euro-Arab coalition should clearly outline what Israel stands to lose should it continue the path of de-facto annexation, or if it takes a de-jure annexation move. Such steps beyond the Green Line will face political, legal and economic consequences.

The EU principle of differentiation should be implemented when recommending and inflicting forceful measures. It re-instates the illegitimacy of the settlements and the unilateral moves of this and previous Israeli governments and the settlement movement beyond the Green Line. It also re-instates the legitimacy of Israel's right to exist while enjoying security. It can help Israeli society in drawing its red lines in the debate about the future of the state as a democratic and Jewish country. It can strengthen the political factions within Israel which advocate for a separation from the Palestinians and the few who dare to speak these days for the two-state solution.

Opposing annexation is a pro-Israel action. It is imperative in order to secure a thriving Jewish, liberal-democratic Israel, who lives in peace, security and prosperity with its neighbors, and enjoys regional integration and legitimacy. If Israel would abide more to international law and international humanitarian law, and especially if it would reach out for political solution with the Palestinians (which is outside the scope of this paper), it is also a step to fight and decrease Antisemitism as a form of Anti-Zionism or anti-Israeli positions in public opinion, be it in Europe, Arab countries or elsewhere. This is why forming this coalition is not against Israel, though it is clearly against the current Israeli government and the settler movement. Forming this coalition is actually helping a liberal democratic pro-peace Israel, while standing for the two-state solution and for liberal world order.

The paper begins in section B with a short description of the roots of annexation policy and past failed attempts to stop the expansion of settlements beyond the 1967 green line. Part C outlines the speedy annexation moves by the current Netanyahu-Smotrich government. Readers familiar with the ideological roots, historical mechanisms and accelerating reality of de-facto annexation may wish to skip ahead to Section D, which outlines the strategic shift in the global, Western and regional contexts, that necessitates the formation of a Euro-Arab coalition. Section E examines the 2020 case study of allegedly thwarted de-jure annexation, and the lessons that can be drawn from it. Section F presents the foundations for establishing the Euro-Arab 'coalition of the willing'. In conclusion, the paper argues that assertive, coordinated Euro-Arab action, rooted in credible red lines and targeted costs, can still halt the annexation trajectory and preserve the viability of the two-state solution, while reinforcing international norms and supporting a liberal democratic and Jewish Israel.

B. The Roots of Annexation Policy

Israel's occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip following the 1967 war marked not only a territorial shift but also the emergence of a powerful ideological movement that would shape the country's long-term strategy toward the Palestinian territories. *Gush Emunim*, founded in the early 1970s, became the vanguard of a religious-nationalist vision that viewed settlement in the occupied territories as a sacred imperative and a political necessity. The movement's objectives were and are clear: to entrench irreversible Jewish presence across the *Judea and Samaria* (the West Bank). It was a tiny minority back then but a growing one nowadays in Israel.

The Oslo Accords in the 1990s presented a profound challenge to this agenda. *Gush Emunim* and its allies launched a multifaceted campaign to derail the two-state vision, through increasing political mobilization within the Israeli right. Crucially, settlement expansion persisted even under governments that publicly endorsed negotiations with the Palestinians, including centrist and center-left coalitions. The result was a duplicitous dual track: diplomatic engagement on the one hand, some only on the surface, and systematic territorial entrenchment on the other hand. The goal of the settler movement was to assert sovereignty de-facto and ultimately render Palestinian statehood impossible through creeping territorial takeover, legal transformation, and such practices.

By the mid-2010s, the concept of creeping annexation had evolved from practice into doctrine. Bezalel Smotrich's 2017 "Decisive Plan" articulated a blueprint for full Israeli control over the West Bank while explicitly rejecting Palestinian self-determination. The failed 2020 attempt to formally (de-jure) annex parts of the West Bank (see below), undertaken with the tacit backing of the first Trump administration, marked a turning point. Although formal annexation was shelved in favor of the Abraham Accords, key actors within the Israeli right drew important lessons: sovereignty could continue to advance de-facto, even in the absence of official legal proclamation.

C. State of Affairs: Annexation at Full Speeds

Since the extreme right-wing Netanyahu-Smotrich-Ben Gvir government was formed in January 2023, it is conducting de-facto annexation at full speed, while preparing the ground for de-jure annexation, meaning applying formal sovereignty over the West Bank or major parts of it. The government's efforts are led by minister Bezalel Smotrich.

The current Israeli government has been pursuing a two-phase policy. First is speedy *structural* annexation – adopting new legislation and mandatory orders, transferring authority over all key civilian realms in the West Bank from the military to civilian administrators. This was done by the creation of the *Settlement Administration* within

the Ministry of Defence, which transferred all civil realms in the West Bank from the military to civilian hands (see elaboration below). This administrative change erodes the distinction between sovereign Israel within the 1967 Green Line and the occupied territory, blurring the fundamental legal and operational difference between military rule over occupied land and civilian governance within a sovereign state. It is a clear shift in the direction of de-jure annexation.²

Second, which is the point we may be facing now, is de-jure annexation, formally legalizing the de-facto acts. Smotrich proclaimed the year 2025 as “the year of sovereignty” (i.e., de-jure annexation of [the] occupied Palestinian Territories [OPTs]) and as a minister in the Ministry of Defence he instructed the Settlement Administration to prepare the administrative and legal frameworks for it.³

These institutional transformations, led by Minister Smotrich and entrenched through a series of structural and legal changes, transformed the legal and day-to-day reality on the ground, stopping short of formal declaration of sovereignty. What was supposed to be a temporary military occupation in 1967 was institutionalized and became permanent civilian governance by 2023. Key steps include revoking the long-standing requirement for political approval of settlement construction,⁴ and authorizing the transfer of hundreds of administrative powers to a new deputy head of the Civil Administration, subordinate not to the military but to the civilian Settlement Administration.⁵ The International Court of Justice cited these measures explicitly in its July 2024 advisory opinion and considered them to form annexation under international law.⁶

² With the formation of the Netanyahu-Smotrich government, the Religious Zionism party began implementing structural changes in government ministries with the aim of consolidating control over civilian affairs in the West Bank - a major step toward annexation. The powers of the Minister of Defense were split: Bezalel Smotrich, in addition to serving as Minister of Finance, was appointed as an additional minister in the Ministry of Defense. He assumed full civilian authority in the West Bank from the Civil Administration. The legal advisory system regarding the West Bank was also fundamentally altered, transferring responsibility from the military to the Ministry of Defense. As a result, the Deputy Head of the Civil Administration is no longer subject to the military prosecution system but to a civilian legal advisor. The attorney in charge, Moshe Farcht, is a former researcher at the right-wing Kohen Forum. This series of measures has created a profound structural transformation within the Ministry of Defense, whereby all civilian powers in the West Bank have been transferred from the military to civilian hands, under Minister Smotrich. In addition, Orit Strock was appointed Minister of Settlements and National Missions, and her ministry received broad authority, agencies, departments, and budgets related to the settlements, including oversight of the Settlement Division's activities. See Yael Orbach (forthcoming), “How to Stop the Disastrous Annexation,” The Berl Katznelson Center & Mitvim (in Hebrew).

³ One recent quote of Smotrich: “God willing, there'll be [Israeli de-jure] sovereignty [in the West Bank] during this term.” Minister Smotrich at the Settlement Conference: '[We Will Do/Achieve Sovereignty in This Term](#),' Interview *Makor Rishon*, 6 May 2025 (in Hebrew).

⁴ In June 2023, Government Decision No. 657 granted Smotrich full authority over construction approvals in the West Bank, while significantly shortening the approval process.

⁵ In May 2024, Amendment 33 to the Civil Administration Order (Order 2195 of 1981) enabled the full transfer of civilian powers from the Civil Administration. The person in charge of the Civil Administration for Civil Affairs is a close associate of Smotrich, professionally subordinate to the Settlement Administration, rather than the Minister of Defense.

⁶ For a detailed description of Smotrich moves, see Yael Orbach (forthcoming), “How to Stop the Disastrous Annexation,” The Berl Katznelson Center & Mitvim (in Hebrew).

In his capacity as finance minister, Smotrich is allocating considerable funds to the construction of outposts, settlements and infrastructure in the West Bank.⁷ His capacity as a minister in the Ministry of Defence in charge of the 'Settlement Administration', allowed him so far to 'declare' (i.e., confiscate) 24,258 Palestinian dunams in the West Bank as "State Land". This is almost equivalent to all the 28,084 dunams Israel 'declared' as State Land between 1998-2023.⁸ Much of this "State Land" is handed to Jewish shepherd farms (outposts) for grazing. By now this has amounted to 13.6% of the West Bank territory (787 sq.km – see graph no. 1 and map no. 1). Smotrich explicitly referred to all these annexation steps as the way to "de-facto kill the Palestinian state".⁹

Since January 2024 the government has authorized 15,000 housing units in the West Bank. In 2024 at least 59 new outposts were deployed (+840% per year than during 1996-2022),¹⁰ eight of them were established in Area B, setting a dangerous precedent. The outposts and infrastructure are located in areas that fragment the territorial contiguity required for a viable Palestinian state.¹¹ Government funding also serves to pave asphalt or dirt roads to new and old outposts and settlements. Some of the roads are illegal in the sense they were not even approved by the government. These roads are used to block Palestinians passage and considerably narrow and restrict their freedom of movement, harming their employment and undermining their ability to access and cultivate their lands.

Map no. 1: Map of land grab (in brown) for Shepherding Area, 2025



This map was produced by Dror Etkes, Kerem Navot

⁷ Smotrich allocated seven billion shekels (approximately \$1. 9 billion) in roads since January 2024. Hagar Shezaf, "[This Is How You Kill the Palestinian State': Smotrich Says Gov't Set to Approve Construction Plans That Would Divide West Bank in Half](#)," *Haaretz*, 6 May 2025.

⁸ Between 1998-2016 Israel 'declared' 21,378 dunams as state land, which are 16% of Area C (see [here](#)). Until 2022, the number rose to 28,084 dunams. In 2024 alone 24,759 dunams were declared 'state land' by Smotrich. "[The Government Declares 12,000 Dunams in the Jordan Valley as State Lands](#)," *Peace Now*, 3 July 2024. For 'declaration' as a means of confiscation see: "[What is a declaration of state land?](#)" *Peace Now*, 8 September 2014.

⁹ Hagar Shezaf, "[This Is How You Kill the Palestinian State': Smotrich Says Gov't Set to Approve Construction Plans That Would Divide West Bank in Half](#)," *Haaretz*, 6 May 2025.

¹⁰ See "[2024 in the West Bank: The Year of Annexation and Expulsion](#)," Settlement Watch Annual Report, *Peace Now*, 6 February 2025.

¹¹ This is especially so with the plans to approve construction in the E1 area east of Jerusalem, a step that would effectively divide the Occupied Palestinian Territory between its northern and southern regions, hindering the creation of a Palestinian state.

Thus, many Palestinians villagers, and especially pastoralist (shepherd/ herding) communities are forced to leave their homes and land.¹²

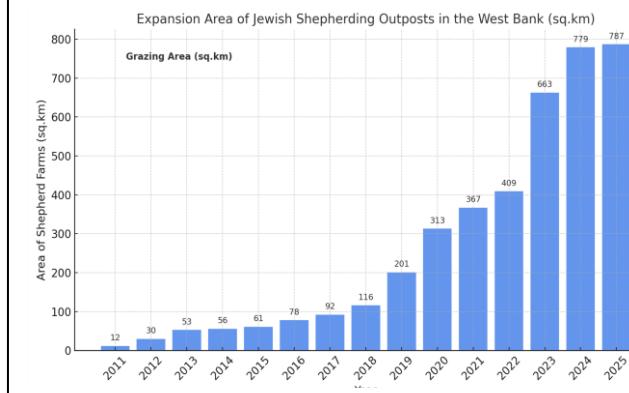
It appears as these steps advance Israel towards Smotrich's 2017 '*Decisive Plan*,' to drive away Palestinians from the West Bank. Nowadays it is primarily Palestinian villagers who move from Area C. From a demographic point of view, this diminishes the Palestinians claims for Area C.

Another 'contribution' to the realization of the 'Decisive Plan' is that of the Minister of National Security. Under Ben-Gvir the police enforcement of law and order in Area C has considerably loosened, allowing settler violence to go unhindered. Sometimes the perpetrators are even accompanied and secured by IDF soldiers, who have no policing authority over settlers. Violent settlers are burning Palestinian property (cars, houses, etc.), wounding and in some cases even causing the death of Palestinians. These terror acts are rarely investigated, let alone prosecuted and punished. This Jewish messianic terror is the major cause for about sixty Palestinians communities to leave their lands in Area C, to the verge some have called it ethnic cleansing.¹³

The other side of the law-and-order coin are demolitions of illegally built Palestinians buildings mainly in Area C but also B. Not a single building permit was granted to Palestinians in 2024 and very few were granted beforehand.¹⁴ On early May 2025, Smotrich allocated three million NIS to double the number of inspectors of illegal Palestinian housing in Area C, aiming to more than double the number of demolitions.¹⁵

Thus, many Palestinians in Area C are increasingly squeezed by a pincer movement: settlements, outposts and roads expansion on one side and demolitions and settler violence on the other. No wonder minister of Settlements and National Missions, Orit

Graph no. 1: Expansion of Jewish shepherding Area in the West Bank, 2011-2025



¹² For the full annexation steps taken by the settlers and the government, see Yael Orbach (forthcoming) "How to Stop the Disastrous Annexation," The Berl Katznelson Center & Mitvim (in Hebrew).

¹³ Lior Amichai (2025), [Israel Pushes Normalization Away and Deepens the Occupation. The Opposition Doesn't Care](#), Haaretz, 7 June (in Hebrew).

¹⁴ See "[2024 in the West Bank: The Year of Annexation and Expulsion](#)," Settlement Watch Annual Report, *Peace Now*, 6 February 2025.

¹⁵ 30 additional inspectors will be recruited, doubling the existing 32. Smotrich's declared goal is to increase from 200 to 1000 demolitions per year. The replacement of Minister of Defence Galant by Katz gave Smotrich a tailwind. Elisha Ben Kimon, "[Shortcut to annexation: The alliance between Smotrich and Katz, and the war on Palestinian construction](#)," *Ynet*, 1 April 2025 (in Hebrew).

Strock, called it a “miraculous period,”¹⁶ despite October 7 slaughter and the ongoing war in Gaza.

In fact, the war serves the extreme parts in the government in executing the ‘Decisive Plan’, as the media, social media and foreign governments are busy dealing with the war in Gaza. Other international and regional shifts contribute too.

Annexation, in both its creeping de-facto and potential de-jure forms, threatens to fundamentally alter the ability to solve the Israeli Palestinian conflict via the two-state solution. It would also be further deterioration in the weakening world order and lead to further regional instability.

Beyond its specific implications for the Israeli Palestinian conflict, annexation represents a direct violation of one of the foundational principles of the international world order: the prohibition against acquiring territory by force. This norm, enshrined in the UN Charter and reaffirmed in countless resolutions since 1945, serves as a cornerstone of global stability. If Israel is allowed to formally or effectively annex occupied land without facing serious consequences, it sets a dangerous precedent for other conflicts worldwide, especially Russia’s annexation of Crimea and parts of Ukraine, weakening the international legal framework that aspire to restrain territorial aggression.

Moreover, accelerated annexation would worsen and entrench a permanent reality of unequal control, deepen Palestinian dispossession, and make any negotiated resolution vastly more difficult, if not impossible. This trajectory is likely to fuel ongoing resistance, generate additional cycles of violence, and cause further radicalization. Regionally, it would place renewed pressure on neighboring Arab states, many of which face internal tensions over their peace agreements and normalization of ties with Israel. Annexation would risk inflaming public opinion in Arab countries to the verge of destabilizing regimes - especially in Jordan - and igniting broader unrest across the region. The streets and domestic political contention of many European countries are not immune to it either. Thus, annexation not only undermines international law but actively threatens the already fragile balance of regional stability in times when the Gaza war still continues.

The international community has for decades reiterated its support for a two-state solution, premised on territorial compromise and a contiguous Palestinian state. Yet the tools used to deter annexation - diplomatic protest, public condemnation, and legal statements - have proven less than insufficient, especially with the current Israeli government that couldn’t care less about international norms. Even specific individual sanctions on violent settlers and some of their organisations, imposed by the Biden

¹⁶ Sam Sokol, “[Far-right minister extols ‘miracle period’ of settlement expansion](#),” *Times of Israel*, 7 July 2024.

Administration, the EU and other Western countries, did not deter the current government from continuing de-facto annexation.

It is not new that Israeli governments have systematically engaged in a range of unlawful unilateral actions that amount to de-facto annexation of Palestinian land. Yet the scale and speed of de-facto annexation policy under the current Israeli government are massive, would be extremely hard to reverse, and therefore severely impeded the possibility of the two-state solution.

D. Strategic Shifts in the Global and Regional Context

Several global and regional dynamics have converged to weaken the deterrents to annexation. *Globally*, the liberal world order is eroding. The international legal principle that territory cannot be acquired by force has been trumped down - first by Russia's invasion and partial occupation and annexation of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. Second, President Trump's rhetoric at the beginning of his second term regarding Greenland, Canada, and Panama, as well as his sympathy to Russia's retention of Ukrainian territories seized by force, further weakened these principles from within the very core of the Western bloc. These developments indirectly signal to the Israeli government that it has room to act with reduced concern of international consequences.

Direct signals were given as well. The Trump administration's decision to lift the sanctions imposed by President Biden on violent settlers and their affiliated organizations sent yet another clear and dangerous message to the Israeli government, Ben Gvir in particular, the settlers' movement and the violent settlers. It was seen as a glaring green light for accelerated annexation, displacement of Palestinians and impunity from inflicting harsh violence on the ground.

Regionally, October 7 abruptly shifted the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a simmering tension to a full-scale war on seven fronts, West Bank being a potential one.¹⁷ While the focus of the war has been on Gaza, escalating tensions in the West Bank were harshly suppressed by Israel, including a wide scale military operation in Jenin, using similar tactics and methods of destruction as in Gaza (which also further weakened the PA, in charge of security enforcement in Area A according to the Oslo agreements). Due to the regional war, the fast-track annexation moves and sharp rise in incidents of violence, which are noticed by civil society organisations and diplomats on the ground, have mostly gone unnoticed by the Israeli public and media sight, and foreign governments either chose not to address it, prioritizing the war for obvious reasons, or their warnings went unnoticed. Yet sensitivity within Arab governments and domestic public opinion have grown, especially in Jordan and in Egypt. Rulers in the Gulf countries also feel such domestic pressure.

¹⁷ The seven fronts are: Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, terrorist elements in the West Bank, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Iranian proxies in Syria (until the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024) and in Iraq, and Iran itself.

The election of Donald Trump as the U.S. president - shaking the foundations of the global rules-based order - not only further emboldened the Israeli government in its pursuit of annexation and tolerance of settler violence. It has also caused the EU and others to "lower profile" on the West Bank matter for a while, contributing to this wrong messaging.¹⁸ At the beginning of Trump's second office in January 2025, the European and Arab 'bark' regarding Israeli unilateral moves in the West Bank became more sporadic and subdued. At the beginning of the new EU Commission and HR/VP Kaja Kallas, December 2024, no change was made to the EU's agreed language. However, instead of increasing condemnation in the face of growing outposts, settlements construction and of settler violence, the voice of the European External Action Service appears to have diminished for a while.¹⁹

Trump's policy towards the West Bank and how to try and solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still unknown. But Trump was favorable to the settlements in his first term, no longer deeming them a violation of international law. His "Deal of the Century" plan already proposed Israeli annexation of 30% of the West Bank. One should also recall he recognized Israel's sovereignty of the Golan Heights. This term, his appointed U.S. ambassador to Israel explicitly expressed support for West Bank annexation. During a press conference on February 6, when Trump was asked whether he would support annexation of West Bank "areas" he said that while his administration has not taken a position yet, "people do like the idea".²⁰

In the context of Trump's broader unraveling of international norms, European and Arab countries are now the only ones left who can hold the Israeli government accountable and impose meaningful consequences on de-facto speedy annexation moves and the planned de-jure annexation (sovereignty proclamation).

European actors sharpened their criticism and demands of Israeli policy and took preliminary warning steps regarding Gaza. These include demands to lift the siege on Gaza, end the use of starvation as a weapon, ensure the broad and equitable distribution of humanitarian aid, and ultimately end the war. Arab countries have issued

¹⁸ After Trump was elected, Smotrich said: "Trump's victory also brings an important opportunity for the State of Israel... the time has come to apply sovereignty over the settlements in Judea and Samaria... 2025 will be the year of sovereignty in Judea and Samaria. I have instructed the Settlement Administration in the Ministry of Defense and the Civil Administration to begin thorough professional staff work to prepare the necessary groundwork for applying sovereignty". Moran Azulai, "[Smotrich: I Instructed to Begin Staff Work to Prepare the Infrastructure for Applying Sovereignty in the West Bank](#)," *Ynet*, 11.11.2024 (in Hebrew).

¹⁹ Under the new HR/VP Kallas the European External Action Service (EEAS) has not issued automatic statements against each outpost building and settlement expansion. Perhaps it was just a slight change during the entry period under Kallas on the one hand and Trump on the other, or before the Association Council held by the EU with Israel on 24 February 2025. In any case, this sends the wrong message to the Israeli government and the settlers movement.

²⁰ James Shotter, "[Palestinians fear their Donald Trump nightmare has begun](#)," *Financial Times*, 6 February 2025.

a few warning signals to Israel. In Jordan, Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi warned that "the West Bank is a powder keg that could explode".²¹ The self-restraint many European and Arab capitals maintained during the early months of Trump's second term, motivated by a desire to avoid confrontation with Washington, has receded.²²

This shift is reflected in the increasingly critical positions of the UK, France, Canada, and now also at the level of the EU. A key development was the Dutch Foreign Minister's initiative to review Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, which obliges both parties to respect democratic principles and human rights, including international law and international humanitarian law. This triggered a rapid diplomatic tide within the EU, culminating in the May 20 Foreign Affairs Council, where 17 of the 27 foreign ministers supported launching the review process. Only nine opposed and one abstained.²³ At the very same time the discussion was held in the Foreign Affairs Council, the UK, in what seems as a well synchronized and orchestrated move, announced it was suspending negotiations on a new trade agreement with Israel and would reexamine the 2030 Roadmap Agreement signed with it in March 2023.²⁴ The UK government move helped to shift EU member states stance to send a clear signal to the Israeli government.

So far the move to review the EU-Israel Association Agreement has been translated to an EEAS report which indicated Israel breached international law and international humanitarian law in Gaza and to a list of steps which the EU can take vis-a-vis Israel. Yet the Foreign Affairs Council meetings which took place on June 23 and July 15 were not able to take concrete decisions regarding Israel. Israel's attack on Iran, beginning on 13 June, and the two-weeks war was one reason, and lack of the Qualified (double) Majority needed to pass decisions was another.

One recommendation was put forward by Belgium, together with eight other countries, to ban trade with the settlements.²⁵ Another was put forward by MEPs, advancing a proposal to expand the EU mechanism for suspending visa-free travel from countries violating international law or human rights, potentially affecting Israel; the initiative, still in early legislative stages, includes a new trigger mechanism that could make suspension easier to initiate.²⁶ Currently, Israeli citizens enjoy visa-free entry to the Schengen Area, allowing stays of up to 90 days within any 180-day period. The EU

²¹ John Irish, "[Arab proposal for Gaza in works, but Jordan can't take more Palestinians, minister says](#)," *Reuters*, 15 February 2025.

²² See for example, Itamar Eichner, "[Israel's Concern: The U.S. Facilitates Widespread Recognition of a Palestinian State](#)," *Ynet*, 28 May 2025 (in Hebrew).

²³ Mared Gwyn Jones, "[Support grows for Dutch call to review EU-Israel ties amid Gaza aid blockade](#)," *Euronews*, 14 May 2025.

²⁴ Tony Connelly, "[EU-Israel deal: Why Dutch gambit succeeded where Ireland and Spain faltered](#)," *RTE*, 24 May 2025.

²⁵ Lili Bayer, "[Nine EU countries call for talks on ending trade with Israeli settlements](#)," *Reuters*, June 19 2025.

²⁶ Itamar Eichner, "[Visa-free entry in the crosshairs: the anti-Israeli move launched in the European Union](#)," *Ynet*, 18 June 2025 (in Hebrew).

has been considering a targeted measure of removing visa-free access only for Israeli settlers. This would require all Israelis to go through a process of identification and to establish a mechanism based on the registered address of the traveler and may be hard to build and operate.

This international pressure regarding Gaza has had a noticeable tangible impact on introducing aid, though levels of aid are still way insufficient, to say the least. It does demonstrate the importance of international pressure. Israeli government, allowing humanitarian aid into the strip at an increasing pace. However, changes to the distribution process have drawn European criticism, and the Israeli government continues to show little intention of ending the war. Meanwhile, the Gaza war continues to provide political cover for rapid developments in the West Bank, which increasingly undermine the viability of a two-state solution. Still, this is an example how Europe can influence Israel and play a role.

While in Gaza European pressure is helping to change reality, these global and regional dynamics allowed Smotrich's agenda to advance "quietly and without spectacle" in the West Bank.²⁷ Halting annexation requires more than warnings and diplomatic condemnations or demands. It requires a much forceful bark with a credible 'bite'. It demands a strong and coordinated European-Arab response. The next section will draw lessons from the 2020 case, allegedly suspending Israeli de-jure annexation of the Jordan valley.

E. The Suspension of the 2020 Israeli Annexation Plan: Impact Assessment

One could argue that the Western coalition was never particularly effective in slowing de-facto annexation.²⁸ The 2020 case offers, at best, partial and contested success, highlighting important lessons about what should be avoided going forward.

²⁷ These are the words of Smotrich, quoted in Hagar Shezaf, "[This Is How You Kill the Palestinian State': Smotrich Says Gov't Set to Approve Construction Plans That Would Divide West Bank in Half](#)," Haaretz, 6 May 2025.

²⁸ In 1996 there were 136,000 settlers in the West Bank. In the last three decades (1996-2025) more than 600,000 Israelis moved to or were born and live nowadays in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This demonstrates the overall failure of the international community to stop the settlements growth. Yet one can argue that when the US was part of the informal coalition against it, the coalition was stronger than it is today without Trump. There are three examples of Western resistance to the settlements: (1) After Israel signed a peace agreement with Egypt, 1979, that did not resolve the Palestinian issue, and just before Israel's 1980 Basic Law declaring Jerusalem its "undivided capital", 30 July 1980, and a growing wave of settlement expansion, the EU (then called European Economic Community, EEC of nine member states) adopted the Venice Declaration, 13 June 1980, which explicitly called to recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The Reagan administration opposed settlement expansion and refused to recognize Israel's sovereignty over East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. While settlements continued, formal annexation steps (e.g., applying Israeli law across the West Bank) were held back in part due to the threat of political and economic isolation.

(2) Between 1991-1992 Israel requested from the US \$10 billion in loan guarantees to help absorb immigrants from the Soviet Union. President George Bush conditioned U.S. loan guarantees on a freeze in settlement expansion. This caused a major rift between the two governments and was a rare and successful use of economic leverage that demonstrated how US pressure under condition of Israeli urgent need for financial assistance could influence Israeli policy.

On September 10, 2019, Prime Minister Netanyahu publicly stated his plan to extend Israeli sovereignty (de-jure annexation) to the Jordan Valley and northern Dead Sea area. In January 2020 Trump unveiled his 'Deal of the Century' plan, in which Israel annex 30 percent of the West Bank. The Trump administration was ready to recognize Israel's annexation of key parts of the West Bank, but said it was contingent on an offer of statehood to the Palestinians. The plan was immediately rejected by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and much of the international community. Nevertheless, it started the political undermining of the struggle for a two-state solution according to the 1967 line, which President Biden later restored.

The Netanyahu-Ganz government, established on 20 April 2020, included in its coalition agreement a possibility to annex parts of the West Bank if an agreement with the USA (under Trump) would be reached.²⁹ In response, European leaders formed an informal "coalition of the willing" and sent a strong message against annexation. On 1 May, 11 European ambassadors issued a formal objection to the Israeli Foreign Ministry against the move. They stated that "the annexation of any part of the West Bank constitutes a clear violation of international law".³⁰ By the end of the month European leaders of the big European state - Macron (France), Johnson (UK), Conte (Italy) and Sánchez (Spain) - sent personal letters warning Netanyahu not to advance annexation.³¹ In June 1,080 parliamentarians from right and left, coming from 25 European countries signed a joint letter calling their governments and leaders to oppose "the imminent prospect of Israeli annexation of West Bank territory".³² From the Arab side, the Arab League called the annexation plans, "a war crime". But only Jordan threatened to review its ties with Israel if annexation goes along.³³

(3) 2013–2016 - Amid the breakdown of the peace process and increasing settlement construction, the EU launched in June 2013 a policy of differentiation between Israel and the settlements. The EU issued guidelines which denied funding to Israeli entities operating in the OPTs. The U.S. under Obama condemned settlement expansion as illegitimate and a threat to peace. While this did not reverse settlement growth, it reinforced international legal distinctions and placed diplomatic limits on Israeli ambitions to formalize annexation.

(4) 2020 – Normalization stops annexation plans – see case study below.

²⁹ Article 29 of the Coalition agreement stated: "After a discussion and consultation between the Prime Minister [Netanyahu] and the Alternate Prime Minister [Ganz] on the principles set out above, the Prime Minister will be able to bring the agreement that will be reached with the United States on applying sovereignty starting on 1 July 2020 to the Cabinet hearing and the government for approval by the government and/or the Knesset." [Coalition Agreement to Establish Emergency and National Unity Government](#), 20 April 2020, p. 12.

³⁰ The ambassadors were from the UK, Germany, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Finland and the EU. *TOI*, "[11 European ambassadors warn Israel against West Bank annexation](#)," 1 May 2020.

³¹ It was unclear then if Chancellor Merkel wrote to Netanyahu as well. Barak Ravid, "[European leaders urge Netanyahu against West Bank annexations](#)," *Axios*, 26 May 2020.

³² See the full [Joint Letter here](#), 23 June 2020.

³³ *Times of Israel*, "[Jordan threatens to review diplomatic ties if Israel annexes West Bank](#)," 21 May 2020.

The de-jure annexation plan was shelved in August on the White House lawn when the Abraham Accords were signed between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain. Yet the Abraham Accords were effectively bypassing the two-states solution, weakening the Palestinians' negotiation hand, which has conditioned Arab normalization on the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the establishment of a Palestinian state. It seemed Europe's political deterrence made an impact. But eventually it was the UAE's step that (allegedly) postponed de-jure annexation. The UAE obtained Trump's commitment he would stop de-jure annexation for four years, until 2024.³⁴ Even here a certain disagreement exists whether this reflects a temporal commitment (as some Israelis see it) or a long-standing promise (as viewed by the UAE) to annul annexation as a political plan. Neither Netanyahu nor Trump commit to stop de-facto annexation.

Europe's political pressure in the summer of 2020 did exert some deterrent effect, but its overall impact remained limited as long as the US signaled a green light for annexation. Ultimately, it was the demand by the UAE - accepted by the Trump administration as part of the Abraham Accords - that led Prime Minister Netanyahu to formally shelve the de-jure annexation plan.

Settler leaders learned a clear lesson from this episode: pushing for formal sovereignty invites international backlash, while *de-facto* annexation - quietly advancing control on the ground without official declarations - is far more sustainable. That is precisely the strategy they have been pursuing in the years that followed. It is worth noting that, in 2020, the European and Arab/Gulf efforts were not coordinated. Today, however, the Peace Day effort (September 2023), replaced by the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two State Solution (September 2024), is giving the option to amend this. So are the eight working groups under the French-Saudi initiative. The geopolitical landscape offers a greater opportunity for joint action - an alignment of interests that could make a future Euro-Arab coalition significantly more effective in countering both overt and covert annexation moves.

Main takeaways from the Suspension of the 2020 annexation plans are:

- (1) Normalization should not be used only to stop de-jure annexation. It must also serve to stop and prevent *de-facto* annexation.
- (2) Nor should it be offered in exchange for short-term commitments. Rather, normalization ought to promote a sustainable permanent peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. The planned Saudi-French summit choosing to clearly tie Saudi normalization to the two-state solution according to the Arab Peace Initiative is a move in the right direction. This was and should be clearly (re)stated by Saudi Arabia and all other participants. No more bypassing the

³⁴ Jacob Magid, "[UAE envoy: De-facto West Bank annexation unfolding, but our ability to stop it wanes](#)," *Times of Israel*, 14 September 2023.

Palestinians and the two-state solution. The EU's 'linkage policy' of 2008 should be formally adopted also by the Arab countries: no upgrade in the relations with Israel if there is no real concrete advancement in the peace negotiations with the Palestinians towards a settlement of the conflict.

- (3) Keep your eyes on several balls: Along with stopping the war in Gaza and returning all the hostages, eyes should be kept on the West Bank and the speedy de-facto annexation taking place there. European and Arab governments cannot allow the steps that Smotrich is taking within the framework of the Ministry of Defence to continue. They should be stopped in order to preserve the feasibility of the two-state solution.
- (4) As the European unity over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was weak to begin with, and further weakened during the Gaza war, than if stopping the speedy annexation is not agreed by the Foreign Affairs Council, such decisions should be taken at state level by European countries in coordinated manner with the Arab partners in a coalition of the willing. Coordination with Arab countries is a significant addition, strengthening the European position.
- (5) But unlike 2020, Arab countries should play a more dominant and vocal role. They should also try to communicate with the Israeli public, sending the message of differentiation between Israel within the 1967 lines and the West Bank.
- (6) It would also be a good signal to the Global South, who accuses the EU and its member states of double standards (compared to its policy of sanctions on Russia due to its war on Ukraine) since the war in Gaza evolved.
- (7) Coordination between European and Arab countries would be more effective and taken more seriously by the current right-wing extreme Israeli government, ruled by dangerous messianic ideology. An alignment of the West and Arab countries is harder to dismiss and trivialize; it has a potential to increase the pressure over the more moderate parts of the current extreme right-wing government. Normalization is an achievement of Netanyahu; a success story the right wing takes pride in. The influence of such coalition depends to some extent on its size and quality of participants. The friendlier countries the countries are to Israel, the more pragmatic Arab countries join this coalition, the more effect it would have on Israel. Their voice carries much more weight than the hard liners European critics and the radical Arab ones.

F. Why Euro-Arab Anti-Annexation Coalition?

International actors are the primary players on which the task of deterring the Israeli government from further annexation falls on. The inner Israeli forces that were once semi-influential have little influence with the current government in Israel. The

annexation topic is hardly covered by Israeli media, and public attention, still traumatized by October 7, concentrate on returning the hostages and the domestic liberal-democratic fight. Gazan suffering is rarely discussed and presented, let alone Palestinians in the West Bank. Empathy towards Palestinians is at all-time low. Domestic Israeli opposition which can raise its voice (mainly 'The Democrats', only four MPs out of 120 at the Knesset) are sometimes vocal but few. They also concentrate on the government's anti-democratic, anti-liberal regime overhaul, though they do also speak of the occupation and annexation. Arab Members of Knesset are not heard by Israeli mainstream. Thus, the domestic Israeli opposition to annexation is not strong enough, and politically marginalized. That being said, there is raising domestic critical debate on the government's conduct of the Gaza war, which may allow to also increase the volume on West Bank policy and practice, and to be more attentive to messages coming from the Euro-Arab coalition. Domestic Israeli action is essential but not sufficient to bring about change on its own. There must be a unification of efforts between the international community and the opposition and civil society organisations within Israel.

Without US pressure, while the war in Ukraine is still dragging, after a long regional war in the Middle East, and in the midst of a protracted and devastating war in Gaza, preventing Israeli annexation in the West Bank becomes a much harder challenge.

This task must be borne by states with both the interest and especially the capacity to exert influence on Israel and its government. A successful coalition against annexation should entail a political will to prevent annexation and to take steps to achieve it, and leverage over Israeli decision-makers or over Israeli stakeholders who can influence the government (e.g., business sector, R&D sector, including the academia, public opinion, the opposition in Israel, especially the right-wing parts, etc. One should note these circles are not quite influential on this government as well). One can also think of reaching out to Netanyahu's network of close supporters of Israel in the US Senate and elsewhere.

This paper proposes a multi-tiered international coalition designed to maximize diplomatic, political, and economic pressure in order to preserve the two-state solution and Israel as a liberal- Democratic and Jewish state.

Building such a coalition would need effective coordination between the members and possibly also steering. Such a task should preferably be taken by two or four big countries, European and Arab. For example, France and Saudi Arabia, who are currently leading the two-state solution conference.³⁵ The UK and Egypt can join and

³⁵ Shirit Avitan Cohen, "[Saudi Arabia, France to impose Palestinian state without Israeli input](#)," 16 May 2025. The conference was planned to take place in New York between 17-20 June, but was postponed/cancelled due to Israel's pre-emptive attack on Iran. Following the ICJ advisory opinion on the Israeli occupation, given on 19 July 2024, a UN resolution on September 18, 2024 (Resolution A/RES/ES-10/24) called to hold a conference at the UN on the two-state solution. On 3 December, 2024, Resolution [A/RES/79/81](#), stated that the conference "will adopt an action-oriented outcome

form a leading quartet.³⁶ Such joint leadership is also important vis-a-vis the Trump administration. A quartet of this nature can go beyond halting annexation. It can add to its tasks and goals also pushing for the establishment of a Palestinian state along the lines of the two-state solution, which is the final goal, but beyond the scope of this paper.

Europe

Europe is the natural anchor of such coalition. All 27 EU member states are committed to the two-state solution. This is the “agreed language” of the EU, repeated once and again for decades in the formal resolutions and statements of the European Council and the Foreign Affairs Council. The main weight of active opposition to annexation lies especially with Western European countries, but Central and Eastern European states also have a vested interest to stop annexation, given their wish to preserve the international world order, and given the (not similar or comparable, but) parallels drawn by others with Russia’s expansionist aggression to annex parts of Ukraine. Resisting annexation of the West Bank by Israeli government is a sort of a ‘proxy’ campaign against Trump’s unraveling international world order about acquisition of territory by force.

There is special significance of Pro-Israeli European government or partners in this coalition, especially governments coming from the right side of the political spectrum. Public rebuke and a clear “stop” signal from these centrist, pro-Israel governments – such as the Dutch foreign minister move – would carry much bigger weight and send a stronger signal in Jerusalem. Criticism of an Israeli annexation policy gains far greater legitimacy, and is interpreted as genuine concern for Israel’s long-term security and international standing, when it emanates from Europe’s moderate mainstream rather than from traditionally critical voices.

In that regard, Germany, the United Kingdom and France each have significant role to play here. Their participation or leadership in the Euro-Arab coalition would ease other countries joining it. As liberal democratic countries, Europeans also have high standing from which they can talk to the like-minded Israeli public, creating a clear differentiation

document” the purpose of which is to “urgently chart an irreversible pathway towards the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the implementation of the two-State solution.” On April 9 President Macron indicated that France may recognize a Palestinian state. See “[Background to June 2025 UN Conference on Two-State Solution](#),” *UNWatch.org*, 13 April 2025. But as the Gaza war continued and its Palestinian population brought to the verge of hunger by Israeli siege, Saudi Arabia was unwilling to recognize Israel, and so Macron shelved his willingness to recognize a Palestinian state for a later phase.

³⁶ One can mention here the *Munich Group*, also known as the Cloverleaf Format, a joint diplomatic initiative by Germany, France, Jordan, and Egypt aimed at advancing a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was the first recent active Euro-Arab multilateral platform. The group first convened on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in February 2020 and has since met seven more times. These meetings reflect the continued commitment of these countries to promote a just and lasting peace in the region, based on the two-state solution and in accordance with UN resolutions and international law.

between the extreme right-wing government and the moderate liberal public. UK's Foreign Minister Lamy words at the House of Commons when announcing the suspension of trade talks with the Israeli government due to the manner it conducted the war in Gaza, represent a 'best practice' which can be replicated by others, and is relevant also to de-facto annexation:

*[This government is] isolating Israel from its friends and partners around the world, undermining the interests of the Israeli people and damaging the image of the state of Israel in the eyes of the world. I find this deeply painful, as a lifelong friend of Israel and a believer in the values expressed in its declaration of independence... we cannot stand by in the face of this new deterioration. It is incompatible with the principles that underpin our bilateral relationship.*³⁷

It would be of significant importance if the German government, headed by Merz, would join this coalition at the front and not from the rear. Germany has unique strategic relations with Israel, second only to the US. It is rooted in historical responsibility, moral obligation, and mutual trust. Germany is committed to Israel's security as a core *raison d'état* (Staat *raison*). This is reflected in close defense cooperation, including mutual weapons purchases³⁸ and high-level intelligence coordination. Germany is also one of the leading European trade partners of Israel and shares a developed scientific and technological innovation cooperation with it. There is very close dialogue and high levels of trust at many governmental levels. However, Germany also stands for international law and especially international humanitarian law. This is also part of its moral obligation and heritage it should bring forward. Such balanced policy towards Israel would also regain Germany some of its losses in public opinion and in the Global South. As Israel's Ambassador to Germany, Ron Prosor, said following criticism from German Chancellor Friedrich Merz: "When Friedrich Merz raises this criticism of Israel, we listen very carefully because he is a friend."³⁹

The new CDU-SPD coalition government, headed by Chancelor Merz, took office on May 6. Its position regarding Israel has remained as former governments: it firmly believes that only a negotiated two-state solution that is acceptable to both sides can lead to lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.⁴⁰ It has the most considerable leverage on Israel, but political will to use it is yet unclear and considered weak. So far, the new German government did not clarify publicly its position on the current de-

³⁷ For the full statement of Foreign Minister Lamy, see "[Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Foreign Secretary statement](#)," 20 May 2025.

³⁸ Weapons purchase amounted to 30% of Israel's defence import in 2023 and 160m€ worth deals in 2024.

³⁹ Sarah Marsh et al., "[Germany threatens steps against Israel as tone shifts over Gaza](#)," *Reuters*, 27 May 2025.

⁴⁰ "[Germany stands by Israel – and is seeking to bring about a de-escalation](#)," The Federal Republic government of Germany website, accessed 18 may 2025.

facto annexation steps which the Israeli government is taking in the West Bank. Uncritical alignment with Israel risks undermining Germany's credibility (already considerably weakened by the former government) and exposing it to growing accusations of double standards when its policy towards Russia is considered. This has been decreasing Germany's credibility in the broader geopolitical arena. Germany's support for Israel clashes not only with Germany's normative principles, but also with what seems like the Chancellor's political interests to lead European foreign policy.

As stated above, it is important to stress that opposing annexation is a most pro-Israel action for those who wish to see a thriving Jewish, liberal-democratic Israel. A one state solution would be either non-democratic or have a non-Jewish majority. Can Merz echo Lamy's words:

*"The Netanyahu government's actions have made this necessary... I say now to the people of Israel: we want, I want a strong friendship with you based on our shared values with flourishing ties between our people and societies. We are unwavering in our commitment to your security and to your future, to countering the very real threat from Iran, the scourge of terrorism and the evils of antisemitism. But the conduct of the war in Gaza [and the conduct in the West Bank] is damaging our relationship with your government. And... if Israel pursues this... as it has threatened... we will take further actions in response."*⁴¹

Therefore, it is important that the Euro-Arab coalition distinguish, in both statements and action, between its criticism of Israeli government policy in the West Bank and the growing challenge by BDS actors to Israel's right to exist. The target should be the occupation and annexation, and not be coined as colonialization. It should be fought *for Israel's sake*, not against it. The Green Line should be effectively reestablished as a meaningful legal and political boundary. The message should be clear: Israel within the Green Line is a legitimate country, which safe existence and security should and would be safeguarded by this coalition.

An inspiring such example were the strong words of the Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, during a press conference on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2024. He stated that Arab and Muslim countries are willing to guarantee Israel's security if Israel agrees to end the occupation and allow the emergence of a Palestinian state along the agreed borders.⁴² But beyond the Green Line, the situation is unacceptable. This nuanced chirurgical strategy is exactly what can make it most effective. It reinforces international law,

⁴¹ For the full speech of Lamy, see "[Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Foreign Secretary statement](#)," 20 May 2025.

⁴² Ayman Safadi, 27 September 2024, [See here](#).

incentivizes internal Israeli actors for change, and avoids alienating potential allies within Israeli society and Jewish diaspora.

Moreover, opposing annexation should be presented as a tool to maintain and ensure the resilience, security and prosperity of Israel and its relations with the region and the world. Opposing annexation pose a vision of Israel living in peace, security and prosperity with its neighbors, enjoying regional economic integration and legitimacy. It is also a step to fight and decrease Antisemitism as a form of anti-Zionism or anti-Israeli positions among the public in Europe, in Arab countries and elsewhere.

Arab Countries

Regarding the Arab countries, two of them hold peace agreements with Israel: Egypt and Jordan. Three others hold normalization agreements: The UAE, Bahrain and Morocco. These are strategic asset to Israel. All of them in effect sidestepped the Palestinian issue, not conditioning normalization on a path to solve the Israeli Palestinian conflict. These normalization agreements are, among other things, political achievements dear to Netanyahu. These Arab countries possess significant political, security and symbolic leverage that can serve as deterrents against unilateral Israeli actions. Downgrading these agreements is an ultimate “doomsday weapon”. The Euro-Arab coalition against annexation should develop a graduated response mechanism and clearly communicated it to Israel.⁴³

Preventing annexation was Israel's commitment to the UAE prior to the signing of the Abraham Accords, 2020. There is a contradiction between the continued stability of existing normalization and the advancement of de-facto annexation.

Arab countries have used different multilateral formats to discuss with leading European countries many issues, among them the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One is the Arab Contact Group - a diplomatic framework established at the initiative of the Arab League in 2023, aiming to lead political and diplomatic efforts toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly in the aftermath of the Gaza war. The group includes senior representatives and foreign ministers from key Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, and the UAE, along with the Secretary-General of the Arab League.

The Arab Contact Group's mandate is to advance a political process based on the two-state solution, to rally international support, and to exert pressure on major global actors, including the United States, European countries, and also - quite importantly -

⁴³ One can note that during the Akaba and Sharem a-sheich summits, February and March 2023, which were held to de-escalate the tension between Israel and the PA, the understandings included a commitment not to approve any further construction in the settlements over the next four months (beyond the 7,500 housing units already announced), and not to legalize any additional outposts for six months (beyond the nine outposts announced on February 13). Again, such steps are too little and too inefficient in the long run.

China, and Russia. Its activities include rounds of meetings with international decision-makers, and the presentation of political initiatives.

This group emphasizes the need for a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue, rather than settling for temporary or purely humanitarian arrangements. It represents a renewed Arab engagement with the Palestinian cause, aiming to align regional efforts with broader international initiatives. The Arab Contact Group should start coordinating and issuing warnings about the consequences of continued occupation and escalation. Such statements can be in cooperation with European partners, especially leading ones as France and the UK.

Global South partners, who share the coalition's main principles, can and should join this coalition. As mentioned, the condition should be the recognition of Israel's right to exist in security within the 1967 borders.

The Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two State Solution is a multilateral platform aimed at translating global consensus on the two-state framework into coordinated diplomatic, political, and economic action. Its inclusive structure makes it a natural umbrella under which to anchor the mechanism of a Euro-Arab coalition working to oppose Israeli annexation policies, both de-facto and de-jure. By embedding the Euro-Arab partnership within this broader alliance, the coalition can leverage wider international backing, enhance its normative power, and promote a unified strategy to counter settlement expansion, settler violence, and unilateral Israeli measures. Moreover, the Alliance's global scope allows for coordinated engagement with key actors beyond Europe and the Arab world, such as the UN, emerging powers, and the global south, while maintaining a focused, action-oriented core of Euro-Arab cooperation at its center. In September 2024, when the Global Alliance convened in NY at the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, over 100 participants, among them 60 ministers, took part in the meeting: 90 states alongside various international organizations.⁴⁴

Action below the government level is also welcomed. The Euro-Arab coalition proposed here is at the level of governments, but one can envisage a coalition combining local governments, businesses and NGOs. Willing bodies coming from the business sector, academia, research and innovation, culture, sport, as well as civil society organisations and even (the relatively small) parts of the Jewish community who are critical of the Israeli government and its settlement and annexation policy.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ EEAS, "[Israel/Palestine: Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution announced in the UNGA margins](#)," 26 September 2024.

⁴⁵ One example is President Macron mentioning Jewish voices as strengthening his position in favor of reviewing Art.2 of the EU-Israeli Association Agreement. See AFP, [Request for revision of EU-Israel agreement is 'legitimate'](#), says France, 11 May 2025.

G. Conclusion

The de-facto speedy annexation momentum endangers the two-state solution but can also present an opportunity. This paper outlined the logic, instruments, and potential architecture of a Euro-Arab coalition. Without such Euro-Arab joint action, Israel's annexation steps will harden into facts that make the two-state solution demographically and physically impossible. But with very assertive diplomacy and credible red lines, an Euro-Arab coalition of the willing can still alter the trajectory.

Time to act is now.

Obviously, there is no tolerance among European and Arab countries for de-jure annexation. For the sake of the credibility of the international rules-based order, Europeans cannot afford let the Israeli government and the settlement movement further de-facto annex parts of the West Bank.

For the sake of preserving Israel as a liberal-democratic Jewish rather than one that employs the 'Decisive Plan' of Smotrich, the Israeli government should be stopped from any de-facto and de-jure annexation of the West Bank.

Eventually, this coalition should not be limited to merely preventing annexation, but rather to advancing a broader political process toward a viable two-state solution, embedded in regional normalization, security guaranties for Israel, demilitarized and de radicalized Palestinian state. But for that to take place, stopping annexation is the first move. Coordinated action and strategic vision is needed from European and Arab countries to form and operate such a coalition to stop annexation.