



PERSPECTIVES

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Annexing Parts of the West Bank Area C: An Israeli National Interest

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The former commanders who are demanding a referendum on the possible annexation of parts of the West Bank's Area C misunderstand the threats confronting Israel. One need only consider the latest round of fighting in Gaza to understand what the threat to the cities of the coastal plain would look like if Israel were to give up control of the mountainous terrain dominating the country's economic-social-industrial heartland.

The [Commanders for Israel's Security movement](#) has appealed to PM Netanyahu with a much-publicized warning based on a new false assertion: that annexation of parts of the West Bank would endanger the residents of Israel.

Only a few weeks ago, in the midst of the election campaign, this group inundated the country with billboards and posters mounted on buses, at a cost of millions of shekels, telling voters that the elections would spell the difference between separation and annexation. No one had any doubt which side they were trying to help.

A considerable majority of the Israeli people chose to ignore the recommendations of the former *bit'honistim* (security experts). Nor did the three former chiefs of staff at the helm of the Blue and White Party, who enjoyed the open support of three other retired chiefs of staff, manage to get public opinion on their side and achieve the parliamentary majority needed to implement the recommendations of the former senior defense officials who favor additional withdrawals.

This controversy has two aspects. The first has to do with the overall vision of Israel and Israeli national security.

As defined by the IDF, "National security is the domain concerned with ensuring the national capacity to contend effectively with any threat to the national existence and to national interests." This is certainly accurate as far as it goes.

But Israel's national interests in the West Bank go way beyond security needs alone. The same is true for the Palestinians, as explained by Mahmoud Abbas in his rejection of President Trump's plan: "The Palestinian problem cannot be turned into nothing more than an economic-humanitarian problem." Israel, for its part, must not turn the Zionist dream into nothing more than a desire for a safe haven for persecuted Jews. Security – as David Ben-Gurion emphasized – is only a means, not the goal. There is a substantial difference between a desire for security and a desire for independence, and therein lies the heart of the controversy.

The second aspect concerns the security issue itself. Over the years, the strategic outlook of the former *bit'honistim* has been debunked time and again in the face of reality.

Many of those who signed the commanders' letter to the PM also signed the declaration of support by the Movement for Peace and Security for the 2005 unilateral disengagement from Gaza, promising that it would improve Israel's security. Needless to say, they were dead wrong.

In a recent [BESA study](#), I analyzed where the commanders go wrong – namely, in misunderstanding the potential threat to Israel resulting from, on the one hand, dramatic changes in the nature of war; and on the other, the vastly enhanced power and operative capabilities of the Palestinian terror organizations since the launch of the "Oslo peace process." One need only consider the latest round of fighting in Gaza to understand what the threat to the cities of the coastal plain would look like if Israel were to give up control of mountainous terrain dominating the country's economic-social-industrial heartland. Highway 6 would become the border road, and antitank and anti-aircraft missiles would threaten traffic on the main transportation arteries as well as air traffic to Israel.

The outcome of the recent elections indicates that a considerable majority of Israelis have learned that, for all their great respect for people who have devoted days and nights to defending the country, it is wise to beware their misconceived visions and recommendations.

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