

Partners for Progressive Israel on the Israel-UAE Agreement

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The announcement today of the normalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates is an incremental step in the direction of Israel's acceptance in the region, and in that respect is to be welcomed. We welcome, too, Israel's agreement, expressed in the joint Israeli-Emirati statement, to suspend moves to formally annex Occupied Territory. De jure annexation would be a catastrophic step, which would fix in Israeli law the current apartheid-like situation in the West Bank.

Despite these two points of light, however, we find the Israeli-Emirati statement to be no cause for major celebration. In fact, there is significant cause for concern.

Israel will not know peace until its conflict with Palestine has been equitably resolved. Today's statement, however, fails to mention the 53-year Occupation and does nothing to end it. As with the Trump administration's so-called "Vision for Peace," the Palestinians have been excluded from diplomatic developments and their interests have been ignored. A perfunctory reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict serves as lip service, not substance.

The Emirati Foreign Minister today explained that his country took this move in order to prevent annexation and maintain the viability of the two-state solution. Israel's Prime Minister, on the other hand, was quick to cite the deal as proof that the "land for peace" formula, which is key to any Israel-Palestine resolution, can and should be disposed of. The greatest danger arising from this normalization agreement, therefore, is that it allows Israel's current government and its supporters to argue that Israel will be able to enjoy normalization with the wider Arab world without having to make any changes in its policy vis a vis the Palestinians.

To add insult to injury, Mr. Netanyahu himself has already admitted that annexation is in no way a dead letter, as the agreement purports to establish. He publicly stated today that he "remain[s] committed" to annexation and "there is no change to our plans to apply sovereignty over Judea and Samaria," better known as the West Bank. And a senior Israeli diplomatic official told the media that the suspension of annexation was nothing but a "temporary delay," requested by the Trump administration.

In light of the de facto, covert Israeli-Emirati relations that have existed since the days of the Yitzhak Rabin government, today's Israeli-Emirati statement on normalization seems more a political maneuver than an act of courageous statesmanship.

We continue to look forward to a future when the Occupation has ended, a just

and fair Israel-Palestine agreement has been reached, and Israel's sovereign existence within negotiated borders will be recognized by all the nations in the region. We will continue educating and advocating for true peace until that day arrives.