

June 18, 2020

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

As a long-time, committed supporter of Israel, the U.S.-Israel relationship, and the two-state solution, I have been cautiously watching the Israeli government's recent moves toward annexing or applying Israeli law to parts of the West Bank. I consider myself a champion of Israel's security and our close security cooperation, will continue to support unconditional aid to Israel regardless of any policy disagreement with its government, believe firmly in Israel's right to defend itself, and defer to Israelis' judgments of how best to safeguard their interests in a tumultuous region. Even so, I understand that the Israeli coalition agreement stipulates that annexation will only proceed under "full agreement with the United States"<sup>1</sup> and, in my capacity as a U.S. Senator, wanted to notify you that I must withhold my agreement at this time.

Achieving two states for two peoples through direct negotiations is the best way to ensure a Jewish, democratic, and secure Israel can live next to a Palestinian state. Though reaching this needed result through diplomacy has proven difficult, not least because of Palestinian leaders' actions, I have long believed that unilateral actions—from Israelis or Palestinians—would make a final, negotiated settlement more difficult. Just as I vehemently opposed unilateral Palestinian efforts to achieve statehood outside the framework of negotiations with Israel, correctly predicting that they would complicate ongoing talks, I fear unilateral Israeli annexation would also have negative impacts on the possibility for a lasting peace.

Having long hoped that Israel's neighbors would treat it as a normal, accepted partner, and not an unconditional enemy, I also worry unilateral actions would undermine cooperation between Israel and others in the region. Israel's coordination with the Palestinian Authority and other Palestinian groups to stem the spread of COVID-19 in the West Bank and Gaza has been a rare good news story in a trying time. I worry that unilateral Israeli action, taken while this crisis will sadly be far from over, will complicate this cooperation and subsequently jeopardize the health of Israelis and Palestinians alike. Further, I am concerned that Israel's growing security cooperation with Arab states would be far more difficult in the wake of unilateral actions,

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<sup>1</sup> "Annexation as early as July 1 under Netanyahu-Gantz deal", Tovah Lazaroff, *The Jerusalem Post*, May 9, 2020  
<https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/annexation-as-early-as-july-1-under-netanyahu-gantz-deal-625304>

undoing encouraging progress and making it harder for Israel to secure itself against nefarious actors in the Middle East.

Though my commitment to the cause of Israel and the safety of Israel will remain steadfast, I cannot currently agree with proposed Israeli unilateral actions to annex parts of the West Bank. The implications for a negotiated two-state solution and negative outcomes for Israel's relationship with its neighbors lead me to believe unilateral actions would be especially unhelpful at this moment. I have copied the Israeli Ambassador to the United States onto this communication to ensure both you and he are aware of my lack of agreement as a member of a co-equal branch of our government.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

CC:

Ambassador Ron Dermer  
Embassy of Israel  
3514 International Dr. N.W.  
Washington DC 20008