

# UAE Official on Annexation Assurances

by Hugh Fitzgerald



**The Foreign Minister Director of Policy Planning** in the United Arab Emirates, Jamal al-Musharakh, has again explained what the UAE claims it has been assured by Israel and the U.S. His statement is [here](#).

*Israel and the United States have promised the United Arab Emirates that Jerusalem will not annex parts of the West Bank as a guarantee for normalizing relations between the countries, UAE Foreign Ministry Director of Policy Planning Jamal al-Musharakh said on Tuesday.*

*Asked if annexation would threaten the ties between the countries, Musharakh said “it does not” and that “bilateral relations are well underway in various fields.”*

Here Al-Musharakh restates a claim made by other UAE officials, that Israel will not “annex” – that is, extend its sovereignty over – parts of the West Bank. But both the U.S. and Israel have said that Israel has agreed only to “suspend” those plans, with no indication of when they might be revived.

**And there is a puzzling ambiguity in Musharakh’s answer, when he was asked “if annexation would threaten the ties between the countries” and he answered “it does not.”** What does that answer mean? Was Musharakh simply noting that, “it [annexation] does not threaten the ties between the two countries” – for now – because Israel has not gone forward with its annexation plans?

**Or does his remark mean that “even if the Israelis at some point annex part of the West Bank, it won’t necessarily threaten our relations with them”?** It certainly seems to be saying that. If that is true, that would be a great relief. It may be that the UAE leaders are themselves not sure how they would react to an Israeli annexation of parts of the West Bank down the road. By that time, many months from now, there would presumably have been a great many mutually beneficial bilateral agreements, in technology, trade, tourism, solar energy, medicine, agriculture, that would make the UAE leaders increasingly reluctant to walk away from the agreement, sacrificing the national interest of the UAE to satisfy the demands of the querulous, ungrateful, insulting Palestinians, who have defaced and stomped on the Emirati flag, filled social media with curses directed at the Emirates, its leaders, and its people, and tried to whip up other Arabs against the Emirates for its supposed “betrayal” of the Palestinian cause.

*However, he added, that “one of the prerequisites of the commencing of bilateral relations was the halting of annexation.”*

*Al-Musharakh said he has “assurances from key leaders in the*

*US and Israel” that such a move [annexation] will not happen. He used a word in Arabic that means “to stop or delay” to describe the agreement on the matter of sovereignty. American statements on the matter used the word “to suspend.”*

**The Arabic word Al-Musharakh used could mean “stop or delay,” rather than, unambiguously, “end.” Both the Israelis and the Americans have continued to use the word “suspend” in discussing the extension of sovereignty to the major settlement blocs and the Jordan Valley. Netanyahu himself has assured Israelis that he has not forgotten his pledge to extend Israeli sovereignty, but that he awaited the go-ahead from the Americans – whose views on extension of sovereignty he has promised to respect. And right now the Americans are not ready to go forward. They have taken annexation “off the table” – for now. Such an agreement by the Americans may not happen for months. By that time there may well be a Biden administration, much less favorable to Israel, that will insist that there will never be a time when Israel will be allowed to assert its claim to the West Bank. That claim is based both on the Mandate for Palestine, which included the entire West Bank in the territory that would become the Jewish State, and on U.N. Resolution 242, which guaranteed Israel’s right to retain territories won in the Six-Day War that it needed in order to have “secure [i.e., defensible] and recognized boundaries.” Israel must assume that if Biden becomes president, those who advise him on foreign policy, and the raucous anti-Israel “Squad” (Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Ayanna Pressley, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez), will not merely block Israel’s extension of sovereignty, but actively work to have Israel’s settlements declared to be “illegal,” just as Biden’s boss, Obama, allowed to happen when he ordered the U.S. to abstain on UNSC Resolution 2334, which declared Israel’s settlement activity to constitute a “flagrant violation” of international law that had “no legal validity.” By abstaining, instead of exercising its veto, the U.S. for**

the first time allowed such a resolution to pass.

*The UAE “remains with the Arab consensus and resolutions pertaining to” the Palestinians, he said. “We have not backed out even an inch from our position.”*

This is not what the Palestinians think. They think the UAE has betrayed them, by going out on its own and normalizing relations with Israel in defiance of what the Palestinians, and other Arab states, want them to do. The UAE did not require Israel to withdraw from a single dunam of territory. Nor did it say that it expects Israel to withdraw to the 1949 armistice lines. It did get Israel to agree to “suspend” its extension of sovereignty in the West Bank, but not a commitment to end that attempt forever. This agreement was – as Prime Minister Netanyahu keeps repeating – not “land for peace” but, rather, “peace for peace.”

But normalizing relations with Israel without requiring it to give up any territory, as the UAE has just done, is not the Arab consensus, which – except for Egypt and Jordan – still predicates peace treaties with Israel on the withdrawal of Israel to the 1949 armistice lines, and the establishment of a Palestinian state that would include Gaza and all of the West Bank.

Whatever one thinks of the UAE’s new policy, it does not reflect, as Al-Musharakh wants us to believe, the “consensus” of Arab states but, rather, challenges that consensus.

*The director spoke with journalists at the United Arab Emirates’ Presidential Airport as the first official Israeli delegation visit to the country, led by National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat, came to a close. A day earlier, the first-ever direct flight from an Israeli airline, El Al, landed in that airport.*

***Al-Musharakh argued that normalization with Israel benefits***

*the entire region, including the Palestinians.*

Al-Musharakh is right.. Closer ties between Israel and the UAE will help both countries economically – in technology, trade, tourism, investment, as well as in medicine, including joint efforts to subdue the coronavirus pandemic – but others in the region will also be affected. As other Arab states see the many benefits the UAE will have derived from its ties to Israel, their opposition to dealing with the Jewish state should soften. The first states to follow the UAE's example, many have suggested, will be Oman, Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco, and – possibly – Saudi Arabia. These new Arab economic partners of Israel – the result of the UAE's bold decision to normalize relations – will bring similar benefits to those Arab states, which in turn will lead still other Arab states to follow suit. As for the Palestinians, the recognition that the Arab states are now making their separate agreements with Israel, and that Israel goes diplomatically from strength to strength, may soften their own hard-line positions, and lead them, as the Saudi Crown Prince exasperatedly told Mahmoud Abbas, to make whatever deal they can.

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