

OCCUPATION REWARDS: ON U.S. SUPPORT TO ISRAELI OCCUPATION

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The Trump administration's declaration that the Israeli settlements on the West Bank are not illegal not only challenges international laws and consensus on the issue but also complicates the already-stalled peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. To be sure, the decision is in line with President Donald Trump's Israel policy, which has unconditionally favoured the Jewish nation. In December 2017, Mr. Trump announced that the U.S. would recognise Jerusalem, a disputed city, as Israel's capital, breaking with an international consensus that the status of Jerusalem should be settled as part of a peace agreement. In March this year, the administration recognised the Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria in the 1967 war and has occupied ever since, as part of Israel. And now, with its de facto recognition of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank, Washington has given a shot in the arm to Israel's religious right, which wants the settlements to be annexed. Before the September election, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had promised to annex the settlements if voted back. Incidentally, the U.S. decision comes as Israel is inching closer towards another election as neither Mr. Netanyahu nor his rival, Benny Gantz, managed to form a government.

The UN General Assembly, the Security Council and the International Court of Justice have all stated that the Israeli settlements on the West Bank are illegal. According to the Fourth Geneva convention, an occupying power "shall not transfer parts of its civilian population into the territory it occupies". But Israel has been doing just that for decades. There are at least 4,00,000 Israeli settlers on the West Bank. The 'security barrier' Israel has built has cut deeper into the West Bank to incorporate some of the settlements, and the check-points Israel has set up across the West Bank restrict the movement of Palestinians. The Palestinians have made it clear that the two-state solution could be implemented only based on the 1967 border, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state of Palestine. Israel is already non-committal on Jerusalem. The right of return of the Palestinian refugees forced from their homes during the 1948 war remains a contentious issue. The third one is the border of a future Palestinian state. Israel has already taken effective control of a huge chunk of the West Bank through the settlements. The UN Security Council has asked Israel to stall the settlement activities, but Israel has hardly paid any attention to international opinion. And now, the Trump administration has rewarded the Jewish state, once again. If Israel goes ahead with annexation of the settlements, the call for which is gaining traction in the country, that will be the last nail in the coffin of the two-state solution.

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