



[Netanyahu Pledges to Annex Jordan Valley if Re-Elected](#)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to annex the Jordan Valley in the occupied West Bank if he is re-elected, just a week before citizens headed to the polls to cast their ballots. Netanyahu's announcement appeared to be aimed at mobilizing right-wing supporters on the eve of what is expected to be a tight race against former Israeli military chief, Benny Gantz. Netanyahu went on to repeat the promise the night before the election as well. Before the recent elections on April 9, Netanyahu issued a similar pledge to apply Israeli sovereignty to West Bank settlements if he were to be re-elected. However, he came up short of the seats needed for a ruling majority and instead of allowing another politician to have the opportunity to form a coalition government, Netanyahu pushed through a vote to dissolve the Knesset and call for new elections in mid-September.

The Jordan Valley is a 2,400 square kilometer area that accounts for nearly 30% of the West Bank. It runs along the eastern edge of the West Bank, a heavily Palestinian-populated territory that was taken by Israel in 1967. It contains large Palestinian population centers, like the city of Jericho, as well as a number of Israeli settlements. In the announcement of his plans, Netanyahu stated that he would exempt Jericho and nearby Palestinian villages and instead surround them with the newly taken Israeli land. Analysts say that annexing the Jordan Valley would serve no legitimate purpose and would merely amount to a statement that Israel is not interested in helping establish a Palestinian state, since this area is vital to the prospect of that. His political rivals have even dismissed his talk of annexation as an election ploy, pointing to the fact that Netanyahu has never annexed any new territory during his more than a decade in power.

Arab League foreign ministers have condemned the plan, stating that it would undermine any chance of progress on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas commented that "all signed agreements with Israel and the obligations resulting from them would end" if Netanyahu went through with this course of action. Jordan called the plan a "serious escalation" and warned that it could push the entire region towards violence. Turkey criticized Netanyahu's plan as an "illegal, unlawful, and aggressive message" to send to voters in the lead up to the election. International organizations like the United Nations also weighed in, with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres expressing concern that the move would be illegal and hinder the viability of the two-state solution. They also warned Netanyahu that this plan would have no international legal effect. Lastly, the European Union concurred that they would also not recognize the legitimacy of this potential move.

As of this morning, two days after the September 17 election, it's still not clear who Israel's next Prime Minister will be. Gantz's centrist Blue and White Party looks to have won the largest number of seats in the Knesset, with Netanyahu's right-wing Likud coming in a close second. However, neither of these parties has enough for its own parliamentary majority, so there will have to be some sort of power-sharing deal in order to form a coalition government. What is clear however is that Netanyahu and his Likud party performed worse than they had hoped and there is a strong possibility that Netanyahu will lose his job as Prime Minister since Gantz has already stated he is only interested in a coalition government that does not include Netanyahu. The next step is for Israeli President Reuven Rivlin to meet with the leadership of these parties and task one of them with trying to form a coalition government. These discussions are set to begin in the coming days.