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## Annexation moves intensify: Greater Jerusalem Bill hits Ministerial Committee on Legislation on Sunday

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On Sunday, the Ministerial Committee on Legislation will discuss the Greater Jerusalem Bill (“Jerusalem and its Daughters”), the requisite first step in promoting it to the Knesset floor. The bill seeks to de facto annex the three major settlement blocs – Gush Etzion, Ma’ale Adumim/E-1, and Givat Ze’ev – to the city in an unprecedented move that would constitute a consummate non-starter for any future negotiations on a two state solution. If approved by the Committee, it is expected to advance to its first reading in the Knesset on Wednesday.

The bill is one of two – its complement, the proposed amendment to Basic Law: Jerusalem: Capital of Israel (Amendment No. 2) – now being promoted by coalition members in an effort to fundamentally change the boundaries of Jerusalem. Introduced in the 50<sup>th</sup> year since the annexation of East Jerusalem, the bills are intended to accomplish the de facto annexation of the three adjacent West Bank blocs while at the same time uprooting the roughly one third of the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem who live in the eight neighborhoods located within the municipal line but outside the Separation Barrier. The bills have not surfaced in a vacuum; they complement a series of recent initiatives calculated to impose crucial territorial-political facts on the ground under the guise of “municipal moves.” They would preempt chances of a political resolution to the conflict, weaken the urban fabric, and ratchet up tensions in Jerusalem.

The Greater Jerusalem bill, introduced by MK Yoav Kisch (Likud) and Minister Yisrael Katz (Likud) on July 10, 2017, seeks to expand Jerusalem’s jurisdictional boundary to include the local authorities of Ma’ale Adumim (including Area E1), Gush Etzion and Givat Ze’ev. Similar to the proposed amendment of Basic Law: Jerusalem, this initiative would change the municipal status of the local authorities within the West Bank blocs. A previous version of the bill, since stricken, included application of Israeli law to the enumerated authorities. Even in its downsized version, it is difficult to mistake the political significance of the bill, the intention of which has been rendered unambiguous in statements from its sponsors and backers: annexation of the blocs and “creation of a large Jewish metropolitan area with a solid Jewish majority” (MK Kisch).

As stipulated in the bill, the local authorities to be annexed to Jerusalem – the Beitar Illit and Ma’ale Adumim municipalities, the Givat Ze’ev and Efrat local councils and the Gush Etzion Regional Council – would be granted the status of Jerusalem sub-municipalities (“daughter municipalities”) and their electoral calendars synchronized with elections for the Jerusalem Municipality, laying the groundwork for

residents of the blocs to have dual voting rights in Jerusalem and their own local bodies. The clear aim is to expedite a radical shift in the demographic balance of Jerusalem. The “sub-municipalities” would continue to enjoy municipal autonomy while, should they choose to exercise their newly conferred franchise in Jerusalem, diminishing the electoral power of the Palestinian residents of the city.

At the same time, the bill establishes a second category of sub-municipalities of Jerusalem – “the Jerusalem neighborhoods separated from it by means of the Separation Barrier.” The bill includes three newly defined “sub-municipalities”: The Shuafat refugee camp, Kufr Aqab and Anata. Here the goal, as expressed by MK Katz, is: “to strengthen Jerusalem by adding thousands of Jewish residents to the city and simultaneously weakening the Arab hold on the capital.”

## Ramifications

- **Geopolitical:** This is the first practical move to unilaterally annex West Bank territories to Israel since the annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, coupled with a massive displacement of Palestinian residents from Jerusalem. Such actions would be undertaken in contravention of international law and UN Security Council resolution 2334. The driving goal, as evidenced in statements from political officials promoting the proposals, is to erect a critical obstacle to the two states solution. The bills are designed to deepen Israeli control over the heart of East Jerusalem – the Old city and its surroundings – areas that are heavily populated by Palestinian residents and are of core significance to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. A sustainable solution would be rendered impossible should legislation be passed.
- **Humanitarian:** Such coercive actions would only exacerbate the indefensible conditions in the affected neighborhoods. Unlike the local authorities in the settlement blocs, which were established as separate municipalities with all the necessary physical and social infrastructures and financial resources, the neighborhoods beyond the Barrier are an integral part of East Jerusalem, bound to it by identity, and dependent upon it for the sustenance of community life, family ties, and income. History demonstrates the disingenuousness of promises to improve infrastructure and services in these areas. In fact, statements issued subsequent to the bill's introduction reiterate the goal of strengthening “governance”; if resources are at all directed to these neighborhoods, they are more likely to be allocated, and in greater measure, for policing than neighborhood improvements. Should local authorities be established – with no infrastructure on which to build and a lack of civil status to influence decision making – residents will be caught in a geographic, infrastructural and systemic state of limbo, leading to further deterioration in living conditions and rights.
- **Urban:** The bills seek to impose radical changes on the structure, area, and population of the city in the absence of any professional assessment of the impact such actions would have on its everyday functioning, and without the inclusion of the city's residents – Israeli and Palestinian - in decision making. The bills' mobilizers understand Jerusalem in a vacuum of local context or history: 140,000 people who do not reside in the city would be annexed to it and a comparable number bound to it by family and community ties and who contribute to its economy, summarily displaced; the area of the city would be doubled in size and arbitrarily disconnected from areas that have been an integral part of it for last 50 years. The prospective legislation would allow people who don't live in Jerusalem or pay taxes toward its welfare to influence decision making in the city, denying these same rights to actual permanent residents of the city, by imposing a concept of sub-municipalities that has no precedence in Israel. Even if the neighborhoods beyond the Barrier are disconnected from Jerusalem, Israel will be held accountable for the political and humanitarian crisis that will remain within Barrier's distance from Jerusalem.

In the coming week, Ir Amim will be releasing a comprehensive policy paper on these legislative developments and their political implications.

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