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Mapping the Israeli Settlement Project in the West Bank: History and Institutions***

رصد المشروع الاستيطاني الإسرائيلي في الضفة الغربية: المسارات التاريخية، والمؤسسات الحاكمة، ومكوناته الرئيسية

Abstract: This article examines the various components of the Israeli settlement project in the West Bank, as well as the Israeli agencies and institutions that plan, implement, and support it. It also addresses the status of settlement activity under international law. It proceeds from the premise that the settlement project constitutes an integrated structure engaged in a conflictual relationship with Palestinian space, governed by a zero-sum logic. The study begins with a historical overview of the development of settlements in the West Bank. It outlines the project's structural components, followed by an analysis of the four Israeli bodies that administer the expansion of settlement and shape its legal and planning frameworks. Finally, it considers the position of international law regarding Israeli settlements.

Keywords: Settler Colonialism; Israeli Settlements; International Law; West Bank; Palestine; Israel.

الملخص: تستعرض الدراسة مكونات المشروع الاستيطاني الإسرائيلي في الضفة الغربية، وأنواعه، والمؤسسات والأجهزة الإسرائيلية التي تخططه وتنفذه وتدعمه، إضافةً إلى مكانة الاستيطان في القانون الدولي. وتنطلق الدراسة من تأكيد شمولية هذا المشروع الاستيطاني بوصفه بنية متكاملة في علاقة صراعية مع الحيز الفلسطيني تحكمها معادلة صفرية. تُقدم الدراسة سردًا تاريخيًا لتطور الاستيطان في الضفة الغربية، ثم تستعرض مكونات هذا المشروع في الضفة الغربية، وتتناول الجهات الإسرائيلية الأربع التي تدير التوسع الاستيطاني، ويشعر كل منها في تشريع المصادرة وتسهيل التخطيط، بوصفها البنية البيروقراطية والإجرائية التي تدفع المشروع الاستيطاني قُدماً. كما تركز الدراسة على موقف القانون الدولي من الاستيطان.

كلمات مفتاحية: الاستعمار الاستيطاني؛ الاستيطان الإسرائيلي؛ القانون الدولي؛ الضفة الغربية؛ فلسطين؛ إسرائيل.

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Introduction

Israel established Jewish settlements across all the territories it occupied in 1967: in the Sinai Peninsula, the Syrian Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.¹ In 1982, Israel dismantled its settlements in Sinai, and in 2005 it withdrew from the settlements in the Gaza Strip while maintaining control over the territory and its population by land, air, and sea. During the genocidal war (2023-2025), however, Israel reoccupied large parts of Gaza amid growing Israeli calls to reestablish settlements there, at least within the so-called “Yellow Line”. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which constitute the primary focus of this study, the settlement project began during the first months of the occupation with the establishment of the settlement of Kfar Etzion near Bethlehem on 27 September 1967, and it has continued to expand systematically ever since. This study examines all components of the settlement project in the West Bank, in its various forms, and the Israeli institutions and state bodies involved in planning, implementing, and supporting it; it also analyses the status of Israeli settlements under international law.

Before turning to the structure of this study, it is important to highlight three fundamental characteristics of Israeli settlement in the West Bank. These characteristics remain essential for understanding the broader dynamics of the settlement project and should stay present in the reader’s mind throughout this extensive study.

1. Israeli settlement in the West Bank has evolved far beyond a series of scattered enclaves into an integrated and expansive structure. In 2026, approximately 532,000 settlers live in the West Bank, as well as around 250,000 in the settlements of East Jerusalem, distributed across more than 500 sites. These include residential settlements such as cities, towns, kibbutzim, and pastoral farms spread throughout the West Bank, alongside extensive infrastructure networks including modern road systems, industrial zones, shopping centres, roadside facilities, biblical parks, forests, schools, and colleges. As this study demonstrates, the settlement project extends far beyond the construction of Jewish housing in the West Bank. It constitutes a gradual process of Israelization aimed at consolidating the social, economic, cultural, and spiritual life of the settler community while integrating it ever more deeply into Israel’s urban and institutional landscape.
2. Israeli settlement in the West Bank does not exist as a structure that is merely “adjacent” to the Palestinian space within the occupied territory. Rather, it develops through a fundamentally conflictual relationship with that space, as settlement expansion necessarily entails the displacement, exclusion, or confinement of Palestinians and their civic sphere. The relationship between Jewish settlement and Palestinian society therefore operates as a zero-sum struggle. Understanding the settlement project as a settler-colonial structure remains essential for grasping both its present and future implications for Palestinians. As the settlement enterprise expands quantitatively and qualitatively, it further isolates Palestinian communities while intensifying systems of domination and control aimed at consolidating a superior and privileged settler society.
3. Although this study also examines in detail the Israeli institutions, state agencies, and organizations involved in expanding and supporting the settlement enterprise, it is important to emphasize that one of the defining features of settlement expansion over the past decade has been the growing leadership of the religious-nationalist Torah current in Israel. This current now drives the settlement project under the banner of returning to the Promised Land and establishing Jewish sovereignty over it as part of a

¹ Politically, the West Bank encompasses the entire area of Jerusalem occupied in 1967, which lies east of the 1949 Armistice Line or “Green Line”, and was under Jordanian rule from 1948-1967. However, Israel has annexed Jerusalem administratively and imposed Israeli law there, whereas the rest of the West Bank remains under military rule.

redemptive divine vision. Although settlements affiliated with this ideological stream constitute only around one-third of existing settlements, the movement is increasingly shaping the direction of the project as a whole. It views the Palestinian presence in the West Bank as an obstacle to the fulfilment of its redemptive vision, which centres on imposing Jewish sovereignty over what it refers to as Judea and Samaria.

Against this backdrop, the present study offers a comprehensive overview of the Israeli settlement project in four main sections. The first section provides a historical account of the development of settlement in the West Bank over four major phases: the administration of the occupied territory (1967-1977), the legalization and institutionalization of settlement under Likud rule (1977-1992), its contested expansion during the Oslo period (1993-2011), and the rise of the settler movement as a dominant political force after 2011. The second section examines the various components of the settlement project in the West Bank, including residential settlements in their different forms, outposts, industrial zones, the separation wall, infrastructure networks, confiscated lands, natural resources, and nature reserves. The third section focuses on the four main Israeli actors managing settlement expansion: the Israeli military, the religious settler movement, the Israeli government, and the Supreme Court. It analyses the role of the army, the Civil Administration, planning bodies, the inspection unit, and the Custodian of Government Property in legalizing land confiscation and facilitating settlement planning, highlighting the bureaucratic and administrative apparatus that continuously advances the settlement enterprise. The fourth and final section addresses the position of international law regarding Israeli settlements and reviews the core principles governing military occupation, including its temporary nature, the prohibition on transferring sovereignty, and the ban on transferring the occupying power's civilian population into occupied territory.

The Historical Context of Settlement Development in the West Bank

In Hebrew, the term *hitnachaluyot* (sing. *hitnachalut*) refers to Jewish settlements established in the territories occupied by Israel after 1967. By contrast, Jewish settlements established before 1948 were commonly known as *moshavot* (sing. *moshava*).² Each of these terms carries distinct political and ideological connotations.

During the nineteenth century, Western powers widely viewed colonialism as a legitimate, modernizing, and “positive” enterprise. Secular Zionism emerged within this broader historical and intellectual context. For example, in 1884, the Zionist rabbi Haim Zelig Slonimski defined colonialism as “the seizure of authority and possession of land in a country in order to develop and exploit its frontiers, unleash its latent natural energies, and control all of its material resources”.³ After Americans, Germans, Russians, and Greeks established settlements in Palestine, Jewish groups also began founding Jewish “colonies”, commonly known as *moshavot*. One of the earliest examples was Petah Tikva, often referred to as the “Mother of the Colonies”, established in 1878.⁴

The term *moshava* literally conveys the meaning of a “place of residence” or “dwelling”, but it extended beyond its literal sense to describe a particular model of cooperative agricultural settlement within Zionist thought. It combined individual labour with collective solidarity in the management of essential

² The name *moshava* [colony], which Zionist Jews used to describe their settlement activity before the establishment of the State of Israel, has predominantly European, colonial connotations. The word comes from the Hebrew root *y-sh-v*, which means to abide and settle in a new place.

³ Ayalon Gilad, “When Did Mityashvim Become Mitnakhlim, and Why Are They Being Recast as Mityashvim Again? On the Origins of the Word *Hitnachalut*,” [Hebrew] *Haaretz*, 9/3/2022, accessed on 26/11/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPOP>

⁴ Although Petah Tikva is known in both Zionist and Arab literature as “the mother of the colonies”, some Jewish settlement activity did precede it, including the establishment of the Jewish Agricultural College (Mikveh Israel) in East Jaffa in 1870, and the Montefiore settlements in Jerusalem and the Galilee between 1840 and 1870.

services such as marketing and distribution. Following the 1967 occupation, however, Israeli discourse conventionally adopted the term *hitnachalut* to describe settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Unlike the European colonial meaning of settlement, this term carries biblical and legal connotations associated with the transfer of inheritance from a father to his sons.⁵

Table (1): Hebrew Terminology for Settlements Before 1948 and After 1967

	Before 1948	After 1967
Hebrew term	<i>Moshava</i>	<i>Hitnachalut</i>
Connotation	Political – Colonial	Biblical – Legal
Hebrew linguistic meaning	“to sit or settle in a place”	“to settle or take possession of one’s inheritance”

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The adoption of this terminology stirred deeply embedded emotions within the Israeli collective consciousness and helped construct biblical associations between Israelis and the occupied land. At the same time, it stripped the settlement project of the connotations of aggression and colonialism (concepts that had become increasingly delegitimized in global discourse after the Second World War) and replaced them with meanings centred on the Jewish “right” to reclaim their ancestral inheritance in the Promised Land.⁶ This etymological clarification is useful for understanding Jewish and Israeli settlement as a project based on the appropriation and Judaization of the land.⁷

This understanding became embedded in Israeli discourse and practice from the very first months of Israeli control over the West Bank. On 17 December 1967, Israeli Military Order No. 187 stated: “By virtue of the authority vested in me as commander of the Israel Defense Forces in the area... the term ‘Judea and Samaria Region’ shall correspond in meaning ... to the term ‘West Bank Region’”.⁸ Then, in July 1968, the Israeli government officially decided to replace the name “West Bank” with “Judea and Samaria”. The decision involved politicians, military officers, and academics from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and received formal approval from the Government Names Committee, with the endorsement of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol. Politically, the decision marked a symbolic shift toward incorporating the biblical narrative into official Israeli discourse regarding the West Bank and consolidating a historical settlement vision that treated the occupied territories as part of the “Land of Israel” rather than as territories under temporary military occupation.⁹

Accordingly, from the beginning of its control over the West Bank, Israel viewed the territory as a natural space for the expansion of Jewish settlement. The development of this settlement enterprise, however, passed through several distinct phases, with its form, pace, and geographic spread shaped by changing Israeli political considerations and differing government agendas. Broadly speaking, the evolution of settlement in the West Bank can be divided into four main stages:

⁵ Gilad.

⁶ Ibid. Israelis do not use the word *hitnachalut* to refer to settlements in Jerusalem. They simply refer to them as “neighbourhoods”, as they have been annexed to Israel.

⁷ In biblical writings, particularly in the Book of Joshua, *hitnachalut* refers to a divine promise to grant the land to the 12 tribes of Israel as an eternal right, and is closely linked to the concept of religious entitlement to the land. In this sense, *hitnachalut* differs in its religious basis from *moshav*, which has an agricultural, cooperative character. It also differs from the English term *colony*, which focuses on colonial dimensions and foreign control, while *hitnachalut* is based on a religious narrative of historical rootedness and divinely ordained inheritance of the land.

⁸ Israel Defense Forces, *Leaflets, Orders, and Appointments Issued by the Israel Defense Forces in the West Bank Area: Booklet No. 9, 17/12/1967* (Jerusalem: Military Government in the West Bank, 1967).

⁹ National Library of Israel, “al-Ḍaffā al-Gharbiyya aw Yahūdā wa-l-Sāmira – Taghyīr al-Isīm al-Rasmī fī Tammūz 1968,” in: Walid Habbas & Yasser Manaa, *al-Khiṭāb al-Istīyānī al-Tawrātī Tijāh al-Ḍaffā al-Gharbiyya – Qirā’a fī Khīṭāb al-Jaysh al-Isrā’īlī wa-l-Mustawṭinīn*, Israeli Papers, no. 83 (Ramallah: Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies – MADAR, 2024), pp. 34-37.

The First Phase: Administering the Occupied Territory (1967-1977)

Shortly after the occupation, the Israeli military officer and politician Yigal Allon formulated the Allon Plan, which proposed a strategic vision for settlement in the West Bank under the justification of protecting Israel's security while taking demographic concerns into consideration. Allon proposed retaining Israeli control over the Jordan Valley, the southern border area of the West Bank with Jordan, and the Etzion bloc in any future political arrangement, with the aim of creating a buffer zone east of the Jordan River.¹⁰ Although the plan never received formal governmental approval, it strongly shaped subsequent settlement policies. The Israeli Labor government did not oppose settlement expansion in the West Bank based on Allon's ideas. On 3 September 1973, it approved the "Galilee Document", which called for settlement expansion in Rafah, the Golan Heights, and the Jordan Valley as part of the party's platform for the Eighth Knesset elections.¹¹ Settlement practices during this period took two main forms. The first was "top-down" settlement, including the military seizure of land for security purposes and the establishment of combined civilian-military settlements, commonly known as Nahal settlements, many of which later transformed into purely civilian settlements. The second was "bottom-up" settlement, led by religious-nationalist settlers, who established their first settlement near Bethlehem at Kfar Etzion, followed by the establishment of Kiryat Arba using lands confiscated through military orders. The most significant transformation within Israeli society during this period came with the establishment of the Gush Emunim movement in 1974. The movement assumed responsibility for activating and leading the settlement project politically, socially, and culturally. At the end of this phase, in 1975, the settler population in the West Bank remained relatively small, numbering no more than approximately 4,000 settlers.¹²

The Second Phase: Likud Institutionalizes Official Settlement Expansion (1977-1992)

Once the Israeli right wing came to power for the first time in 1977, Prime Minister Menachem Begin declared that the West Bank constituted an inalienable part of the Jewish historical heritage, and his government moved to sponsor and support settlement expansion throughout the entire territory. In 1978, the Israeli government adopted the Drobless Plan, which served as a comprehensive framework for the regional planning of the settlement project, particularly in strategic areas such as mountain ridges and zones adjacent to major Palestinian population centres. According to the plan, these settlements would function as a deterrent against Arab hostility while strengthening Israel's future claims to the land. During this period, the West Bank was divided into seven regional settlement councils, alongside the development of a structured system of settler local governance. These included the Shomron Regional Council (established in 1979), the Binyamin Regional Council (1980), the Jordan Valley Regional Council (1979), the Gush Etzion Regional Council (1980), the Mount Hebron Regional Council (1982), the Dead Sea Regional Council (1981), and the Gaza Coast Regional Council (1979), which later dissolved following Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005. A coordinating umbrella body for these councils, the Yesha Council, was established in 1980. During this phase, the Israeli military confiscated approximately 908,000 dunams of West Bank land (around 16 percent of the territory that would later be designated as "Area C" under the Oslo II framework of 1995) and reclassified it as "state

¹⁰ Handel Ariel, Marco Allegra & Erez Maggor, "The Israeli Settlements: Past, Present, and Future," in: Asaf Shafir (ed.), *Routledge Companion to the Israeli Palestinian Conflict* (London/New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 218-233.

¹¹ "Israel Draws a Map for Peace with Egypt," [Hebrew] *Maariv*, 5/1/1973, accessed on 8/7/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GP2A>

¹² "Population," *Peace Now*, 2024, accessed on 7/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPY2>

land”, much of which was subsequently allocated for civilian settlement expansion.¹³ Organizations such as Gush Emunim, Amana, the Settlement Division of the World Zionist Organization, and the Yesha Council played major roles in advancing settlement activity during this period. By the end of this phase, in 1992, the settler population had risen to approximately 105,000 settlers,¹⁴ reflecting the Likud government’s determination to demonstrate its Zionist commitment through the large-scale expansion and institutionalization of settlement in the occupied territories.

Map (1): Boundaries of the Six Regional Settlement Councils in the West Bank



Source: Yesha Council, “About the Yesha Council,” accessed on 15/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPap>

The Third Phase: The Rise and Collapse of Oslo (1993-2011)

At the time the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, approximately 128 settlements existed in what later became designated as Area C, distributed across the six regional settlement councils in the West Bank. As Yitzhak Rabin’s government negotiated over the future of the West Bank, intending to retain control over the major settlement blocs (particularly Ariel, Gush Etzion, and Ma’ale Adumim), the settlement project increasingly emerged as a deeply contested political issue within Israel itself. Before his assassination in 1995, Rabin had moved toward restraining settlement expansion. However, in 1997, Benjamin Netanyahu advanced what became known as the “Allon Plus Plan”, which aimed to preserve Israeli control over roughly 60 percent of the West Bank, including the major settlement areas and road bypass networks.

During this period, the Settlement Division of the Jewish Agency continued to play a decisive role in expanding settlement infrastructure. At the same time, a growing number of settler-oriented “civil society”

¹³ Norwegian Refugee Council, *A Guide to Housing, Land and Property Law in Area C of the West Bank* (February 2012), accessed on 8/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPM2>

¹⁴ “Population.”

organizations emerged, including Nahala, established in 2005, and Regavim, founded in 2006, both of which sought to intensify settlement expansion throughout the West Bank. These organizations subsequently established dozens of settlement outposts, some of them state-funded, despite the official Israeli policy that formally opposed the widespread creation of new settlements.¹⁵ The dismantling of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip in 2005 marked a major intellectual and political turning point for religious-nationalist settlers in the West Bank. In response, these groups evolved into a more radical and politically organized force, developing extensive lobbying networks, associations, NGOs, and fundraising mechanisms aimed at accelerating the Judaization of the West Bank.

The negotiations between Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas in 2007, followed by the Netanyahu-Abbas talks between 2010 and 2011, represented the final political negotiation between the two sides. After these negotiations collapsed, Israeli policy increasingly shifted toward determining the future of Area C through settlement expansion on the ground. By the end of this period – which many Israelis regarded as marking the effective end of the “peace process” – the settler population had nearly tripled compared to its size before Oslo, reaching approximately 311,000 settlers.¹⁶

The Fourth Phase: The Rise of the Settlers as a Political Force Since 2011

During this phase, the West Bank entered a prolonged condition of “managed status quo”. On the one hand, political negotiations with the Palestinians largely disappeared. On the other, the settlement project in Area C expanded systematically and continuously. Over time, the religious-nationalist settler movement succeeded in shifting the Israeli political debate from the question, “What is the future of the occupation in the West Bank?” to a new question: “When will Israel annex Area C?” Throughout this period, the settler population continued to grow, reaching around 532,000 settlers by 2026, and living across roughly 500 settlement sites, including approximately 246 officially recognized Israeli settlements and around as many unofficial settlements, commonly referred to as outposts.¹⁷ Settlement expansion increasingly reshaped and constrained the boundaries of Palestinian residential space throughout the West Bank.

On 29 December 2022, a new right-wing religious coalition government was formed under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu, Bezalel Smotrich, and Itamar Ben-Gvir, together with the ultra-Orthodox parties. The coalition rested on a set of agreements and policy guidelines that effectively granted the religious settler leadership broad authority to shape the future of the West Bank. The coalition’s strategy focused on accelerating the Judaization of as much land in Area C as possible within the shortest feasible timeframe, while preparing the legal and legislative foundations for its future annexation to Israel.

As part of this agenda, a new directorate was established within the Israeli Civil Administration in May 2024 and placed under the authority of Hillel Roth, one of the leading figures of the religious settler movement, with the purpose of advancing the legal incorporation of settlements into Israel’s administrative framework. Bureaucratically, this body operates under the Settlement Administration within the Ministry of Defense, which in February 2023 was placed under Yehuda Eliyahu, a close associate of Minister Bezalel Smotrich. Its primary objective is to accelerate land confiscation and

¹⁵ Walid Habbas, “al-Bu’ar al-Istīyāniyya al-Zirā’iyya fī al-Ḍaffa al-Gharbiyya: Min al-Irtijāl wa-l-Taṭawwu’ ilā al-Ma’sasa wa-l-Tamwīl al-Hukūmī!” *Supplement to The Israeli Scene*, Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies – MADAR, 12/2/2024, accessed on 16/11/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPJF>

¹⁶ “Population.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

settlement planning while bypassing the traditional channels of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) and sections of the military establishment that have historically shown greater sensitivity to international criticism. In parallel, the Ministry of National Missions was entrusted to Orit Strock, a prominent settler leader from Hebron, enabling the ministry to support settlement outposts directly and finance projects aimed at accelerating the Judaization of the West Bank.

The Main Components of the Israeli Settlement Project

This section examines the principal components of the Israeli settlement project in the West Bank. These include residential settlements located in Area C; annexed residential settlements in East Jerusalem; settlement outposts, whether caravan-based or pastoral; industrial zones and business centres; the separation wall, which isolates approximately 9 percent of the West Bank; infrastructure networks and bypass roads; confiscated lands; appropriated natural resources such as water sources, streams, and mineral reserves; and nature reserves and waste disposal sites.

This section examines these components in detail based on data available in January 2026, while recognizing that the settlement project continues to expand, meaning that many of the figures and conditions described below may already have changed by the time this text is read. The information presented here relies primarily on leading Palestinian and Israeli sources, especially the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, and the Wall and Settlement Resistance Commission.

Official Residential Settlements in the West Bank

Civilian settlements constitute the most visible and central component of the Israeli settlement project. The officially recognized settlements include approximately 246 residential entities, varying in scale from large settlement cities and towns to small kibbutzim. All of these settlements have received formal approval from successive Israeli governments and therefore receive full state support, including master planning schemes, infrastructure development, municipal budgets, and public services. They contain the institutional foundations of everyday life, including schools, kindergartens, health centres, recreational facilities, and other civic services.

One useful way to understand the scale and geographic distribution of settlements in the West Bank is through the institutional structure of the Yesha Council, the umbrella governing body of the settlement movement. The council consists of 25 members, 24 representing settlements in the West Bank, while one seat continues to symbolically represent the former Gaza settlements even since Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005. The West Bank settlement representation is divided into four settlement municipalities (or settlement cities), 14 local councils, and six regional councils, with each regional council overseeing several smaller settlements.

The officially recognized settlements are home to at least 532,604 settlers. Collectively, these settlements exercise jurisdiction over an area amounting to approximately 9.4% of the total area of the West Bank.¹⁸ Table (2) presents the main indicators related to the officially recognized settlements established in the West Bank.

¹⁸ A settlement's area of influence (Hebrew: *shetach shevot*) is the geographical area allocated to its local or municipal council, and is under full Israeli control in terms of its infrastructure, tax collection, public services, management of municipal life for the Jewish population, and security zone.

Table (2): Numbers of Settlers and Settlements (January 2026)

Category	Settlement/ Community Name	No. of Settlers	No. of Settlements
Cities	Ariel	22,383	city
	Ma'ale Adummim	36,185	city
	Betar Illit	73,220	city
	Modi'in Illit	91,323	city
	Total	223,111	Four cities
Settlements	Oranit	10,044	settlement
	Alfei Menashe	7,981	settlement
	Elkana	4,551	settlement
	Efrat	12,132	settlement
	Beit El	6,540	settlement
	Beit Aryeh–Ofarim	5,795	settlement
	Giv'at Ze'ev	25,850	settlement
	Har Adar	4,234	settlement
	Immanuel	6,232	settlement
	Kiryat Arba	7,832	settlement
	Sha'ar HaShomron	8,793	settlement
	Ma'ale Efrayim	1,862	settlement
	Karnei Shomron	10,755	settlement
	Kedumim	4,565	settlement
	Total	116,166	14 settlements
Regional Councils	Shomron Regional Council	49,383	55 settlements
	Mateh Binyamin Regional Council	82,434	59 settlements
	Gush Etzion Council	29,464	32 settlements
	Jordan Valley Regional Council	16,755	43 settlements
	Hebron Hills Regional Council	12,402	30 settlements
	Megilot Regional Council	2,889	9 settlements
	Total	193,327	228 settlements
Grand Total		532,604	246

Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, "Population in Localities and Regional Councils – Provisional Estimates, 2025–2026," 2/3/2026, accessed on 21/5/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2sIJ>

Residential Settlements Annexed to Israel in East Jerusalem

The settlements in East Jerusalem are addressed separately because Jerusalem was annexed by Israel in 1967 and therefore did not develop through the same settlement mechanisms that shaped the rest of the West Bank, which largely operated under the authority of the Israeli military and regional settlement councils. At the same time, East Jerusalem remains an integral part of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. Despite its annexation by Israel, it continues to constitute a central component of the envisioned Palestinian state and its future capital within the framework of the two-state solution. The boundaries of Jerusalem, however, remain among the most disputed issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On 29 June 1967, a single “unified” municipality of Jerusalem was established, and Teddy Kollek, who had served as mayor of West Jerusalem since 1966, became mayor of the unified city. Following this internationally unrecognized annexation, Israel declared the unification of West and East Jerusalem and proclaimed the city the eternal capital of Israel. At the end of the war, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan appointed a committee of three generals (including Chaim Herzog, Rehavam Ze’evi, and Shlomo Lahat) to determine the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem. The committee submitted its recommendations at the end of June 1967, resulting in the addition of approximately 70,000 dunams to the boundaries of occupied East Jerusalem. Today, settlement activity in Jerusalem includes settlements, settler homes, outposts, and settlement neighbourhoods, as detailed in Table (3).

Table (3): East Jerusalem Settlements and Populations

Settlement	Classification	Population
Yeshivat Bnei Rachel	School	50
Beit Samuel (Neve Shmuel)	Tourist settlement	est. 10
Tur (Beit Orot)	Settlement/neighbourhood	est. 60
Ma’ale HaZeitim	Settlement/neighbourhood	est. 400
Metzudat Tzion	Settlement/neighbourhood	est. 25
Jewish Cemetery on the Mount of Olives	Settlement/neighbourhood	15
Ma’ale David	Settlement/neighbourhood	est. 50
City of David	Settlement/neighbourhood	250
Beit Yonatan	Settlement/neighbourhood	30
Shimon HaTzaddik	Settlement/neighbourhood	50
Nof Tzion	Settlement/neighbourhood	360
HaMefaked Street	Settlement/neighbourhood	20
Muslim and Christian Quarter	Settlement/neighbourhood	1,000
Pisgat Ze’ev	Settlement	45,100
Gilo	Settlement	32,290
Ramot	Settlement	56,086
Neve Ya’akov	Settlement	25,000
East Talpiot	Settlement	15,398
Ramat Eshkol	Settlement	8,975
French Hill	Settlement	6,800
Ma’ale Dafna	Settlement	4,500
Tallat al-Muftar (Giv’at HaMivtar)	Settlement	est. 3,500
Jewish Quarter (Harat al-Sharaf)	Settlement/neighbourhood	4,200
Ramat Shlomo	Settlement/neighbourhood	16,736
Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa)	Settlement	24,900
Sanhedria Murhevet	Settlement/neighbourhood	est. 5,500
Givat Hanania/Abu Tor	Settlement/neighbourhood	400
Beit HaSheva	Settlement/neighbourhood	est. 50
Total		251,755

Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022 (April 2024 projections), accessed on 15/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPfU>

Settlement Outposts in the West Bank

Settlement outposts are residential settlement sites established in an improvised and often informal manner by extremist settler movements and organizations. Unlike officially recognized settlements, these outposts generally lack approved master plans, although the Israeli state frequently provides them with financial support, security protection, legal assistance, and public services. As a result, it remains difficult to determine precisely the total area they occupy. Israeli human rights organizations commonly refer to these sites as “outposts”,¹⁹ while in the official Israeli discourse, particularly under right-wing governments, they are often described as “young settlements”.

A distinction can be made between unauthorized settlement outposts established for residential purposes and those established primarily for territorial control and land appropriation without the development of permanent residential neighbourhoods. Regarding the residential outposts, Bezalel Smotrich stated, in his political and electoral platform, that 60 of the unauthorized outposts existing in the West Bank were inhabited by approximately 25,000 settlers.²⁰

All of these outposts were originally established through initiatives led by settler groups without formal authorization from the Israeli government. Nevertheless, successive Israeli governments have legalized many of them retroactively. One notable example occurred in October 1999, shortly before Prime Minister Ehud Barak departed for the Camp David Summit negotiations. Barak reached an agreement with settler leaders concerning 42 unauthorized settlement outposts in the West Bank. Under the agreement, 32 outposts received various forms of approval: two were relocated, expansion was frozen in 19 (allowing them to remain in place but prohibiting further expansion), and 11 were formally legalized, while the remaining outposts were designated for evacuation.²¹

One of the earliest and most significant attempts to legalize settlement outposts took shape in the 2017 Regularization Law.²² The law aimed to retroactively authorize thousands of housing units built on privately owned Palestinian land by allowing the state to expropriate usage rights while compensating Palestinian owners financially or with alternative land. In June 2020, however, the Israeli Supreme Court struck down the law, ruling that it disproportionately violated Palestinians’ constitutional rights to property, equality, and dignity.²³

The effort to legalize outposts on a large scale resumed only after two important developments. First, the religious-nationalist far right gained unprecedented influence and, with the formation of Israel’s 37th government at the end of 2022, acquired direct control over key institutions responsible for settlement policy. Second, tensions between the settler movement and Israel’s judicial system deepened. A major source of this conflict was the disagreement between the government and the Supreme Court over how quickly settlements should expand and which legal tools could facilitate that expansion. The disagreement concerned the methods and pace of settlement growth rather than the legitimacy of the settlement project itself.

This is precisely what unfolded under Israel’s 37th government. By 2026, the majority of these outposts had been legalized through a variety of administrative and planning mechanisms, resulting in the establishment of approximately 90 new officially recognized settlements.

¹⁹ The most important of these organizations are the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B’Tselem), Peace Now, Volunteers for Human Rights (Yesh Din), and Kerem Navot.

²⁰ Bezalel Smotrich, “List of Sites According to Article 2(b) of Cabinet Decision B/6 Dated 21 February 2023,” [Hebrew] *Official Letter*, accessed on 21/11/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPdL>. In his 2018 electoral programme, Smotrich referred to some 70 unauthorized settlements. However, by the time of writing, he had legalized 13 of them, with the intention of legalizing the rest by the end of the 37th Israeli government’s term in 2026.

²¹ “‘The Outpost Agreement’ – Neither Evacuation nor Freeze: An Analysis of the First Outpost Agreement between Barak and the Settlers since October 1999,” [Hebrew] *Peace Now*, 2008, accessed on 21/11/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPoB>

²² Knesset, “Law for the Regularization of Settlement in Judea and Samaria, 5777–2017,” [Hebrew] 13 February 2017, pp. 410–414, accessed on 27/9/2025 at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2sZk>

²³ Gilad Morag et al., “High Court Orders Cancellation of the ‘Regularization Law’ Because It Is Unconstitutional,” [Hebrew] *Ynet*, 9/6/2020, accessed on 27/9/2025 at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2sbR>

Industrial Zones and Commercial Centres

According to a report issued by the State Comptroller of Israel, approximately 35 industrial zones and commercial centres operate in the West Bank, all located within Area C.²⁴ Comprehensive information regarding all of these industrial zones remains unavailable, and the locations of some facilities appear not to be publicly disclosed. The overwhelming majority of these zones are established on lands administered by the “Custodian of Government Property”, a department within the Israeli Civil Administration authorized to manage lands held by Israel in the occupied territories. Some industrial zones function as independent facilities, while others operate as industrial neighbourhoods attached to existing settlements. Certain zones also remain inaccessible to the general public. In addition, approximately 35 stone quarries and stone-processing factories operate in Area C, alongside around 25 fuel stations located independently of settlements and distributed along major highways throughout the West Bank.²⁵

Table (4). Major Industrial Zones Located Outside and Inside Settlements

Industrial Zone		Inside Settlement	Geographically Independent	Area (dunams)
Eli Centre	Business/ shopping complex	X		496
Dolev Centre	Business/ shopping complex	X		60
Sha’ar Binyamin (Rami Levy, Jaba’)	Business/ shopping complex		X	176
Rami Levy Etzion	Business/ shopping complex		X	94
Neveh Tzuf/ Halamish	Industrial zone	X		N/A
Efrat Hi-Tech	Industrial zone	X		N/A
Ma’ale Amos	Industrial zone	X		N/A
Atarot	Industrial zone		X	1,530
Alfei Menashe	Industrial zone		X	236
Shilo	Industrial zone	X		500
Meitar	Industrial zone		X	2,000
Shahak	Industrial zone		X	8,000
Bar On	Industrial zone		X	1,200
Barkan	Industrial zone		X	728
Ariel	Industrial zone	X		N/A
Ariel West	Industrial zone		X	865
Sal’it	Industrial zone	X		N/A
Emmanuel	Industrial zone		X	120
Gush Etzion	Industrial zone		X	527
Mishor Adumim	Industrial zone		X	1,550
Maccabim	Industrial zone*		X	300

²⁴ “Industrial Zones under Israeli Administration in the Judea and Samaria Area: A Follow-up Report [Annual Reports],” [Hebrew] Israeli State Comptroller’s Office, 28/2/2023, accessed on 10/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GQ3Z>

²⁵ The database can be accessed under “Maps”, at: Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, “Civil Administration Digital Database,” [Hebrew] accessed on 28/9/2025 at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPSG>. Although this database is under the supervision of the Civil Administration, it is significant in that it links its statistics to specific documents, military order numbers, and engineering and structural plans, meaning their accuracy can be verified by searching for them individually at other relevant Israeli ministries and agencies.

Industrial Zone		Inside Settlement	Geographically Independent	Area (dunams)
Sha'ar Shomron	Industrial zone**		X	2,700
Bustanei Hafetz	Industrial zone***		X	980
Nitzanei ha-Shalom	Industrial zone		X	50
Sal'it – Adumim	Quarry		X	200

* Approved in 2016. It is in the advanced stages of urban planning at the time of writing.

** Approved for establishment in 2022.

*** Approved in 2018, but construction has not yet begun.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on various sources.

The Separation and Annexation Wall

Israel began constructing the separation and annexation wall in 2002, based on security justifications linked to the Second Intifada in the West Bank. According to Israeli plans, the wall's total projected route extends approximately 714 kilometres, of which around 488 kilometres have been completed to date. The wall is roughly twice as long as the Green Line, with approximately 85% of its route running through the West Bank rather than along the 1967 boundary. In practice, the route of the wall establishes the territorial basis for the de facto annexation of most Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The wall isolates approximately 9% of the occupied Palestinian territory.²⁶

Settlement Infrastructure and Road Networks

Map (2): Main Settler Roads in the West Bank



Source: Generated by the authors.

²⁶ "The Separation Barrier," *B'Tselem*, 11/11/2017, accessed on 7/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPCm>

Israel has developed an extensive network of roads and infrastructure designed to facilitate settler life, connect industrial zones to ports and border crossings, and reshape the spatial organization of the West Bank. This settlement infrastructure includes a road system constructed primarily to serve the needs of the settlement project, and has significant economic and geographic consequences for Palestinians. These effects include the fragmentation and isolation of Palestinian areas, the extension of travel times between Palestinian communities, and increased logistical and transportation costs.

A closer examination of the settlement road network reveals two principal categories: 1) Vertical roads (running along a north-south axis), designed to separate Palestinian space from the areas designated for settlement expansion throughout the West Bank; 2) Horizontal roads (running along an east-west axis), designed to connect settlements directly to Israel proper.

Table (5): Major Settler Roads in the West Bank

Name	Direction	Location/ Route	Length
Route 60	North-south	Runs through the centre of the West Bank, passing close to Hebron, Al-Arroub refugee camp, the Bethlehem area (via tunnels), Atarot-Jaba' and the Jaba'-Nablus road, as far as the outskirts of Jenin	189 km
Route 90	North-south	Runs along the Jordanian border of the West Bank	118 km
Allon Road	North-south	Runs through the Jordan Valley region, from Mishor Adumim to Al-Hamra, passing through Ma'arajat and the villages of Duma and Al-Fasayil	88 km
Route 446	North-south	Connects the city settlement of Modi'in with settlements west of Nablus	31 km
Route 1	East-west	From the Latroun area to the south of Jericho city	65 km
Route 5	East-west	Connects the settlement city of Ariel to Israel; hosts Israeli industrial zones including Ariel, Ariel West, Barkan Industrial Park, and the planned zone of Sha'ar Shomron	18 km
Route 443	East-west	Stretches from Modi'in to Giv'at Ze'ev/ Bitunia	13 km
Route 465	East-west	Starts from Silwad and goes to Ayoun al-Haramiyeh, the Rawabi roundabout, Umm Safa, Aboud, Rantis, and the Rantis checkpoint close to Tel Aviv	35 km
Route 57	East-west	Between Tulkarm and Netanya, cutting transversally through the West Bank	36 km
Route 449	East-west	Between northern Jericho (Al-Auja area) and the Ofra settlement north of Ramallah	36 km

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on a compilation of materials from various sources, including websites for some streets, and analysis of various urban plans.

Israel constructs these roads and infrastructure networks through land confiscation orders issued under the justification of serving the "public interest". Based on these orders, most of the roads reserve corridors ranging between 50 and 100 metres on both sides of the roadway for future expansion and security purposes. In addition, numerous other roads form part of the broader settlement infrastructure network, although many of them remain difficult to comprehensively document.

Israel has transformed this road network into an integrated system of control and surveillance that functions as a major obstacle to Palestinians' fundamental rights, particularly the right to freedom of movement. By the end of 2025, the West Bank contained more than 1,200 checkpoints and movement barriers restricting Palestinian mobility.²⁷

Land Confiscation Under the Designation of “State Land”

“State land” refers to lands held and administered by Israel and constitutes the central territorial foundation upon which the settlement project in the West Bank depends. The term “state land” carries significant legal and political implications, as it effectively reflects a form of de facto annexation (albeit framed within the legal structure of military occupation), the designation itself implying that the land belongs to the occupying Israeli state.

Israel assumed control over lands that had been classified as state land during the period of Jordanian rule in the West Bank between 1948 and 1967, as well as over lands categorized as “enemy property”, based on the claim that they had once constituted private property owned by Jews who fled the West Bank before the 1948-1949 armistice boundaries were established. Estimates indicate that these two categories together amount to approximately 527,000 dunams, which Israel controls under Military Order No. 59 of 1967.

More broadly, lands regarded by Israel as falling under state ownership total approximately 1.6 million dunams – equivalent to roughly 30 percent of the West Bank and nearly half of the territory classified as Area C (Table 6).

Table (6): Classification and Areas of State Land

Classification	Area (dunams)
Lands registered as “state land” during Jordanian rule, including “enemy property”	527,000
Lands declared as state land by Israel (1967-1973) on the grounds that they were unregistered in its land tax registries, and appeared to be “government property”	160,000
Lands included in the largest campaign of declarations of state land by the civil–military administration (1979-1992)	908,000
Estimated state land declared since Benjamin Netanyahu first took office (1996-2024)	50,000
Total	1.645 million (30% of WB)

Source: Walid Habbas, “Isrā’īl wa-l-Mas’ala al-Filasṭīniyya”, in: Honaida Ghanim (ed.), *Taqrīr “Madār” al-Istrāṭījī 2024: al-Mashhad al-Isrā’īlī fī al-’Ām 2023* (Ramallah: Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies – Madar, 2024), pp. 25-48.

Israel uses confiscated lands in three principal ways:

1. Construction of Jewish residential settlements: Since 1967, approximately 98 percent of the “state lands” allocated for residential construction have been incorporated into the jurisdiction of settlement councils, thereby making most of these lands available for Jewish civilian expansion. Israeli authorities have often justified this expansion internationally under the concept of accommodating the “natural growth” needs of settlements. These lands are all located in Area C, where the Israeli Civil Administration continues its efforts to expand the classification of land as “state land” by placing land settlement and registration projects at the centre of its policy agenda in the West Bank.

²⁷ OCHA, “Movement and Access in the West Bank – August 2023,” 25/8/2023, accessed on 7/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPDj>

2. Confiscation for “public purposes”: Israel has also used land confiscation orders justified by “public needs” to seize land, particularly for the construction of roads, arguing that such infrastructure also serves Palestinians. Across the West Bank, the Israeli military controls hundreds of sites related to water, electricity, and other supposedly “public” facilities. The Israeli road network in the West Bank – which occupies extensive areas – is generally excluded from the officially calculated footprint of settlements themselves. Nevertheless, this infrastructure constitutes an essential component of the settlement project, which cannot be understood solely through the physical locations of the settlements themselves; rather, the creation of a modern infrastructural system and an integrated road network is deeply embedded within Palestinian geographic space, especially in Area C.
3. Confiscation for military purposes: Legally, military seizure orders do not formally alter the ownership status of the land and do not transfer property rights to the state, unlike the designation of “state land”. Instead, such orders grant temporary rights of use for a specified period and for declared military–security needs. In practice, however, many lands confiscated under military justifications become integrated into Israel’s broader system of territorial control in the West Bank. These lands are used for military facilities and bases, the separation wall, checkpoints and crossings, surveillance sites, and watchtowers, as well as strategic zones that may remain undisclosed.

Control over Natural Resources

Natural resources in the West Bank include groundwater reserves, mineral resources such as salts and the resources of the Dead Sea, the agricultural fertility of the Jordan Valley, as well as oil, gas, and solar energy resources. Control over these resources directly affects the Palestinian right to self-determination, while international law prohibits an occupying power from exploiting or pillaging the natural resources of occupied territory. At the same time, Israeli occupation authorities impose a wide range of restrictions that limit Palestinian access to and use of natural resources, particularly land and water resources in areas adjacent to Israeli settlements. These restrictions significantly undermine Palestinians’ ability to cultivate their land and utilize water resources for agriculture, thereby weakening agricultural self-sufficiency and constraining the economic sustainability of Palestinian farming communities.

Archaeological Sites, Nature Reserves, and Waste Disposal Facilities

Since 1967, the Israel Defense Forces declared approximately 48 areas in the West Bank as natural or archaeological reserves. Within these areas, Israeli authorities have established dozens of recreational sites, forests, and sites designated as “Israeli” archaeological zones, open to visitors. These reserves cover an estimated area ranging between 350,000 and 360,000 dunams, equivalent to approximately 6.2 percent of the West Bank.²⁸ In 2023, Amichai Eliyahu announced that the Israeli government had identified approximately 2,400 Jewish archaeological sites in Area C and intended to designate them as biblical-archaeological heritage reserves, while also seeking to register some of them through UNESCO.²⁹ In addition, the Israeli Civil Administration, through its Environmental Quality Department, manages several waste-related facilities in the West Bank, including landfill sites and waste incineration facilities.³⁰

Israeli Institutions and Bodies Overseeing the Settlement Project

Four principal Israeli actors manage and consolidate the expansion of the settlement project: 1) The Israel Defense Forces, as the effective sovereign authority in the occupied territories, including the army’s Central

²⁸ “A De Facto Annexation of the West Bank’s Nature Reserves,” *POICA*, 10/6/2023, accessed on 21/11/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/4nIg3BF>

²⁹ Walid Habbas, “Isrā’īl wa-l-Mas’ala al-Filasṭīniyya,” in: Honaida Ghanim (ed.), *Taqrīr “Madār” al-Istrāṭījī 2024: al-Mashhad al-Isrā’īlī fī al-‘Ām 2023* (Ramallah: Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies – MADAR, 2024).

³⁰ Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, “Civil Administration Digital Database.”

Command, the Civil Administration, and the Office of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT); 2) The religious settler movement, operating both at the political level through settler-affiliated parties and at the civil level through NGOs, associations, youth movements, lobbying groups, and grassroots settler organizations; 3) The Government of Israel, including the Prime Minister's Office, Israeli ministries, members of the Knesset and its committees, and the government's legal advisory bodies; 4) The Supreme Court of Israel, commonly referred to in Hebrew as the *Bagatz* (High Court of Justice).

Israeli Military Institutions and Administrative Bodies

The Israel Defense Forces Central Command functions as the supreme governing authority in the occupied West Bank. The commander of the Central Command effectively serves as the highest governing authority in the territory, exercising legislative powers through military orders, judicial powers through the military court system, and executive powers through the Civil Administration. Within this framework, the most important institution is the Israeli Civil Administration.

a. The Israeli Civil Administration

The Israeli Civil Administration is a military-civil body operating under the authority of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), the Israeli unit responsible for administering and enforcing Israeli control over Palestinian life in the occupied territories. Following the Oslo Accords, its role has also expanded to include coordination and liaison functions with the Palestinian Authority regarding various administrative and civilian affairs. Acting on behalf of the "State of Israel", the Civil Administration manages a broad range of colonial affairs in the West Bank, including planning and construction, settlement expansion, the declaration and administration of state lands, land-use regulation, and enforcement measures such as issuing demolition orders and managing building violations.

The institution functions through a structure resembling a ministerial cabinet, composed of military officers overseeing nearly every sphere of civilian life affecting both Palestinians and Israeli settlers. Its departments include archaeology, environmental affairs, legal affairs and land registration, surveying and mapping, nature reserves, labour affairs, welfare coordination, telecommunications and postal services, transportation and public works, energy, land valuation, agriculture, water affairs, and health services. The welfare coordination office, for example, operates through officials linked to the Israeli Ministry of Social Affairs, who coordinate between the Israeli authorities and representatives of the Palestinian Authority.

b. The Higher Planning Council (Hebrew: Mat'a)

One of the central branches of the Israeli Civil Administration, the Higher Planning Council functions as one of the primary institutional mechanisms driving the procedural expansion of the settlement project. Virtually all planning authority in the West Bank is concentrated in the hands of this body. It serves as the central planning institution in the occupied territory, exercising broad powers that include declaring planning zones, approving regional and local master plans, issuing construction and zoning regulations under the framework of Jordanian planning law, and reviewing objections to decisions issued by planning committees. Several subcommittees operate under its authority, including the Settlement Committee, which approves settlement-related projects; the Planning and Licensing Committee, responsible for reviewing Palestinian planning schemes and construction requests in Area C; and the Roads and Infrastructure Committee, which authorizes infrastructure and transportation projects.

In 1971, the Israeli military issued an order granting the Higher Planning Council broad powers to amend, revoke, suspend, or override any planning scheme or permit, as well as the authority to exempt individuals from licensing requirements mandated by law. Because the military order relied on the Jordanian

Planning and Building Law (which had originally placed the Jordanian Minister of the Interior at the head of the planning system), the Israeli military appointed the Staff Officer for Interior Affairs as head of the Higher Planning Council. Although formally attached to the Israeli Civil Administration, this official receives a salary from the Israeli Ministry of the Interior.

The Council's responsibilities include formulating, implementing, and advancing Israeli planning policy in the West Bank; promoting planning schemes through legal planning procedures; providing professional oversight to local planning and construction committees throughout the territory; and offering technical support regarding planning and construction matters to local authorities, professionals, and private developers. Its authority also extends to issuing planning guidelines for the submission of plans to various committees, regulating Palestinian construction and licensing in Area C, approving agricultural construction permits, authorizing projects related to transportation, roads, environmental protection, mining, and quarrying, and supplying planning-related information concerning construction and land use.

Decisions regarding the approval of new settlement housing units are issued through this Council. In 1979, the Higher Planning Council established the "Settlement Subcommittee", specifically dedicated to handling settlement planning throughout the West Bank.³¹

c. Custodian of Government Property and Abandoned Property

This unit was established in 1967 and, since 1981, has operated within the framework of the Israeli Civil Administration. The authority of the Custodian derives from two military orders: the "Order Concerning Government Property (Judea and Samaria) (No. 59) of 1967" and the "Order Concerning Abandoned Property (Private Property) (No. 58) of 1967". Since 1980, the Custodian has served as the principal authority responsible for declaring "state land" and allocating it for the establishment of new settlements. It is estimated that approximately 1.5 million dunams – roughly 26% of the West Bank – could potentially be classified as state land under the Ottoman land laws that continue to operate within the Israeli military legal framework, particularly regarding uncultivated land. Most Israeli settlements in the West Bank have been established specifically on lands designated as state land. The Custodian delegates various governmental and semi-governmental bodies to develop residential settlement projects on these lands, often relying on institutions such as the Jewish Agency for Israel. Under the applicable legal framework, the Custodian grants long-term land leases to the Jewish Agency for the establishment of settlements, gas stations, industrial zones, and road infrastructure.³²

d. Inspection Unit

The Israeli Civil Administration operates an Inspection Unit in the West Bank responsible for enforcing planning, construction, and environmental regulations in Area C. The unit primarily focuses on combating what the Israeli authorities classify as unauthorized Palestinian construction, alongside unlicensed Israeli construction, while also overseeing environmental protection, quarry supervision, the prevention of unauthorized water extraction, and the protection of forests and natural areas. In July 2017, the Inspection Unit began operating unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) over areas administered by the Palestinian Authority as part of its enforcement activities, including monitoring and enforcement related to environmentally polluting charcoal production activities.³³

³¹ "Definition, Summary, and Structure of the Planning Office in Judea and Samaria," [Hebrew] *Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria*, 30/9/2024, accessed on 21/11/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/44YAfHW>

³² Israeli Ministry of Intelligence, *The Palestinian Campaign on Area C - Shaping a New Reality in the Region: Description and Implications* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: 2021), accessed on 10/7/2025, at: <https://bit.ly/4lnzPkc>

³³ Yuli Kaminsky, "Watch: Drones in the Service of the Civil Administration," [Hebrew] *Channel 7* (Israel), 4/6/2024, accessed on 21/11/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/465xSnQ>

e. The State Land Delimitation Committee in the West Bank (“Blue Line Committee”)

The “Blue Line Committee” was established in 1999 within the framework of the Israeli Civil Administration to review and verify the boundaries of lands declared as “state land” in the West Bank. The Committee emerged in response to demands from Civil Administration experts for more precise demarcation of government lands after concerns were raised regarding inaccuracies in previously drawn boundaries, many of which relied on outdated or imprecise maps. The Committee includes representatives from multiple branches of the Civil Administration, including the Planning Unit, the Land Registration Office, the Survey and Infrastructure Unit, and legal advisors. It operates under the supervision of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT). According to its officially declared mandate, the Committee’s primary responsibility is to review lands classified as state land in order to ensure that they do not overlap with privately owned Palestinian lands. It also reviews development and planning permits issued in relation to these areas. In addition, the Committee prepares expert reports in cases involving legal challenges to land evacuations and provides legal assessments regarding land ownership claims and previous land use. The Committee’s activities undergo ongoing legal and administrative review to ensure that land-related procedures conform to Israeli legal frameworks and to the international legal standards invoked in relation to land confiscation and land use. Its work remains subject to oversight by Israeli legal and executive authorities in order to avoid potential conflicts with private property claims.³⁴

Organizations of the Religious Zionist Movement

Religious Zionism constitutes an ideological current within the broader Zionist movement grounded in a nationalist political vision that advocates the establishment and consolidation of Jewish sovereignty across the entirety of the biblical Land of Israel. In contrast to many ultra-Orthodox Haredi interpretations (which hold that the redemption of the Jewish people and the land will occur only with the coming of the Messiah), Religious Zionism promotes active political intervention to achieve Jewish sovereignty. Within this ideological framework, many adherents interpreted Israel’s “victory” in the 1967 war and its “return” to Judea and Samaria as a profound act of redemption and a divine signal that the time had arrived for Jews to settle the whole Land of Israel. The central spiritual and ideological figure associated with this current was Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891–1982), one of the leading rabbis of Religious Zionism and a major advocate of the doctrine of Greater Israel.³⁵ Although the Religious Zionist movement underwent multiple transformations over its long historical trajectory (particularly after 1967 and the emergence of the Gush Emunim movement in 1974), it also experienced significant internal tensions between older and younger generations. The younger generation increasingly adopted more radical positions and embraced more confrontational and violent approaches toward Palestinians. Among the most significant Religious Zionist organizations, institutions, and political parties active as of 2024 are the following:

a. The Yesha Council

The Yesha Council is officially known as the Council of Jewish Settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. It was established on 24 December 1980 by Yisrael Harel and functions as the umbrella organization representing the leadership of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, excluding Jerusalem. The Council was created to promote settlement expansion, represent settler interests, and defend the legitimacy and strategic importance of the settlement project both domestically and internationally. The Council has played a major role in advancing the settlement enterprise by coordinating closely with successive Israeli

³⁴ See: “Report by the Coordinator’s Unit on the work of the Committee,” [Hebrew] Government of Israel, 2016, accessed on 28/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPPy>

³⁵ Walid Habbas, “al-Ḥardaliyya: al-Tayyār al-Mutazammit Dīniyyan, al-Mutaṭarriḥ Qawmiyyan wa-l-Muḥāfiẓ Thaqāfiyyan,” in: Honaida Ghanim (ed.), *al-Yamīn al-Jadīd fī Isrā’īl: Mashrū’ al-Haymana al-Shāmila* (Ramallah: Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies – MADAR, 2023), pp. 187–218.

governments, leading campaigns to secure funding for infrastructure projects, and opposing governmental decisions perceived as obstacles to settlement expansion. It strongly supports the annexation of the West Bank, particularly Area C, and opposes political initiatives or peace proposals that could lead to the recognition of a Palestinian state, including proposals associated with former US President Donald Trump. It has also participated in campaigns aimed at integrating major settlements (such as Ma'ale Adumim) more fully into Israel's political and administrative framework. In addition, it successfully campaigned for the removal of international monitoring mechanisms such as the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), portraying them as hostile to Israel. Over the years, the Council has consistently maintained a hardline position opposing territorial concessions, and continues to advocate the expansion and normalization of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.

b. Amana

Amana was established in 1979 as a settlement movement affiliated with Gush Emunim. Its objective is to promote Jewish settlement in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, the Galilee, and the Negev. Since 1989, the organization has been headed by Zeev Hever, widely known by his nickname "Zambish". Amana implements construction projects in the West Bank through its subsidiary company "Binyanei Bar Amana". Its activities include encouraging settler migration, planning and establishing new settlements, and providing support to local authorities within the regional settlement councils. In 2017, the organization announced a long-term strategic vision aimed at settling one million Jews in the West Bank. It has also participated in establishing new settlements in the Golan Heights, the Gaza envelope region, and the Galilee panhandle. The organization has faced legal criticism regarding its receipt of public funds from local settlement authorities in the West Bank. However, the Supreme Court of Israel approved its eligibility to receive such funding on the grounds that it functions as a public organization dedicated to encouraging settlement activity. In June 2024, the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs imposed sanctions on Amana in connection with its role in supporting illegal settlement expansion in the West Bank. The organization currently oversees numerous settlements housing approximately 140,000 settlers (around 27% of the settler population), as well as a significant number of unauthorized settlement outposts.

c. Nahala Movement

Nahala was established in 2005 by Moshe Levinger and Daniella Weiss as an offshoot of Gush Emunim. The movement advocates the settlement of the "Greater Land of Israel" through public mobilization, settlement construction, demonstrations, and grassroots activism. In its early stages, the movement consisted of two branches ("Trustees of the Land of Israel" and "Youth for the Land of Israel"), before later adopting the name "Nahala Settlement Movement". The organization's activities focus primarily on the West Bank, Gaza, and, to a lesser extent, the Galilee. Nahala emerged largely as a reaction to the evacuation of the Gush Katif settlements from the Gaza Strip in 2005. The movement opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state and promotes the vision of a single state under Jewish sovereignty. Nahala actively encourages the establishment of new settlements and engages in fundraising campaigns aimed at purchasing land from Palestinians in order to expand settlement activity in the West Bank. It also organizes initiatives intended to strengthen the connection between Jewish diaspora communities and the settlement project in the occupied territories.

d. Regavim

Regavim is a right-wing Israeli organization founded in 2006 with the stated objective of promoting a "Jewish and Zionist agenda for the State of Israel in matters of land and environment". According to its declared mission, the organization seeks to protect what it defines as the lands of the Jewish people and

the natural resources and landscape of the Land of Israel. Its director-general, Meir Deutsch, together with many of the organization's staff members, monitors Palestinian construction activities (classified by Israeli authorities as "illegal") both inside Israel and in the occupied territories. The organization campaigns against what it describes as the "illegal seizure" of Jewish national lands in the West Bank and against alleged misuse of natural resources throughout what it calls the "Land of Israel". Among its founders was Bezalel Smotrich. Regavim focuses heavily on documenting "unauthorized" Palestinian construction in areas such as the Naqab/Negev, the Galilee, and Area C of the West Bank, and regularly transfers this information to the Israeli enforcement authorities. The organization also files legal petitions concerning environmental violations, including illegal dumping sites and river pollution, and cooperates with organizations such as Green Now, as well as with local authorities in the Galilee and the Naqab/Negev. Beyond field monitoring, Regavim is deeply involved in policy research, parliamentary lobbying, and the drafting of political position papers, and has participated in governmental committees. In 2017, the organization played a role in advancing the "Kaminitz Law", which strengthened enforcement mechanisms against unlicensed construction in Arab communities inside Israel. In 2019, it led political lobbying efforts to prevent the law's repeal during discussions surrounding the dissolution of the 22nd Knesset.

e. Guardians of Judea and Samaria

Guardians of Judea and Samaria was established in 2013 to support settler farmers in the West Bank and has become one of the most prominent organizations involved in promoting and sustaining pastoral settlement expansion. The organization provides both individual and group volunteers, who are deployed for nighttime guarding and security activities; it also supplies equipment and logistical support for livestock and agricultural farming operations. The grazing areas operating under the organization's supervision extend across hundreds of thousands of dunams throughout the West Bank, making pastoral settlement one of the most significant contemporary mechanisms for territorial expansion and land control.

The Governmental and Ministerial Role of Israel

Since 1967, and especially under successive governments led by Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli policy increasingly moved toward explicit annexationist objectives aimed at securing long-term Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank. However, the major developments that unfolded after 2023 significantly reshaped both the nature and scale of this support.

This shift became particularly visible through a series of structural changes within Israel's administrative and legal frameworks that facilitate the new phase of settlement expansion. One of the clearest examples is the memorandum of understanding concerning the division of authority between Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Bezalel Smotrich, who was appointed an additional minister within the Ministry of Defense with responsibility for civilian affairs in the West Bank. Signed in February 2023, the agreement granted Smotrich extensive governing powers over settlement administration and transferred broad aspects of settlers' daily governance from military authority to civilian structures. As a result, Smotrich acquired effective control over major aspects of settlers' everyday life in the West Bank, contributing to the normalization of the settlers' presence while simultaneously marginalizing Palestinians and confining them to increasingly fragmented and restricted geographic spaces.³⁶

One of the central structural transformations involved the establishment of the "Settlement Administration" within the Ministry of Defense, which assumed many powers previously held by the Israeli Civil Administration. These transferred powers include authority over land use, building permits, and

³⁶ Habbas, "Isrā'īl wa-l-Mas'ala al-Filasṭīniyya."

infrastructure development in settlements, effectively shifting civilian governance away from direct military oversight. Consequently, Israeli settlers in the West Bank increasingly operate under a civilian administrative framework similar to that governing Israeli citizens inside Israel's pre-1967 borders. Palestinians, by contrast, continue to live under military rule, while Smotrich's policies focus on reducing their demographic and territorial presence in Area C.³⁷

The Israeli government's broader vision, as articulated in its official policy guidelines, openly advocates the application of full Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank and the consolidation of Jewish supremacy throughout the territory. These objectives have been pursued through legal and administrative reforms, including amendments to Government Decision No. 150, which reduced the level of political oversight required for settlement expansion approvals. The amendment enabled settlements to expand demographically and geographically with minimal bureaucratic constraints, thereby deepening Israeli territorial control.

In parallel, the government has invested heavily in improving settlers' quality of life through major infrastructure projects, including roads and tourism development, while simultaneously reducing enforcement against unauthorized settlement activities. During the same period, ideologically motivated violence directed against Palestinians has escalated substantially, frequently without meaningful legal accountability. The government has also expanded the arming of settlers, contributing to increased and persistent intimidation, harassment, and displacement targeting Palestinian communities.

Taken together, the extensive legal, structural, and financial reforms advanced by the current government reflect a systematic effort to transform the governing regime in the West Bank in ways that consolidate Israeli sovereignty, undermine forms of Palestinian self-rule rejected by the governing coalition, and reduce or displace the Palestinian presence. This transformation represents a new stage in the Israeli settlement project and requires the Israeli government to be understood not merely as a supporter of settlements, but as a central architect of a broader annexationist agenda.

The Israeli Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of Israel has played a central role in legitimizing and consolidating Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank through a series of judicial rulings and legal decisions that have supported the establishment and entrenchment of settlements since the occupation of the territory in 1967. In the Elon Moreh case of 1979, for example, the Court accepted Israel's seizure of Palestinian land on the grounds of "national security", thereby providing legal justification for the establishment of settlements on privately owned Palestinian land. The ruling subsequently became one of the principal legal foundations used by the state in later settlement projects.³⁸

In 2005, the Court also upheld the construction of the separation wall, whose route incorporated numerous settlements within its boundaries and effectively resulted in the fragmentation of Palestinian areas and the de facto annexation of additional land. Despite the severe impact of the wall on Palestinian daily life, the Court justified its position through security-based arguments.³⁹

In 2011, the Court supported legislation permitting the confiscation of Palestinian land for purposes defined as serving the "public good", thereby providing settlers with legal cover for taking control of privately owned land, despite the fact that such measures conflict with international legal principles prohibiting an

³⁷ Yesh Din, *The Silent Overhaul: Changing the Nature of Israeli Control in the West Bank Analysis of the Israeli Government's Annexation Policy* (Jerusalem: Boulder, Colorado: Yesh Din, Ofek, Breaking the Silence, ACRI, 2024), accessed on 7/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPYy>

³⁸ On the importance of the Supreme Court ruling in the Elon Moreh case over the Israeli army occupying land in the West Bank, see: Yarden Hafir, "1979 – The Elon Moreh Case at the Supreme Court," [Hebrew] *Report*, Israeli Army, accessed on 7/9/2025, at: <https://short-link.me/MnIL>

³⁹ Sawsan Zaher, *Qarārāt al-Mahkama al-'Ulyā al-Isrā'īliyya bi-Sha'n al-Arāqī al-Filasṭīniyya al-Muḥtalla*, Salim Salama (Ramallah: Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies – MADAR, 2021).

occupying power from exploiting the land of the occupied population for non-military purposes.⁴⁰ Reference should also be made to the “Pompeo Doctrine” announced by the administration of Donald Trump, which declared Israeli settlements to be “not inconsistent with international law”. The declaration partly relied on what it described as respect for the Israeli judicial system. Ironically, this “respect” rested on a misleading portrayal of the Israeli Supreme Court as a protector of Palestinian rights, whereas in practice the Court has repeatedly supported settlement expansion and contributed to the institutional consolidation of Israeli control over the occupied territories.⁴¹

International Law on Settlements and the Israeli Occupation

Under international law, Israel is regarded as an “occupying power” in the Palestinian territories it occupied in 1967.⁴² This designation does not necessarily dismiss or negate analyses that understand Israel as a settler-colonial power that established itself through the colonization of Palestinian land in 1948. Rather, the terminology used in international legal instruments specifically refers to the “Palestinian territories” occupied in 1967 (namely the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip), rather than to historic Palestine as a whole. Israel was established in 1948 on approximately 78 percent of the territory of historic Palestine.

Numerous international conventions and legal instruments have defined the concept of belligerent occupation and established regulations governing the duties and responsibilities of both the occupying power and the population living under occupation. These include the Hague Conventions of 1907, the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions. Legal opinions, such as the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice regarding the separation wall, as well as statements issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross and resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, are also frequently invoked in discussions of the Israeli occupation.

Belligerent occupation refers to the effective control exercised by hostile armed forces over foreign territory. Such occupation falls under international legal frameworks designed to protect the rights of populations living under occupation. International law provides a comprehensive framework regulating the conduct of military occupation with the aim of balancing the security considerations of the occupying authority against the rights and welfare of the civilian population in the occupied territory. Here, the term “rights” refers to rights as understood in terms of international human rights principles, rather than to claims of “historical rights”, which are defined by distinct political and historical contexts.

According to international law, the principal characteristics of military occupation include the following:

1. The occupation is temporary in nature

International law, drawing on the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention, establishes that an occupying power must administer occupied territory on a temporary basis without fundamentally altering its legal structure or demographic composition. This principle rests on the understanding that occupation is inherently non-permanent and that any substantial transformations – particularly attempts at annexation – constitute clear violations of international legal norms. Article 43 of

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “al-Wilāyāt al-Muttaḥida Ta’ūd li-Tu’līn anna al-Isṭīyāt fī al-Ḍaffa al-Gharbiyya ‘Ghayr Shar’ī’: Qirā’a fī Mawqif al-Wilāyāt al-Muttaḥida min Qadiyyat al-Isṭīyāt 1977-2024,” *Situation Assessment*, Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies – MADAR, 6/3/2024, accessed on 2/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPYp>

⁴² Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, “Israel’s Belligerent Occupation of the Palestinian Territories, including Jerusalem and International Humanitarian Law,” Paper Presented to the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to 4th Geneva Convention on Measures to Enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including Jerusalem, 15 July 1999, Geneva, accessed on 26/11/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPYI>

the Hague Regulations requires the occupying authority to take the necessary measures to restore and ensure public order, while Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the individual or mass transfer or deportation of protected persons from occupied territory under any circumstances.⁴³ These provisions are widely invoked to affirm the illegality of altering the legal or demographic status of occupied territory.

2. No transfer of sovereignty over occupied territory

This principle holds that occupied territory retains a temporary legal status and that the occupying power may neither annex it nor integrate it into its sovereign territory. The Hague Regulations affirm that military occupation does not confer sovereignty upon the occupying state and that it is defined solely by the exercise of effective control without altering the political status of the territory. In its 2004 advisory opinion, the International Court of Justice emphasized that the construction of the separation wall and the establishment of settlements violate the principle prohibiting the acquisition or imposition of sovereignty over occupied territory and undermine the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.⁴⁴

3. Transferring the population of the occupying power into occupied territory is prohibited

International law prohibits an occupying power from transferring its own civilian population into occupied territory or encouraging its civilians to settle there. Article 49(6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention states that an occupying power may not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territories it occupies. This prohibition aims to prevent demographic transformations that undermine the rights of the indigenous population and render the occupation more permanent in character. The International Committee of the Red Cross interprets this prohibition broadly to include both direct and indirect measures, such as the construction of settlements and the provision of incentives encouraging civilian migration into occupied territory. In its 2004 advisory opinion, the International Court of Justice reaffirmed that the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories constitutes a clear violation of this provision.

Both the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Security Council have repeatedly affirmed the illegality of Israeli settlements in the territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and have stressed that these settlements possess no legal validity under international law. Accordingly, both bodies have repeatedly called for a halt to the construction of new settlements, an end to the expansion of existing ones, and the dismantling of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem (Appendix 1-1).

Among the most significant international resolutions concerning the Israeli occupation is United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, adopted after the 1967 war.⁴⁵ The resolution affirms the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and calls for the “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict”. It also calls for acknowledgment of the right of every state in the region to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries.

Similarly, United Nations Security Council Resolution 446 directly addressed the issue of Israeli settlements and declared that Israel's policy and practice of establishing settlements in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 “have no legal validity”. The resolution explicitly called upon Israel to

⁴³ Geneva Convention (IV), *Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*, 1949, Article 49, accessed on 5/11/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zQAC>

⁴⁴ International Court of Justice, *Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 2004, para. 117, accessed on 5/11/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GP3n>

⁴⁵ United Nations, Security Council, *Resolution 242 [on a Peaceful and accepted Settlement of the Middle East Situation]*, S/RES/242 (New York: 1967), accessed on 9/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPkn>

cease transferring its civilian population into occupied territory,⁴⁶ emphasizing that such actions violate Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits precisely these practices.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 452 further reinforced the international position rejecting Israeli settlements by urging the Israeli government to cease the establishment, construction, and planning of settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem.⁴⁷ The resolution reaffirmed that Israel's policy on settlement in the occupied territories is illegal and called on Israel to comply with previous Security Council resolutions. This position was reiterated once again in United Nations Security Council Resolution 465, which reaffirmed the illegality of Israeli settlements and called upon all states not to provide Israel with any assistance connected to settlements in the occupied territories.⁴⁸ The resolution further emphasized the necessity of dismantling existing settlements and halting all settlement planning and construction activities.

Numerous additional United Nations resolutions, deliberations, and preambular statements have consistently repeated this international position. One of the most recent and significant was United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, adopted in 2016, which reaffirmed that all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories must cease immediately and completely.⁴⁹ In 2019, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination concluded in its report concerning Israel that Israeli settlements in both the West Bank and East Jerusalem violate international law and constitute “an obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights without discrimination based on national or ethnic origin for the population as a whole”.⁵⁰ This assessment came despite the already explicit prohibitions regarding settlements in international law and the repeated condemnations issued by the United Nations Security Council through its resolutions and recommendations.⁵¹

On 19 July 2024, the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, issued what has widely been regarded as its strongest advisory opinion concerning the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. The Court declared that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, including the settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, is unlawful and must end immediately. The President of the Court stated that the settlements and the system associated with them had been “established and are being maintained in violation of international law”.

The advisory opinion further held that Israel bears responsibility for providing reparations for damages inflicted upon Palestinians and explicitly included the obligation to evacuate all settlers from the existing settlements. The opinion therefore represents a major reinforcement of international legal principles while simultaneously increasing international pressure on Israel and weakening legal and diplomatic support for the continuation of the occupation.

The Court additionally affirmed that the United Nations Security Council, the United Nations General Assembly, and all states are obligated not to recognize the legality of the occupation. It also emphasized

⁴⁶ United Nations, Security Council, *Resolution 446 [on Establishment of a Commission to Examine the Situation Relating to Settlements in the Arab Territories Occupied by Israel]*, S/RES/446 (New York: 1979), accessed on 7/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPdK>

⁴⁷ United Nations, Security Council, *Resolution 252 [on the Status of Jerusalem]*, S/RES/252 (New York: 1968), accessed on 9/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GQ0t>

⁴⁸ United Nations, Security Council, *Resolution 465 [on Israeli Settlement Policies in the Occupied Territories]*, S/RES/465 (New York: 1980), accessed on 7/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPZp>

⁴⁹ United Nations, Security Council, *Resolution 2334*, S/RES/2334 (New York: 2016), accessed on 7/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPkK>

⁵⁰ Committee of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Concluding Observations on the Combined Seventeenth to Nineteenth Reports of Israel*, CERD/C/ISR/CO/17-19 (New York: 2020), para. 9, accessed on 7/7/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPiD>

⁵¹ United Nations, Security Council, *Resolution 252*; United Nations, Security Council, *Resolution 2334*.

that states must refrain from providing any aid or assistance that could contribute to maintaining Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territories.⁵²

Conclusion

The Israeli settlement project in the West Bank has evolved into one of the most enduring and sophisticated settler-colonial formations of the contemporary era. From its earliest stages, the project combined military rule with civilian colonization. Over time, however, it gradually transformed from an occupation administered primarily through military logic into an expansive settler-colonial regime organized around permanent Jewish sovereignty and the progressive fragmentation of Palestinian existence. The cumulative result is a multilayered settlement architecture that encompasses urban settlements, agricultural outposts, industrial zones, bypass roads, military infrastructure, nature reserves, surveillance systems, biblical parks, and segregated mobility networks.

The transformation of the Israeli occupation from a paradigm of “conflict management” toward the production of displacement conditions marks a structural shift in the logic of Israeli rule in the West Bank. Earlier Israeli strategies sought to stabilize the occupation through controlled coercion and limited Palestinian self-administration while facilitating the gradual expansion of settlement. The contemporary settlement project, however, has moved beyond the paradigm of incremental expansion alongside Palestinian presence toward an operative logic grounded in a zero-sum relationship with Palestinian existence itself. Within this framework, displacement emerges as a cumulative condition embedded in everyday life. In this context, the widespread appearance of signs across the West Bank declaring “No Future in Palestine” carries profound significance. These signs condense the historical trajectory examined throughout this article into a single political message.

Figure (1): “No Future in Palestine” Settler Billboard on the Ramallah–Nablus Road in the Occupied West Bank in 2024



Source: “Asa Winstanley (@AsaWinstanley),” X, 8/12/2024, accessed on 20/5/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2sSe>

⁵² International Court of Justice, *Summary of the Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024: Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem* (The Hague: 19/7/2024), accessed on 5/11/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPqr>

The growing dominance of the religious-Zionist and messianic current within the institutions governing settlement expansion carries implications that exceed conventional electoral or ideological shifts within Israeli politics. This transformation reflects the relocation of the settlement project from the margins of Israeli political life into the centre of state power and bureaucratic authority. The contemporary settlement enterprise no longer depends exclusively on military institutions or pragmatic security doctrines. It increasingly derives legitimacy from theological and redemptive frameworks that interpret Jewish sovereignty over the entirety of the land as a sacred historical obligation.

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