



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Situation Assessment | 10 September 2025

What Does Israel's Planned Annexation of the West Bank Mean for the Palestinian National Project?

Unit for Political Studies

What Does Israel's Planned Annexation of the West Bank Mean for the Palestinian National Project?

Series: **Situation Assessment**

10 September 2025

Unit for Political Studies

The Unit for Political Studies is the Center's department dedicated to the study of the region's most pressing current affairs. An integral and vital part of the ACRPS' activities, it offers academically rigorous analysis on issues that are relevant and useful to the public, academics and policy-makers of the Arab region and beyond. The Unit for Political Studie draws on the collaborative efforts of a number of scholars based within and outside the ACRPS. It produces three of the Center's publication series: Assessment Report, Policy Analysis, and Case Analysis reports. .

Copyright © 2025 Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All Rights Reserved.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is an independent research institute and think tank for the study of history and social sciences, with particular emphasis on the applied social sciences.

The Center's paramount concern is the advancement of Arab societies and states, their cooperation with one another and issues concerning the Arab nation in general. To that end, it seeks to examine and diagnose the situation in the Arab world - states and communities- to analyze social, economic and cultural policies and to provide political analysis, from an Arab perspective.

The Center publishes in both Arabic and English in order to make its work accessible to both Arab and non-Arab researchers.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat

Al-Dayeen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

www.dohainstitute.org

Table of Contents

Entrenching Annexation and Ending the Prospect of a Political Settlement 1

The Smotrich Map 2

The US Position 4

Repercussions of Israel's Annexation for Palestinians 5

Conclusion 6



The occupied West Bank is undergoing rapid political and on-the-ground developments that reflect a fundamental shift in the approach to the conflict established by the 1993 Oslo Accords, which laid the foundation for the Palestinian Authority in the 1967 occupied territories. The current Israeli government, led by religious and far-right extremists, is pushing for annexation of vast areas of Palestinian land, most notably the Jordan Valley. This move is driven by a mix of ideological and security motives and is backed by the United States, at a time when an increasing number of countries worldwide are moving towards recognizing the State of Palestine during the UN General Assembly meetings this month. Meanwhile, settler leaders continue to exert pressure to impose what they call Israeli "sovereignty" over as much of the West Bank as possible, as part of a plan designed to exploit the current political moment to accelerate and entrench annexation.

Entrenching Annexation and Ending the Prospect of a Political Settlement

Successive Israeli governments have instrumentalized the Oslo Accords to expand the settlement project in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, imposing new realities on the ground that preclude a two-state solution. This has culminated in what is known as the "decisive plan" (or subjugation plan), based on annexing and imposing Israeli sovereignty over the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967.¹ In parallel, the Israeli occupation continues to escalate militarily in the West Bank, which, since the launch of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood in October 2023, has killed more than 1,032 Palestinians left nearly 7,000 others injured. In addition, more than 18,500 people have been arrested.² The military operations and raids of towns and villages across the West Bank represent a re-occupation of the territory.

On 23 July 2025, the Israeli Knesset approved a draft bill supporting what is termed the "imposition of sovereignty" over the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley, where around 700,000 Israeli settlers reside. The bill passed with a majority of 71 votes against just 13.³ Although this measure does not amount to binding legislation – it is instead a declaratory position without legal force, as the Israeli government alone retains the authority to enact annexation decisions – it nevertheless constitutes a serious indication of the current government's direction. In addition, the Israeli government's Subcommittee on Settlement Affairs, chaired by the ultra far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, approved an old plan for construction in the West Bank area known as "E1", which includes the establishment of around 3,400 new settlement units. This plan aims to expand the Ma'ale Adumim settlement and link it to Jerusalem, a move that would in practice sever the northern West Bank from its south, thereby completely undermining the possibility of establishing a geographically contiguous Palestinian state in the future.⁴

¹ "Bezalel Smotrich: Israel's Decisive Plan", Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestinian Question, accessed on 9/9/2025 at: <https://www.palquest.org/en/historictext/39363/bezalel-smotrich-israels-decisive-plan>

² "Fact Sheet for the First Half of 2025," Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, 14/7/2025, accessed on 8 September 2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GP45>

³ "Knesset Votes 71 - 13 for non-binding Motion Calling to Annex West Bank," *The Times of Israel*, 23/7/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPqk>

⁴ "Israel Approves Settlement Plan to Erase Idea of Palestinian State," *Reuters*, 20/8/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPty>



The plan forms part of a wider project led and openly promoted by Smotrich and his team, designed to formally annex the West Bank to Israel, or at least to annex Area C, which is already under full Israeli control under the Oslo Accords. This was further demonstrated by the transfer of the settlement portfolio from the civilian government to the authority of the Ministry of Defence, in an effort to institutionalize state support for settlers and accelerate settlement expansion.⁵ This trajectory aligns with the Israeli Knesset's decision of 18 July 2024 to reject the establishment of a Palestinian state – an unmistakable reflection of Israel's drive to entrench annexation and seal off hopes for any political settlement.⁶

On 2 September 2025, the Israeli Security Cabinet convened a meeting dedicated to examining the possibility of annexing parts of the West Bank. The session was described as a response to ramped up international moves towards recognizing a Palestinian state.⁷ In reality, however, this plan had been prepared in advance, while settlement activity in the West Bank has tripled since the Oslo Accords, rendering the claim of a mere reaction a circumstantial pretext.

The meeting discussed several possible steps, including annexing the major settlement blocs, all settlements, or the entirety of Area C, in addition to considering the annexation of what Israel calls "open areas" (state and common lands) and the Jordan Valley. While some members argued that annexation should be a direct response to the anticipated international recognition of a Palestinian state, others wanted to accelerate the measure as a pre-emptive step ahead of any potential international action. Conversely, a third argument emerged that the annexation of the West Bank should be presented as an independent and radical measure, rather than as a reaction to external pressures.⁸

The Smotrich Map

Smotrich unveiled a proposal providing for the annexation of approximately 82 per cent of the West Bank, based on detailed maps prepared in recent months by the Settlement Directorate of the Israeli Ministry of Defence, illustrating the targeted areas and implementation plans.⁹ This plan constitutes the clearest expression to date of the growing drive within Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government to impose Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank, using the threats by several Western states to recognize a Palestinian state as a pretext to accelerate annexation.

Smotrich represents the most extreme and fascistic current of the Israeli right; he has previously called for wiping entire Palestinian towns "off the map"¹⁰ and argued that "there is no such thing as

5 "IDF Transfers Powers in Occupied West Bank to pro-settler Civil Servants," *The Guardian*, 20/6/2024, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPYo>

6 "Knesset Votes Overwhelmingly against Palestinian Statehood, Days before PM's US Trip," *The Times of Israel*, 18/7/2024, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPfr>

7 "Netanyahu Said to Mull Annexing West Bank Parts in Response to Palestine Recognition," *The Times of Israel*, 2/9/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPCL>

8 "Israeli Prime Minister to Convene Session on Annexation of Occupied West Bank," *Anadolu Agency*, 2/9/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPYR>

9 "Israel's Smotrich Says He Is Drawing up West Bank Annexation Maps," *Reuters*, 3/9/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPVW>

10 "Palestine's Huwara should be wiped out: Top Israeli minister", *Al Jazeera*, 1/3/23, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/1/israel-arrests-settlers-after-anti-palestinian-pogrom>

a Palestinian people."¹¹ The map he unveiled illustrated a vision of the West Bank after annexation, showing six small, scattered population clusters within the West Bank's 5,680 km² area, which in itself only amounts to about 21 per cent of historic Palestine. According to these plans, which Smotrich presented in the presence of the heads of West Bank settlement councils, around 82 per cent of the West Bank would come under Israeli control, while Palestinians would be left with just 18 per cent, concentrated in the densely populated areas classified as Area A. The plan further excludes four principal cities – Salfit, Tubas, Bethlehem and Qalqilya – from the proposed Palestinian areas.

These plans reflect a drive to transform what remains of Palestinian land into fragmented localized civic entities devoid of national substance – an effort aimed at undermining the very idea of Palestinian nationhood. This is coupled with direct threats against the Palestinian Authority, with Smotrich declaring that any attempt to resist the annexation project would be met with the destruction of the Palestinian Authority. His plan rests on the principle of "maximum land, minimum Arabs", implicitly signaling intent to push Palestinians towards displacement in order to advance the settlement enterprise.¹² Those who remain would be left under limited municipal administrations with restricted powers.¹³

The project builds upon infrastructure that Israel has established over decades, centred on the settlement network designed to fragment the West Bank and obstruct the creation of a geographically contiguous Palestinian state.¹⁴ The plan is accompanied by a set of calculated practical measures, including the arming of settlers to consolidate control over land and to terrorize the local population; assaults on Palestinian farmers and the burning of their property; the establishment of hundreds of isolated enclaves cut off by iron gates at the entrances to towns and villages, which the Israeli army can close at any moment; and the deployment of an extensive network of permanent and temporary checkpoints that severely restrict freedom of movement. Since the outbreak of the war on Gaza, the pace of establishing new agricultural settlements on vast tracts of Palestinian land has accelerated, under the pretext of converting them into grazing grounds for settlers' livestock.

Since being granted broad powers over the settlement portfolio by Netanyahu in January 2023,¹⁵ Smotrich has worked to undermine Palestinian presence geographically, administratively and economically, while supporting plans to settle around one million Israelis in the West Bank over the coming years. He has pushed for the legal and administrative integration of the settlements, thereby erasing the current borders between the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel. He issued direct

11 Hadas Gold, "Israeli minister says there's 'no such thing as a Palestinian people,' inviting US rebuke", *CNN*, 21/3/2023, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/21/middleeast/israel-smotrich-palestinians-intl>

12 Elisha Ben Kimon, "Smotrich: If Palestinian Authority raises its head, we will destroy it like Hamas", *Ynet*, 3/9/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/b1dxafhqle>

13 "Smotrich calls for annexing the West Bank and threatens the PA with 'annihilation,'" *Al Jazeera*, 3/11/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GQ1Q>

14 For example, many road restrictions allow settlers to move separately from the Palestinian population and strengthen the interconnectedness of the settlements while simultaneously isolating Palestinian areas from one another. See: "Forbidden Roads Israel's Discriminatory Road Regime in the West Bank," B'TSELEM, August 2004, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPXC>

15 "Israeli pro-settler Minister Formally Gains West Bank Powers," *Reuters*, 23/2/2023, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GP1q>

instructions to the settlement administration to prepare plans for annexation, asserting that 2025 "will be the year of sovereignty in the West Bank."¹⁶

The US Position

Although the Israeli army is stretched thin in both manpower and resources, with its emergency plans under growing strain as the war in Gaza drags on, Netanyahu's government regards the current moment as a favourable opportunity to impose a new security and political reality. It seeks to take advantage of the Trump administration, as well as the muted and apathetic reactions of Arab and Muslim states to the acts of genocide Israel has been perpetrating in Gaza for nearly two years.

Washington's alignment with the Israeli right stands as one of the key factors encouraging Israel to press forward with its plans to annex parts of the West Bank. The Trump administration has adopted a justificatory narrative, claiming that European moves to recognize a Palestinian state compel Israel to pursue annexation as a counter-step. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio made this stance explicit, affirming his conviction in the necessity of annexation and voicing openly extreme positions in support of Israel.¹⁷ Alongside this, the US has taken punitive measures against the Palestinian Authority to pressure European states to reconsider their positions. These measures included suspending visas for Palestinian officials – including President Mahmoud Abbas – who were scheduled to attend the UN General Assembly.¹⁸

By contrast, Europe's ability to exert meaningful pressure on Israel appears limited. European states have not deployed the tools theoretically at their disposal, such as suspending Israel's partnership with the European Union. While symbolic recognition of a Palestinian state carries political significance, it does not alter the facts on the ground. From this perspective, Washington's decision to bar the Palestinian Authority from taking part in UN meetings forms part of a coordinated effort with Tel Aviv to weaken the Authority's international standing. This, in turn, provides Netanyahu's government with a political shield that allows it to advance its annexation plans without serious fear of international isolation or punitive sanctions.

It is evident that the matter of West Bank annexation has taken on a prominent place in political discussions between Israel and the US, paving the way for concrete steps to be announced in the coming months. In late August 2025, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar informed his counterpart in Washington that Israel was moving decisively towards asserting sovereignty over the West Bank.¹⁹ Rubio, for his part, refused to join international condemnations of the Israeli government's actions,

¹⁶ Neomi Neumann "While Other Countries Push for a Palestinian State, Israel Is Increasing Its West Bank Presence," *Policy Analysis*, The Washington Institute, 6/6/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPmh>

¹⁷ Jacob Magid, "Rubio: US Warned Recognizing Palestine Would Lead to 'Reciprocal' Israeli Response," *The Times of Israel*, 5/9/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPmv>

¹⁸ Kanishka Singh & Ali Sawafta, "US Bars Palestinian Leader Abbas from UN as Allies Back Statehood," *Reuters*, 30/8/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPWF>

¹⁹ "Israeli Foreign Minister Tells American Counterpart of Plans to Annex Occupied West Bank: Media," *Middle East Monitor*, 31/8/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GP1g>

remarking that "What you're seeing with the West Bank and the annexation, that's not a final thing – that's something being discussed among some elements of Israeli politics. I'm not going to opine on that today".²⁰

and asserted that "European measures against Israel are pushing growing sectors within it to consider seriously the annexation of parts of the area." This underscored the political and strategic dimensions of the visit, which extended well beyond its proclaimed symbolic nature.

In the same vein, the US ambassador to Israel, prominent evangelical figure Mike Huckabee, paid a visit to the settlement of Efrat south of Bethlehem, officially described as a "social" call. He attended Sabbath prayers in a local synagogue. The head of the settlement council, Dovi Sheffler, described the visit as an expression of moral support that bolstered the settlement enterprise. Notably, Huckabee referred to the area as "Judea and Samaria" rather than the West Bank, echoing Israeli colonial rhetoric. He also asserted that any European recognition of a Palestinian state would push Israel to declare sovereignty over parts of the West Bank,²¹ underscoring the political and strategic significance of the visit, which clearly extended well beyond the symbolic character publicly ascribed to it.

Repercussions of Israel's Annexation for Palestinians

Israel's plan to annex the West Bank places the Palestinian Authority in an existential crisis. It would transform the PA from a political body into a local administrative apparatus with limited powers, serving only the interests of the occupation. Although the PA has already, in practice, become an "administrative body" carrying the burdens of the occupation in fields such as health and education, its role would become further hollowed out to the management of day-to-day civil affairs, stripped of any political or sovereign dimension. This would undermine its national project and transform it into little more than a "fragmented entity." With annexation, the PA would continue its functions under the supervision of the Israeli military governor, entrenching its loss of any independent role and raising the prospect of its eventual replacement once an alternative is devised.

Over the past two years, Israel's finance minister has introduced a series of stringent financial measures designed to strangle the PA as part of efforts to promote annexation. Chief among these was the suspension of the transfer of 500 million dollars in clearance revenues, which was only restored under pressure from Joe Biden's administration, before being withheld once again.²² In the past four months alone, Smotrich has blocked hundreds of millions of dollars in Palestinian tax revenues,²³ while reinforcing the separation of Palestinian banks from the Israeli financial system.²⁴ These policies have severely weakened the PA, leaving it on the brink of collapse. Domestically,

²⁰ Magid.

²¹ "US Ambassador to Israel Visits Settlement South of Jerusalem," *Al Jazeera*, 31/8/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPeW>

²² Jacob Magid, "Israel, PA Ink Deal to Release \$500 Million in Withheld Palestinian Tax Revenues," *The Times of Israel*, 13/1/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GP4E>

²³ "Israel withholds clearance funds for 4th month, US halts visas for Palestinians," *Middle East Monitor*, 8/9/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250901-israel-withholds-clearance-funds-for-4th-month-us-halts-visas-for-palestinians/>

²⁴ "Israeli Finance Minister Orders Cancellation of Waiver on Cooperation with Palestinian Banks," *Reuters*, 10/6/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPMB>

proposals are circulating to replace the PA in the longer term with local Arab municipalities, echoing the "Village Leagues" created by Israel in 1976 to administer Palestinian areas. A striking example is the plan for a so-called "Hebron Emirate," aimed at stripping the city of any PA presence and transferring its administration to tribal and local figures linked to Israel's Civil Administration.²⁵

If Israel proceeds with these plans, more than three million Palestinians will face the threat of forced displacement – whether through direct military force or via economic and administrative strangulation. The Palestinian challenge therefore extends beyond the question of statehood to the very nature of the existential struggle it faces against the occupying power. Since 7 October 2023, Israel has increasingly framed the conflict in existential terms, reflected in its extreme rhetoric, military policies, and political steps. This underlines the grave risks of large-scale forced displacement of Palestinians not only in the West Bank and Gaza, but potentially also within the "Green Line," the territories occupied by Israel in 1948.

Conclusion

Israel's plan to annex the West Bank represents the end of the Oslo process and undermines the two-state solution, while placing the PA in an existential predicament. At the same time, should Israel proceed with annexing large parts of the West Bank, it will face mounting international criticism and rejection, potentially transforming it into a fully isolated entity. Although annexation remains the subject of internal debate – ranging from limited symbolic measures to a comprehensive plan encompassing Area C and the Jordan Valley – the intentions of the Israeli government are unmistakable. Netanyahu's administration is moving decisively towards annexing parts of the West Bank, even if the final details have not yet been settled.

In parallel, Israel is systematically creating new facts on the ground, diminishing the Palestinian presence and driving communities out of targeted areas. The intensification of discussions around "sovereignty" is not merely a reaction to the growing number of international recognitions of Palestinian statehood, but rather the culmination of a long trajectory that began with the Oslo Accords. At its core, this Israeli step embodies territorial expansion, the obstruction of a viable Palestinian state, and the erasure of all that remains of the Palestinian national project – reducing any international recognition of statehood to a symbolic gesture, devoid of concrete effect.

Over the past two decades, Israel has advanced significantly towards *de facto* sovereignty, establishing what could be described as a "parallel state" in the West Bank. A formal declaration of sovereignty would thus amount to the legal codification of an existing reality. This places the Palestinian national movement before an unprecedented challenge – one that demands bold strategies and measures commensurate with the scale of the threat.

²⁵ "The Occupation Plans to Hand over Hebron to Tribal Rule... and the Families Disavow It," *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 31/8/2025, accessed on 8/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9GPP1>













Endnotes