



THE DRAMATIC ACCELERATION OF ISRAEL'S ANNEXATION POLICY IN THE WEST BANK

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While the world's attention has been focused on the horrors of the Gaza war, 2024 and 2025 have seen record numbers of new settlement units, illegal outposts, home demolitions, expansion on state land, and violent settler attacks in the West Bank. Prime Minister Netanyahu and his extremist coalition have been advancing their messianic Greater Israel agenda in unprecedented ways, threatening any viable future Palestinian state.

Many of the most damaging developments have been administrative, legal, and legislative steps that do not generate headlines, but the impact on prospects for independent Palestinian statehood has been devastating. In particular, the process of effectively annexing much of Area C, which comprises about 60 percent of the West Bank, warrants much closer attention. While the current Israeli government has not officially annexed any land in the West Bank, one state ideologues Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir have driven an accelerated and systematic process of "de facto" annexation to a completely unprecedented level.

While every effort should be made to oppose any de jure annexation, it is important to understand and combat this de facto annexation policy, which is equally damaging to any hopes for a viable Palestinian state.

De jure annexation is the formal extension of Israeli sovereignty and the application of Israeli law, jurisdiction, and administration to areas under military occupation. It requires a vote of approval by the Knesset, which can be achieved with a simple majority. The current Israeli coalition, led by Smotrich and Ben-Gvir, is committed to pursuing de jure annexation of significant portions of the West Bank and even Gaza. They expect that President Trump will green light further annexations, as he had recognized prior Israeli annexations of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. In the meantime, they have systematically implemented a policy designed to achieve the same result.

De facto annexation is the longstanding process of expanding Israeli control over Area C by building new settlements, allowing illegal outposts and retroactively approving them, denying building permits for Palestinians and demolishing Palestinian structures, building transportation infrastructure exclusively for settlers, and declaring significant tracts of the West Bank as Israeli state land. While Area C contains most Israeli settlements, violations have expanded to Area B, which comprises about 22% of the West Bank and is jointly administered by Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

While Israeli expansionism has been going on for decades, the current Netanyahu government has taken it to a whole new level. One of the coalition's most significant, under-the-radar steps was shifting authority over civilian governance in Area C of the West Bank from military commanders to civilian officials directly subordinate to Minister Smotrich, effectively applying Israeli civilian administration over occupied Palestinian territory. This unprecedented transfer

brought Israel closer than ever to de jure annexation, while creating the administrative mechanism to dramatically accelerate and expand the de facto annexation process, including:

The Most Settlements Ever Approved: The new regime streamlined the settlement construction approval process, so that it no longer requires approval of the Prime Minister and the Defense Minister. This has dramatically increased the settlement expansion rate:

- 50,000 settlement units are on track to be approved in 2025 – four times the previous record for a single year ([12,349 in 2023](#)).
- [16,820 units](#) were approved thus far in 2025 – more than in all of 2024.
- On May 29, Israel approved plans to create 22 completely [new settlements](#) in the West Bank, which Foreign Minister Katz [described](#) as “a strategic move that prevents the establishment of a Palestinian state.”

The Most Illegal Outposts Ever Established and Approved: In 2024, a [record 59 new](#) unauthorized outposts were established, and [70 existing](#) illegal outposts began receiving state funding.

- Israel has already legalized [13 outposts](#) in 2025, after approving [15 illegal outposts](#) in 2023. This is a record rate of expansion, as the annual average from 1996-2023 was [under 7](#). For the first time ever, the government legalized [8 outposts](#) in Area B.

Largest Expansion Ever of State Land: Under Smotrich’s oversight, Israel declared a record [24,258 dunams](#) as “state land” in 2024, [doubling the total amount of state land that Israel has claimed in the West Bank since the Oslo Accords](#).

- For the first time, they allocated state lands for grazing by private settler entities, directly threatening the livelihoods of Palestinian communities reliant on these lands.

Record Demolitions in Area C: Israel demolished a record number of Palestinian structures in 2024, with [1,065 Palestinian structures](#) in the West Bank destroyed, including [17 in Area B](#), displacing [857 Palestinians](#).

- This marks a record year for demolitions due to permit issues, surpassing the previous [peak of 870](#) in 2016. In 2024, Israel did not approve a single planning permission request for Palestinian housing.

Record Levels of Settler Violence and Forcible Evictions: There was an unprecedented level of settler violence in 2024, with [at least 1,420](#) incidents of settler violence against Palestinians.

- This a monthly average of [118 incidents](#), up from [108 in 2023](#) – which was already a record-breaking year.

With Ben Gvir in the newly created role of Minister of National Security, there has been increasing coordination between settlers, police, and the IDF, including settler reservists carrying out vigilante operations in uniform. This has enabled settlers to forcibly evict Palestinians from their homes and villages with the tacit – and sometimes overt – support of the Israeli military.

- [At least 277](#) Palestinian households, comprising [1,628 individuals](#) – including [794 children](#) – have already been displaced by settler violence, since October 7, 2023.