

Brief **Annexation on Fast Track:** *Israel's Annexation Measures & Patterns Post 7* *October 2023*

Since the outset of Israel's occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) in 1967, Israel's occupation measures in the West Bank have highlighted the contrast between rule of law and rule by law. Under the rule of law, justice, equality, and accountability are upheld, with legal systems meant to protect rights, limit power, and safeguard human dignity through independent oversight. In contrast, Israel has increasingly relied on rule by law, using legal frameworks instrumentally to legitimize control and oppression. This has been evident in the selective application of laws that privilege settlers while disenfranchising Palestinians, the manipulation of legal justifications for settlement expansion and home demolitions, and the absence of meaningful accountability or remedies for victims. These practices underscore a systemic regime that entrenches domination under the veneer of legality.

As such, Israeli policies in the oPt are actively designed to fragment, weaken, and replace Palestinian governance, particularly the Palestinian Authority (PA,) through a mix of legal, military, and administrative tools.

The West Bank has been subjected to increased Israeli annexation measures that have gone unnoticed, even with their massive gravity and unlawfulness, notably post the events of 7 October 2023, and in light of the global attention being placed on the Gaza Strip. The Israeli annexation measures in the West Bank did not slow down even when major regional developments are taking place, like the Israel-Iran war; rather, they spiked up, and more lands were being unlawfully grabbed and controlled by Israel.

The gravity of Israeli plans towards annexation was demonstrated more recently, as the Israeli finance minister announced in a press conference on 3 September 2025 that maps are being prepared to annex territory in the occupied West Bank.



Annexation Policies in the West Bank Are Not a Recent Development

While annexation has recently come to the forefront in the West Bank, it is in fact the culmination of decades of groundwork laid by Israel to entrench permanent control. Since the 1990s, successive governments have advanced plans such as the E1 settlement project, which would effectively sever East Jerusalem from the West Bank and fragment Palestinian territorial continuity. These measures accelerated sharply during the first Trump presidency (2017 - 2021), when U.S. policy shifts, including recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and tacit support for settlement expansion, emboldened the Israeli Knesset to pass laws and measures towards annexation.

What we see today in the surge of settlement approvals and legal maneuvers is less a new development than the acceleration of a long-standing trajectory toward annexation, carried out through incremental policies, settlement expansion, and the instrumental use of law to normalize permanent occupation



In the aftermath of October 7, the Israeli government has capitalized on global attention being directed toward Gaza to accelerate annexation measures in the West Bank. This has included a surge in settler violence and terror, leading to forcible displacement and denial of access to Palestinian land; the expansion of settlements and construction of new settler-only roads; and an increasingly blurred distinction between settlers and soldiers, with settlers often operating under military protection. At the same time, Israel has issued military orders confiscating vast areas of land and advanced legislative initiatives designed to entrench annexation, such as bills simplifying land acquisition in the oPt, including a proposal allowing Israeli individuals to directly purchase land there. Together, these steps are entrenching irreversible facts on the grounds, accelerating the fragmentation of the West Bank, and undermining the prospects of a viable Palestinian state.

Annexation is **ALREADY** happening in the oPt

While much of the world expects annexation to come in the form of a single formal declaration, in reality it has already been advancing through a gradual and cumulative process; a series of procedural, administrative, legislative, and structural measures. Each of these steps may appear technical or incremental on its own, but together they amount to a systematic strategy that entrenches Israeli control and produces the reality of annexation on the ground. The most prominent measures include:

1. Structural changes in governance:

Israeli rule in the West Bank has shifted from military occupation toward direct civilian governance. Powers once under the military's Civil Administration have been transferred to a civilian body under the Israeli Finance Minister, Smotrich, who appointed a settler as the "Civilian Deputy" to the head of the Civil Administration. Despite the misleading title, this deputy is accountable directly to Smotrich, effectively making him governor of the settlements.

2. Mass land dispossession:

Since the current government took office in December 2022, Israel has declared approximately 25,960 dunums of Palestinian land as "state land", one of the primary tools used to expropriate Palestinian property. Once declared, Palestinians are barred from access or use, while the land is allocated exclusively to settlements and Israeli interests.

3. Approval of new settlements & retroactive legalization (including E1):

The current government has advanced the establishment of 49 new settlements and begun the retroactive legalization of an additional 70 outposts, some for the first time in Area B and even beyond the Annexation Wall. Most alarming is the approval of 3,412 housing units in E1, a plan dating back to the 1990s. The E1 would cut the West Bank in two and sever East Jerusalem from Bethlehem and Ramallah, extinguishing the geographic basis for a viable Palestinian state.

4. Settlement infrastructure:

Between mid-2023 and mid-2024, settlers constructed around 139 new roads totaling 116 km, excluding dozens of kilometers of upgraded tracks and dirt roads. Crucially, nearly 65% of these new roads cut through privately owned Palestinian land, consolidating settlement 'blocs' and further fragmenting Palestinian territorial space.

5. Initiating land registration in Area C of the oPt:

In 2024, the Israeli Security Cabinet approved the initiation of land registration in Area C of the West Bank, a measure prohibited under international humanitarian law for its definitive nature and its objective to assert the sovereignty of the occupying power in occupied territory. This process permanently strips Palestinians of their rights to their lands and represents a hurdle in a future Palestinian state, while simultaneously paving the way for annexation under the guise of 'legal regularization'.



6. Preliminary approval of direct land purchase bill:

In 2024, the Knesset gave preliminary approval to a bill that would allow Israeli citizens to directly purchase land in the oPt. This marks a fundamental shift from the longstanding framework in which land expropriation was carried out through state mechanisms such as “state land” declarations. By opening the door to private Israeli ownership in occupied land, the bill further normalizes annexation and strips Palestinians of collective protection against land dispossession.

7. Extension of Israeli authority into Areas A and B:

Israel has also begun extending its control beyond Area C, issuing demolition orders for Palestinian homes and structures in Areas A and B, often justified under “emergency laws” or the pretext of creating buffer zones for settlement infrastructure. This violates the Oslo framework and underscores Israel’s intent to exercise sovereignty over the entire West Bank, not just the areas formally under its civil and military administration.

International Law

Annexation is the extension of sovereignty by an occupying power into occupied territory, and it is absolutely prohibited under international law. This prohibition is categorical: no derogations are permitted. The position is crystal clear and not open to debate. Each individual Israeli policy in the oPt, whether land confiscation, settlement expansion, or demographic engineering, constitutes one or multiple violations under specific legal frameworks, and there is an abundance of legal analysis and factual documentation establishing their illegality.

Accountability as a Legal Obligation

Annexation, both in its individual policies and as a collective outcome, is illegal under international law and therefore engages clear obligations of accountability. Under international law, third states are legally required to respond to serious breaches such as annexation, not as a matter of choice or policy, but as a binding responsibility. This is articulated in customary international law, international humanitarian law, the UN Charter, and confirmed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

The ICJ Advisory Opinion of July 2024 on the “Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem” reaffirmed that:

- **Israel’s entire presence in the oPt is unlawful.**
- **The international community bears responsibility to take measures to bring this unlawful situation to an end. This includes:**
 - Non-recognition of the annexation regime.
 - No aid or assistance to its maintenance.
 - Examining modalities to end it, including sanctions, suspension or review of trade and cooperation agreements, arms embargoes, downgrading diplomatic relations, and even suspension of Israel’s membership or participation in UN bodies and committees.

Conclusion

- Israel's annexation of the occupied West Bank cannot be understood in isolation of its root cause: Israel's colonization of Palestine, and the stemming unlawful prolonged occupation and apartheid. Failure to address the root cause will only exacerbate violations, their patterns and frequency, with consequences that will extend regionally and globally. As such, countering Israel's annexation measures requires properly understanding its rootedness in colonization and addressing it as such.
- Annexation is a result of global impunity and complicity: Annexation is not solely Israel's crime. It is enabled and sustained by governments and actors who shirk their own binding legal obligations, and in some cases actively shield Israel from accountability measures. Despite the clear prohibitions against annexation and the ICJ's 2024 Advisory Opinion affirming Israel's presence in the oPt as unlawful, many governments continue to maintain preferential trade agreements, supply arms, and provide diplomatic cover that shields Israel from accountability. This selective approach to international law not only entrenches Israel's annexation regime but also corrodes the credibility of the rules-based international order, signaling that powerful allies can exempt themselves and their partners from legal norms.

*The Efrat Settlement, Southwest of Bethlehem, Balasan Initiative 2025

