



WEST BANK UNDER SIEGE

February 23, 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The security and political situation in the West Bank have significantly deteriorated following Israel's Operation "Iron Wall", a large-scale military campaign targeting Palestinian militant networks. Since its launch on January 21, 2025, the offensive has led to over 50 Palestinian deaths, the displacement of approximately 40,000 residents, and the destruction of key infrastructure across multiple refugee camps, including Jenin, Tulkarem, Nur Shams, and Far'a. Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz has announced that Israeli Armed Forces (IAF) will maintain positions in these areas for up to a year, effectively preventing displaced Palestinians from returning. Meanwhile, Israeli military reinforcements have been deployed beyond the northern West Bank, extending into Ramallah, Nablus, and Hebron, further escalating tensions. Reports indicate that the IAF has carried out widespread arrests, targeting activists, journalists, and local political figures, while the expansion of checkpoints, roadblocks, and military outposts has severely restricted movement between Palestinian cities. The increasing militarization of the West Bank and the worsening humanitarian crisis have drawn international condemnation, with concerns mounting over prolonged occupation and violations of international law.

Simultaneously, Israeli settlement expansion has intensified, with the government approving the construction of over 1,000 new housing units in contested areas, resulting in further forced displacement of Palestinian communities. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's push for the formal annexation of the West Bank has exacerbated diplomatic tensions, while armed Israeli settlers, frequently backed by the IAF, have engaged in violent attacks on Palestinian villages, including arson and land seizures. The Palestinian Authority (PA) has struggled to maintain governance as Israel's annexation efforts gain traction. Additionally, access between key areas such as the Allenby Bridge, East Jerusalem, and Ramallah has become increasingly restricted due to heightened Israeli security measures, severely impacting Palestinian trade, employment, and mobility. With no signs of de-escalation, the continuation of military operations, settlement growth, and movement restrictions will likely exacerbate instability and increase the risk of a broader regional crisis.



ISRAELI MILITARY OPERATIONS AND PROLONGED PRESENCE

OVERVIEW

Since January 21, 2025, Israel has significantly intensified its military operations in the northern West Bank axis named Operation "Iron Wall", a large-scale campaign aimed at dismantling Palestinian militant networks. The operation has predominantly targeted Jenin, Tulkarem, Nur Shams, and Far'a refugee camps, areas historically associated with armed resistance and home to some of the most active Palestinian militant factions. Israeli authorities have justified the operation by citing the increased presence of militant cells and the alleged stockpiling of weapons within civilian areas. However, the scale and intensity of the operation have raised concerns over disproportionate military action and humanitarian repercussions.

The IAF have reportedly employed airstrikes, heavy artillery, armoured vehicles, and special forces units in the offensive, marking the most extensive military deployment in the West Bank since the Second Intifada (2000-2005). Reports suggest that entire neighbourhoods have been severely damaged and/or destroyed, with civilian infrastructure—including homes, roads, schools, and healthcare facilities—sustaining significant damage. In some cases, Israeli bulldozers have levelled entire sections of refugee camps, citing the need to remove militant strongholds and underground tunnel networks.

This operation has also led to widespread civilian displacement, with approximately 40,000 Palestinians forced to flee their homes—the largest displacement crisis in the West Bank since 1967. UN agencies and humanitarian organizations have reported that overcrowded shelters, inadequate access to clean water, and food shortages are worsening conditions for the displaced population. Meanwhile, Israeli military checkpoints and curfews have further restricted movement, limiting the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide aid to affected communities.

Politically, the operation has deepened tensions between Israel and the PA. PA officials have condemned the offensive as an attempt to permanently weaken Palestinian governance in the northern West Bank axis. In response to the IAF's extended military presence, local armed resistance has increased, leading to frequent clashes between Palestinian fighters and the IAF. The Israeli government, however, has maintained that the operation will continue indefinitely until all militant activity is neutralized, suggesting that a long-term Israeli military presence is likely.

The ramifications of Operation "Iron Wall" extend beyond security concerns. With major highways blocked, businesses shuttered, and basic services disrupted, the local economy in the northern West Bank has suffered severe losses. Farmers, traders, and labourers who depend on movement across cities have been unable to work, further exacerbating the economic downturn in an already fragile region.

Given the scale of destruction, displacement, and militarization, many analysts have compared Operation "Iron Wall" to previous Israeli military campaigns in Gaza, raising fears that the West Bank could witness a similar long-term cycle of destruction, siege, and periodic escalations. The long-term presence of Israeli troops in civilian areas, coupled with the prohibition of displaced Palestinians from returning to their homes, signals a fundamental shift in Israel's security approach in the West Bank, with potentially lasting consequences for the region's stability.

DISPLACEMENT FIGURES AND HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

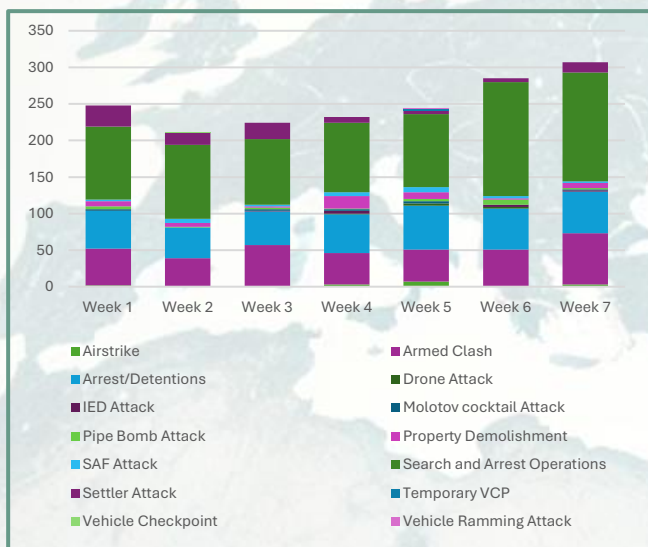
Since the start of the operation, the occupied West Bank has witnessed the most significant displacement since 1967, with approximately 40,000 Palestinians forced to flee their homes due to airstrikes, and ground incursions.

- UNRWA [reported](#) that nearly all of Jenin refugee camp's 20,000 residents have been displaced over the past two months, with an estimated 150 to 180 homes sustaining severe damage.
- In Tulkarem, local authorities have stated that half of the population has fled due to ongoing military operations.
- Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz [confirmed](#) that Israeli troops will remain in strategic locations across the West Bank for up to a year, explicitly stating that displaced Palestinians will not be permitted to return to their homes.
- The United Nations has [expressed](#) deep concern over the humanitarian impact, citing extensive destruction of infrastructure, the creation of uninhabitable conditions, and overcrowded temporary shelters in areas where displaced families have sought refuge.



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

The Israeli military has significantly [escalated](#) its operations in the West Bank, deploying tanks and heavy military reinforcements for the first time since 2002. The presence of armoured vehicles and mechanized units in Jenin and surrounding areas represents a major shift in Israeli military strategy, reinforcing the notion that Operation "Iron Wall" is evolving into a long-term occupation effort rather than a temporary counterterrorism initiative. This move underscores Israeli concerns over a potential resurgence of armed resistance and suggests an attempt to prevent militant factions from reestablishing strongholds in key northern West Bank cities. The deployment of tanks in urban areas has raised concerns about increased civilian casualties, the destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, and further restrictions on movement for residents.



Israeli security forces have intensified intelligence operations and large-scale arrests across the West Bank, targeting suspected militants, political activists, journalists, and community leaders. In Ramallah, Nablus, and Hebron, mass [detentions](#) have become more frequent, signalling an Israeli effort to weaken Palestinian civil society and suppress any form of organized resistance. Reports indicate that hundreds of Palestinians have been detained without formal charges, with Israeli authorities using administrative detention orders that allow indefinite imprisonment without trial. The targeting of journalists has raised serious concerns among human rights organizations, who argue that these actions aim to suppress information about ongoing military operations and settler violence in the West Bank.

Meanwhile, movement restrictions have been significantly tightened, with IAF checkpoints severely limiting civilian access between major Palestinian cities. Roadblocks, security closures, and permit denials have disrupted the flow of goods, preventing essential food, water, and medical supplies from reaching affected communities. In Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nablus, local officials have reported that ambulances and aid convoys face extended delays or outright denials at Israeli-controlled crossings, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. Farmers and business owners have struggled to transport produce and supplies, with reports of agriculture and trade suffering heavy losses due to the Israeli-imposed restrictions. The economic impact of these mobility constraints is profound, as thousands of Palestinian workers are unable to reach their jobs in urban centres or in Israel, further deteriorating livelihoods.

LIKELY PROJECTIONS

- Israeli forces are expected to maintain a prolonged military presence in key West Bank areas, including Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams, reinforcing checkpoints and security perimeters, which will likely prevent displaced Palestinians from returning home and lead to de facto military occupation in the coming months.
- The humanitarian situation will deteriorate further, with overcrowded displacement shelters, worsening shortages of medical services, food, and clean water, and continued Israeli-imposed restrictions on humanitarian aid deliveries.
- The risk of an armed Palestinian retaliation will increase, as militant factions may attempt to counter Israeli occupation efforts through insurgent tactics, guerrilla warfare, or coordinated attacks on IAF and settlements.
- Escalation of international scrutiny and diplomatic pressure is expected, as human rights organizations and international bodies call for investigations into Israel's use of heavy military force in civilian areas, although meaningful intervention remains unlikely due to geopolitical dynamics.
- Economic conditions for Palestinians in the West Bank will continue to worsen, with restricted movement, employment challenges, and trade disruptions driving further instability, increasing reliance on humanitarian aid, and deepening financial hardships for Palestinian communities.



POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS AND SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

OVERVIEW

In tandem with intensified military operations, Israeli authorities have significantly escalated [settlement expansion](#) initiatives in the occupied West Bank. A central figure in this movement is Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a prominent member of the far-right Religious Zionism party, who has been a vocal advocate for the formal annexation of West Bank territories. Smotrich has articulated plans to extend Israeli sovereignty over these areas, viewing the recent political climate as a strategic opportunity to advance this agenda. This push for annexation has profound political ramifications, both within Israel and in the international arena, as it challenges existing legal frameworks and threatens to exacerbate regional tensions.

In November 2024, Smotrich publicly announced directives for preparatory measures aimed at annexing West Bank settlements, aligning these efforts with the anticipated support from the incoming U.S. administration. He expressed intentions to engage with President-elect Donald Trump's team to secure backing for this initiative, underscoring a strategic shift in Israeli policy towards unilateral territorial claims. This announcement has drawn widespread condemnation from Western and Arab diplomats, who argue that such actions violate international law and undermine the prospects for a two-state solution. The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, and Germany's ambassador to Israel, Steffen Seibert, have been particularly vocal in their criticism, emphasizing that annexation would breach international norms and escalate regional instability.

Concurrently, the Israeli government has [accelerated](#) the approval and construction of new housing units within existing settlements. In February 2025, authorities issued tenders for nearly 1,000 additional settler homes in the occupied West Bank, a move that has been met with significant opposition from Palestinian communities and the international community. Organizations such as Peace Now have highlighted that these developments not only expand the settler population but also further entrench the occupation, making the feasibility of a contiguous Palestinian state increasingly untenable.

The political implications of these actions are multifaceted. Domestically, they reflect the growing influence of right-wing factions within the Israeli government, emboldened by perceived international support. The annexation discourse has also intensified debates within Israeli society regarding the future of the occupied territories and the nation's democratic character. Internationally, these moves have strained Israel's relationships with traditional allies and regional partners, many of whom view annexation as a violation of international law and a significant impediment to peace efforts. The potential for increased unrest and violence in response to these policies poses a substantial risk to regional stability, underscoring the complex and contentious nature of settlement expansion and annexation in the West Bank.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

The Israeli government has recently [intensified](#) its settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, approving the construction of nearly 1,000 new housing units. This move has been widely criticized for contributing to the forced displacement of Palestinian landowners and undermining prospects for peace. The anti-settlement watchdog Peace Now reported that these additional units would allow the population of the Efrat settlement to expand by 40%.

This development is part of a broader trend of settlement growth in the region. In July 2024, the Israeli government [approved](#) plans for nearly 5,300 new homes in West Bank settlements, further entrenching its presence in the occupied territories.

Concurrently, there has been a marked [escalation](#) in settler violence against Palestinian communities. Armed Israeli settlers have been reported attacking Palestinian villages, burning agricultural land, and seizing private property. These actions, often carried out with the tacit or explicit support of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), have significantly diminished Palestinian control over the West Bank. Human rights organizations, such as B'Tselem, have documented numerous instances where Israeli authorities have failed to prevent or prosecute settler violence, effectively granting impunity to the perpetrators.



The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has [expressed](#) alarm at the escalating violence, noting that Israeli military operations and a surge in settler attacks have heightened insecurity, displacement, and severe restrictions on Palestinian freedom of movement. In response to these developments, the U.S. Treasury Department [imposed](#) sanctions on Amana, the largest organization supporting unauthorized settlement developments in the West Bank, and its subsidiary Binyanei Bar Amana Ltd. These sanctions target entities and individuals fuelling settlements and the displacement of Palestinians.

LIKELY PROJECTIONS

- The Israeli government is expected to persist with its settlement activities, further fragmenting Palestinian-controlled areas and weakening prospects for a two-state solution.
- The ongoing expansion and associated violence are likely to erode the political influence of the Palestinian Authority, potentially triggering further instability or internal power struggles.
- Global diplomatic condemnation of Israel's settlement policies and associated human rights violations is anticipated to rise. However, concrete legal or economic sanctions against Israel remain unlikely due to strong U.S. support.

CONCLUSION

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the West Bank has escalated to unprecedented levels, marked by intensified military operations, significant forced displacement, and accelerated settlement expansion. Since the initiation of Operation "Iron Wall" on January 21, 2025, Israeli forces have conducted extensive military campaigns targeting Palestinian militant groups within refugee camps, leading to the displacement of approximately 40,000 Palestinians. This represents the largest forced displacement in the region since 1967. Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz has announced that troops will maintain positions in these areas for up to a year, effectively preventing displaced Palestinians from returning to their homes. The United Nations has expressed deep concern over the humanitarian impact of these operations, highlighting the extensive destruction of infrastructure and the creation of uninhabitable conditions in the affected camps.

Concurrently, Israeli settlement expansion has intensified, with the government approving the construction of over 1,000 new housing units in contested areas. This expansion has led to further displacement of Palestinian communities and has been accompanied by increased settler violence. Armed Israeli settlers, often backed by the IAF, have carried out attacks on Palestinian villages, burning crops and seizing land. These actions have drawn international condemnation, with the United Nations and various human rights organizations stating that such settlements violate international law and exacerbate existing tensions.

The political landscape has also been affected, with Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich advocating for the formal annexation of West Bank territories, a move that has further strained diplomatic relations and drawn widespread international criticism. The PA in Ramallah has experienced a weakening of governance amid these developments, as access between key areas such as the Allenby Bridge, East Jerusalem, and Ramallah has become increasingly restricted due to heightened Israeli security measures. These restrictions have severely impacted Palestinian trade, mobility, and access to essential services, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

Given the current trajectory, the continuation of military operations, settlement growth, and movement restrictions is likely to further destabilize the region. The potential for a broader regional crisis looms, as these actions not only undermine the prospects for a two-state solution but also contribute to a cycle of violence and retaliation. International actors have called for immediate de-escalation and a return to negotiations; however, the situation on the ground remains volatile, with both sides entrenched in their positions.

In summary, the convergence of military escalation, forced displacement, and aggressive settlement expansion has created a complex and volatile environment in the West Bank. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from both local leadership and the international community to promote dialogue, protect human rights, and work towards a sustainable and peaceful resolution to the conflict.



GENERAL ADVISORY

To enhance preparedness and response efforts, SARI Global recommends the following strategic actions:

- Strengthen relationships with local communities and civil society networks to enhance intelligence-sharing and ensure a rapid response to security threats.
- Develop localized early warning systems to monitor and anticipate movement restrictions, settler activity, and military operations.
- Regularly update security risk management plans and contingency protocols to reflect evolving threats, including staff relocation and evacuation procedures.
- Enhance situational awareness through active monitoring, coordination with local authorities, and frequent security briefings.
- Identify alternative transport routes and supply chain contingencies to navigate roadblocks, checkpoint closures, and military-imposed restrictions.
- Monitor legislative changes regarding land purchases and lease agreements to safeguard operational premises and prevent forced evictions.
- Engage legal counsel and diplomatic channels to challenge unjustified access restrictions and advocate for secure humanitarian corridors.
- Strengthen advocacy efforts by documenting and reporting access restrictions, settler violence, and security disruptions to international stakeholders.
- Coordinate with humanitarian and security platforms to facilitate information-sharing, threat analysis, and strategic alignment with partners.



SARI Global

ALL DATA AND INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THIS REPORT ARE EITHER PRIMARILY SOURCED THROUGH SARI GLOBAL'S PROPRIETARY RESOURCES OR SECONDARILY OBTAINED THROUGH THE REFERENCED ENTITIES CITED WITHIN THE REPORT.

ANY USE, REPRODUCTION, OR DERIVATION OF THE INFORMATION OR DATA FROM THIS REPORT IS SUBJECT TO COPYRIGHT BY SARI GLOBAL. PROPER ATTRIBUTION MUST BE PROVIDED BY REFERENCING SARI GLOBAL BY NAME AND INCLUDING A DIRECT LINK TO THE REPORT OR THE SARI GLOBAL WEBSITE, ALONG WITH THE DATE THE DATA WAS ACCESSED. FOR EXAMPLE:

SARI GLOBAL, WWW.SARI.GLOBAL, DATE RETRIEVED: MM, DD, YYYY.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR PERMISSIONS, PLEASE CONTACT US THROUGH OUR WEBSITE.

CONTACT: INFO@SARI.GLOBAL