

CRISIS OVERVIEW

- Since December 2024, Israeli military forces have intensified their operations across the West Bank, with a major escalation occurring shortly after the ceasefire in Gaza came into effect on 19 January 2025 (AJ 22/01/2025 and 19/01/2025; BBC 22/01/2025). On 21 January, Israeli forces launched a large-scale operation, dubbed 'Operation Iron Wall', in the West Bank targeting the cities and surrounding areas of Jenin, Tubas, and Tulkarem, seemingly intended to dismantle 'Palestinian infrastructure' in Jenin, with the stated objective of preventing future attacks similar to 7 October 2023 (AJ 22/01/2025; PC 22/01/2025; CNN 24/01/2025). By 23 February, the operation had displaced at least 40,000 people and resulted in the deaths of 50 (The Guardian 23/02/2025). On 23 February, after deploying additional troops and tanks, Israel announced that the operation would continue for one year (AJ 24/02/2025).
- In Jenin, the operation has targeted the Jenin refugee camp, Al Basateen neighbourhood, and the Al Hadaf area, resulting in at least 25 deaths (Sari Global 27/02/2025; OCHA 06/02/2025). **By 6 February, over 90% of the 20,000 residents of Jenin refugee camp had been displaced to Jenin city and surrounding villages** (OCHA 06/02/2025).
- In Tubas, the operation has intensified since 27 January 2025, with the town of Tammun and the Far'a refugee camp, located south of Tubas, coming under partial siege (PC 05/02/2025). By 6 February, at least 18 families had been displaced from Tammun and over 100 families forced to flee the Far'a refugee camp as a result of continued violence (OCHA 06/02/2025). **On 29 January, Israeli forces imposed a curfew in Tammun, further restricting movement and aggravating the humanitarian impact of the operation** (PC 05/02/2025). By 13 February, it was not clear if the curfew in Tammun remained active, but the Israeli military was still conducting operations (OCHA 13/02/2025).
- In Tulkarem, the operation has caused significant displacement and damage to infrastructure. **By 12 February, over 90% of the residents of the Tulkarem refugee camp – more than 12,000 people – had been displaced** (Mehr News 25/02/2025; OCHA 06/02/2025). The Israeli military operation has severely disrupted access to essential services, including water and electricity, aggravating the humanitarian crisis. By 12 February, seven people had been killed in Tulkarem as a result of Operation Iron Wall (OCHA 06/02/2025 and 20/02/2025; AJ 06/02/2025).

- **The escalation in violence associated with Operation Iron Wall occurs alongside an escalation in tensions between Israeli settlers and Palestinians, as well as recent political developments, including the easing of US sanctions on certain settler groups. This policy shift is believed to have encouraged an increase in Israeli settler violence, resulting in a notable rise in both the frequency and intensity of attacks on Palestinians** (Peace Now 26/01/2025; Sari Global 27/01/2025; AA 31/01/2025).
- In January 2025, the humanitarian response was severely affected by several significant policy changes. **On 28 January, Israel passed two laws banning UNRWA, the largest provider of humanitarian aid in the West Bank, from operating within Israeli territory.** This decision was driven by longstanding Israeli allegations that UNRWA had ties to Palestinian militant groups. A few days later, **the US Government, one of the largest financiers of the humanitarian response to Palestine, froze aid to Gaza and West Bank** (TNA 06/02/2025; AJ 29/01/2025; PRIO 01/2025; UN News 29/01/2025).

CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED CRISIS IMPACTS

Increased protection risks

Since the launch of Operation Iron Wall in January 2025, there has been a significant shift in operational patterns, leading to escalating tensions across the West Bank and heightened security risks for Palestinian communities (NRC 23/01/2025; BBC 22/01/2025). This shift has included an increase in security incidents across the West Bank, as compared to the week before the operation was launched (Box 1), and a surge in Palestinian casualties. By 19 February, 59 deaths had been reported since the start of the operation (OCHA accessed 24/02/2025).

By 23 January, Israeli forces had also carried out widespread detentions across the West Bank. On 20 January, more than 60 Palestinians – including children as young as seven – were detained for over five hours during a raid in Azzun town, Qalqilya. The operation targeted residential buildings, businesses, and mosques (OCHA 23/01/2025). With the expansion of the military campaign, an increase in the frequency of detentions is anticipated, contributing to growing tensions in the West Bank.

Since 2019, Israel has withheld approximately ILS 600 million (USD 168 million) annually from tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority (PA), citing concerns over the financial support provided to Palestinian prisoners and their families. On 18 February 2025, the Israeli Ministry of Finance announced an additional deduction of USD 90 million as compensation for Israeli families affected by violence. These financial measures have significant implications for the PA's ability to deliver essential public services, as withheld funds account for approximately 65% of the PA budget (PC 18/02/2025).

The continued suspension of work permits for Palestinian labourers since 7 October 2023, coupled with the reduction in tax transfers, is expected to deepen economic hardship, further straining livelihoods, increasing unemployment, and aggravating social risks. As financial instability grows, protection risks are likely to escalate, particularly for women, children, older people, and marginalised communities. The deterioration of public services – especially healthcare, education, and social welfare – could increase child labour, school dropout rates, gender-based violence, and exploitation. The lack of resources may also weaken law enforcement and social protection mechanisms, heightening the risk of violence, displacement, and recruitment into armed groups (Washington Institute 31/05/2024).

Heightened economic distress and reduced access to essential services may also drive increased displacement and family separation, leaving individuals – especially unaccompanied minors and people with disabilities – at a greater risk of exploitation, trafficking, and abuse. The PA's inability to maintain security coordination, as a result of budgetary constraints, could also lead to lawlessness in certain areas, further endangering civilian populations and complicating humanitarian access.

Box 1. Security incidents in the first week of Operation Iron Wall (16–22 January) compared to the previous week

- **Hebron:** incidents increased from 39 to 45 (15.38% rise), likely as a result of intensified security operations and localised tensions.
- **Jenin:** incidents rose from 30 to 33, reflecting continuing security challenges and friction between armed groups and security forces.
- **Jerusalem:** incidents increased from 24 to 26, driven by tensions over access restrictions and community resistance.
- **Qalqiliya:** incidents rose significantly from 11 to 14 (27.27% increase), likely linked to expanding military operations and growing community resistance.
- **Tubas:** incidents increased from 4 to 6 (50% rise), reflecting emerging security trends.
- **Tulkarem:** incidents increased slightly from 10 to 11 (10% increase), suggesting localised security shifts.

Source: Sari Global (27/01/2025)

If violence continues to escalate between March and May, more fatalities and injuries are likely as the operation spreads to other areas, such as the H2 area of Hebron, where there has been a rise in Israeli forces' detention and physical assault of Palestinians (AJ 22/01/2025; OCHA 06/02/2025).

Map 1. Areas A, B and C



Source: Amir (27/02/2023)

Increased movement restrictions impede access to basic services

Since the beginning of Operation Iron Wall, Israel has imposed more arbitrary measures at military checkpoints near the entrances and exits of West Bank governorates and closed most of the gates of villages and towns. Israeli forces also continue to deploy mobile checkpoints, conduct ID and phone searches, and confiscate devices (OCHA 06/02/2025; WAFA 12/02/2025). Shared control between the PA (civil authority) and Israel (security control) makes Area B more exposed to movement restrictions than Areas A and C. By 16 January, a surge in access restrictions had been reported in several communities in Area B following the Israeli forces' establishment of new settlement outposts (OCHA 16/01/2025). Despite the PA being responsible for providing basic services, movement and access to services is likely to be severely disrupted if Israel continues to implement increased security measures, such as road closures, arrests, and extended curfews, which severely disrupt daily life.

Box 2. Movement restrictions reported in the West Bank as of 6 February

- **Jenin:** Israeli forces have also surrounded both Jenin Governmental Hospital and Ibn Sina Hospital, restricting access to critical healthcare facilities (OCHA 06/02/2025).
- **Hebron:** in the Israeli-controlled H2 area of Hebron, the As Salaymeh checkpoint was closed for five consecutive days, forcing approximately 2,500 Palestinian residents to take lengthy detours to access their homes. This disruption highlights the continued movement restrictions imposed on Palestinians in the area (OCHA 27/02/2025 and 06/02/2025).
- **Jericho:** in Jericho governorate, three road gates were installed and closed in Al 'Auja town and An Nuwei'ma Al Fauqa and Ras Ein Al 'Auja Bedouin communities as part of Operation Iron Wall. These blockades have cut off access to main roads and a crucial water spring, severely inhibiting affected communities' mobility and access to water (OCHA 30/01/2025; 06/02/2025).
- **Jerusalem:** on 22 and 25 January, repeated closures of Qalandia and Jaba' checkpoints, two critical passage points between the central and southern West Bank and East Jerusalem, disrupted the movement of tens of thousands of Palestinians. Many travellers were stranded for hours, further straining daily life and access to basic services (OCHA 30/01/2025).
- **Nablus:** in Nablus governorate, Israeli forces blocked secondary routes in Zawata and Deir Sharaf villages using earth mounds. Road gates were also installed at the northern entrance of Awarta, significantly restricting the movement of people and goods between Jenin, Nablus, and Tulkarem, vital for trade and daily commuting (OCHA 30/01/2025).

Reduced access to shelter linked to displacement

Operation Iron Wall has also led to an increase in property damage and displacement, further threatening Palestinians' access to shelter. In Jenin refugee camp, property damage has been reported in the Al Aloub, Al Bishr, Al Damj, and Al Fallujah neighbourhoods (WAFA 12/02/2025). **By 6 February, nearly 90% of the camp's population had already been forcibly displaced, with many seeking refuge in 39 villages and towns across Jenin governorate** (OCHA 06/02/2025; AJ 06/02/2025).

The current damage and destruction of houses comes alongside longer-term house demolitions in the West Bank. Restrictive and discriminatory planning regimes applied in Area C and East Jerusalem continue to prevent Palestinians from realising their basic housing needs, with the demolition of homes being the primary cause of displacement (OCHA 06/02/2025). In East Jerusalem, the demolition of homes will likely continue to contribute to heightened tensions and unrest (EEAS 28/03/2023 and 19/11/2024). Under full Israeli civil and security control, Palestinians in Area C are disproportionately affected. Between 28 January and 3 February, OCHA noted that 38 Palestinian-owned structures had been demolished in Area C (OCHA 06/02/2025).

Operation Iron Wall may aggravate existing shelter-related risks, such as through the further demolition of homes and infrastructure, displacement, and restricted access to farms. Inadequate legal protections and the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements mean that Palestinians in Area C are at the highest risk of forced eviction and land annexation. Any resultant displacement of populations from Area C will likely further strain resources in Areas A and B. If Operation Iron Wall persists, the likelihood of repeated displacements will also increase, particularly for those seeking temporary refuge in areas also affected by the broader military campaign. Repeated displacement erodes household resources and disrupts livelihoods. Access to basic services will become more constrained, as host communities' infrastructure may not be equipped to accommodate the surge in displaced populations.

Reduced access to WASH and health services

Disruptions to WASH infrastructure resulting from Operation Iron Wall are aggravated by damage caused by settler violence. In Bethlehem, on 13 February, armed Israeli settlers from a newly established outpost near the Ma'ale Amos settlement cut pipes connected to the 450m-long water network of Kisan village in Area B, disrupting the water supply of approximately 20 families (OCHA 20/02/2025). In Jenin, Israeli forces destroyed 5km of roads, including key access routes to Jenin Governmental Hospital, and damaged pipelines, severely disrupting the hospital's water supply (OCHA 06/02/2025 and 20/02/2025). In Tubas, curfews

imposed in Tammun town and Far'a refugee camp have worsened water shortages, as military operations have caused extensive damage to local water networks (OCHA 06/02/2025). In Tulkarem, the Israeli military's encirclement of Thabet Thabet Governmental Hospital has further strained healthcare services, limiting residents' access to medical assistance (AA 09/01/2025; OCHA 06/02/2025; TNA 14/02/2025).

If such destruction continues, access to clean water and functional sanitation services will become increasingly precarious, heightening the risk of waterborne disease and worsening public health conditions. The disruption of healthcare infrastructure will further limit medical treatment, particularly for the injured, pregnant women, and individuals with chronic illnesses.

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Domestic political dynamics

Recent political developments in Israel are driving the shift in violence from Gaza to the West Bank. Israeli military actions in the West Bank appear to be increasingly tied to political manoeuvring, as leaders seek to consolidate power and appease right-wing constituencies (Assafirabi 10/02/2025). The resignation of National Security Minister and far-right leader Itamar Ben-Gvir, and his party's withdrawal from the ruling coalition, on 20 January 2025 in protest of the Gaza ceasefire has introduced instabilities within the Israeli Government, leaving the ruling coalition with a two-seat majority in the Knesset (AP 19/02/2025; ICG 21/01/2025; NYT 16/01/2025).

As part of the Israeli cabinet's internal agreements to approve the ceasefire – despite Itamar Ben-Gvir's resignation and objections – the Government introduced a new military objective alongside its existing goals in Gaza (PC 17/01/2025; FDD 21/01/2025). This objective included a strategic shift in security policy, focused on eliminating perceived threats and enhancing the protection of West Bank settlements and settlers championed by Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich, reinforcing his commitment to expanded operations in the area (FDD 21/01/2025; AA 07/01/2025). Despite opposing the ceasefire, Smotrich's Religious Nationalist Party chose to remain in the coalition, seemingly to maintain political leverage ahead of the anticipated second phase of the ceasefire agreement (NYT 16/01/2025; AJ 27/01/2025). On 10 February, Smotrich publicly warned that Palestinian cities in the West Bank, including Jenin, Nablus, and Tulkarem, could face destruction similar to that seen in Gaza, with civilians forced to flee to neighbouring countries. He also reiterated plans to annex the West Bank, signalling an intent to apply Israeli sovereignty over the occupied territory (AA 10/02/2025; PC 19/01/2025 and 20/01/2025; AP 19/01/2025).

Continued push for de facto annexation and settler violence

Since 1967, and intensifying since the 2000s, Israel has increased its de facto annexation of parts of the West Bank, primarily in Area C, which constitutes 60% of the territory and includes key strategic areas such as the Jordan Valley and regions surrounding Jerusalem (Shemer-Kunz 28/04/2023). In 2024, Israel advanced legislation towards de jure annexation of significant portions of the West Bank. This legislative push, known as the 'Elimination of the Discrimination in the Purchase of Real Estate in Judea and Samaria', was approved by the Israeli Ministerial Committee for Legislation on 26 January and primarily targets Area C (This Week in Palestine 09/2024; Anera accessed 10/02/2025; Peace Now 26/01/2025; AJ 11/11/2024).

While Areas A and B remain under varying degrees of Palestinian control, increased Israeli settlement expansion and military activity in these areas could undermine the PA's administration (Peace Now 26/01/2025; AJ 11/11/2024; PC 02/02/2025; Amir 27/02/2023; AL24 10/02/2025). By 16 September 2024, at least 700,000 Israeli settlers were residing across 147 recognised settlements and 224 outposts (AA/31/01/2025). If implemented, the above-outlined legislative measures are likely to solidify Israeli authority over strategic parts of the West Bank, making de jure annexation increasingly feasible. This could escalate tensions between Palestinians and Israeli settlers, and lead to further displacement of Palestinian communities (MEE 28/06/2024; Amir 27/02/2023; AL24 10/02/2025). The rising frequency of settler attacks, coupled with the potential de jure annexation of Palestinian territories, is likely to intensify resistance, further heightening tensions in the West Bank. Such actions could prompt Palestinian communities to mobilise in protest against the appropriation of their lands, increasing the risk of widespread unrest and confrontations (AJ 22/01/2025).

US policy influence

Political developments, in both Israel and the US, appear to have further emboldened Israel's settlement expansion efforts. Right-wing Israeli lawmakers anticipate a significant expanded Israeli presence in the West Bank, emboldened by the new Trump administration. In November 2024, Finance Minister Smotrich stated his belief that the US President's election presented an opportunity for Israel to advance the de facto annexation of Jewish settlements in the West Bank (Times of Israel 28/01/2024, AJ 11/11/2024 and 12/02/2025; France 24 18/01/2025). The Trump administration's initial peace plan in late 2024, while Trump was still president-elect, also proposed the annexation of all Israeli settlements in the West Bank, offering Palestinians a semi-contiguous state on the remaining territory. While Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cautiously welcomed the plan, albeit with reservations, the PA outright rejected it (Times of Israel 11/11/2024). Trump's public statements and relaxation of sanctions on certain groups of Israeli settlers, those in support of settlement expansion and the annexation of parts of the West Bank, have seemingly fuelled this belief, being widely interpreted as signals of US backing of Israeli settlement policies (AJ 12/02/2025; Politico 24/01/2025; AA 31/01/2025).

Recent statements by President Trump in February 2025, endorsing what would amount to the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, raise concerns that similar rhetoric and support could extend to the West Bank if violence continues to escalate (The Guardian 10/02/2025; Jerusalem Post 05/02/2025; CEIP 11/02/2025).

Trump's continued backing appears to reinforce the Israeli Government's stance to push for annexation in the West Bank and undermines other international calls for de-escalation and a negotiated resolution to the conflict (CEIP 11/02/2025). The US also continues to be Israel's largest arms provider. On 7 February, the Department of State approved an emergency sale of arms to Israel (Reuters 08/02/2025; NBC News 12/11/2024).

Internal Palestinian divisions

Since 2024, the Israeli military and PA have conducted joint operations targeting armed groups throughout the West Bank. While this collaboration has achieved short-term security objectives, it risks aggravating internal divisions within Palestinian society and, in turn, heightening the risk of escalating armed conflict. Groups such as the Jenin Brigades – a coalition between Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Islamic Jihad's Al Quds Brigades, and Hamas's Qassam Brigades – strongly oppose the PA's cooperation with Israeli forces, intensifying tensions between the PA, this coalition, and other Palestinian armed groups. Jenin, particularly its refugee camp, has long been a focal point of armed Palestinian resistance, frequently targeted by Israel's military operations. In December 2024, Israeli forces working with the PA conducted an extensive operation in Jenin refugee camp, targeting the Jenin Brigades (Times of Israel 25/10/2024; AJ 15/12/2024 and 03/01/2025).

Although Area A falls fully under PA civil and security control, Israeli military operations, particularly in refugee camps such as Jenin and Tulkarem, risk undermining the PA's authority. This erosion of control could empower Palestinian armed groups, allowing them to fill the resulting power vacuum and escalating instability and further armed resistance (Jordan News Agency 09/01/2024). As the Israeli military expands operations to other parts of the West Bank, the likelihood of retaliatory attacks from Palestinian armed groups remains elevated (Sari Global 27/01/2025; Jordan News Agency 09/01/2024). Operation Iron Wall may serve as a rallying point for Palestinian armed groups in the West Bank.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Since the start of 2025, the humanitarian response has been severely hampered by several key policy changes at the local and global levels. On 28 January, two laws were implemented that effectively prohibited all UNRWA operations and services within Israeli territory, terminated all associations between Israeli government personnel and UNRWA, and revoked the legal immunities granted to UNRWA staff (TNA 06/02/2025; AJ 29/01/2025; PRIO 01/2025; UN News 29/01/2025).

According to the UN and humanitarian organisations, there is currently no realistic alternative to UNRWA, which operates large-scale emergency services including 96 schools serving approximately 47,000 students, three vocational training institutes, and 43 health facilities across the West Bank (AP 29/10/2024). The new restrictions will impede UNRWA's ability to fulfil its mandate of providing humanitarian assistance, education, healthcare, and social services to Palestinian refugees by significantly disrupting its humanitarian operations in these territories. The impact on the education, health, and protection sectors will be particularly severe (AJ 29/01/2025; PRIO 01/2025; UN News 29/01/2025).

The Trump administration's freeze of US Agency for International Development (USAID) funding, and subsequent stop-work orders, is significantly affecting humanitarian aid response capacity and delivery in the West Bank. USAID has been a critical provider of assistance to Palestinians in both Gaza and the occupied West Bank for decades. Since 2021, USAID has invested over USD 600 million in economic support funding for Palestinians and, by November 2024, had allocated more than USD 1.2 billion to humanitarian assistance following the escalation of violence in Gaza since 7 October 2023. In November 2024, USAID had announced it would be providing USD 230 million in additional funding "to support economic recovery and development programs in the West Bank and Gaza" (JNS 16/11/2024; ABC News 03/02/2025). The funding freeze, which came days after the Israeli ban on UNRWA on 29 January, is having severe impacts on the services provided by organisations reliant on USAID funding, particularly for Palestinians with acute or chronic basic needs that are currently met through humanitarian assistance. Affected services include health facilities, schools, and food distribution networks, vital to more than 912,879 registered refugees in the West Bank. Although waivers to the freeze have been issued, they have not resulted in the release of funding (UNRWA accessed 12/02/2025; NBC News 10/02/2025). While it is still not clear exactly how many organisations are affected, many key services are being affected, including WASH and health, which had been allocated funding (NPR 19/02/2025).

If Operation Iron Wall continues in the coming months, the humanitarian response in the West Bank will significantly reduce. Continued, limited access to healthcare as a result of road blockades will cause medical supply shortages and delayed treatment, straining an already fragile health system. Education will be disrupted as students and teachers face difficulties reaching schools, potentially leading to prolonged closures. Food and essential goods shortages will worsen as a result of supply chain disruptions, increasing prices and aggravating food insecurity. The compounded effects of these restrictions will heighten humanitarian needs, placing additional pressure on aid organisations and local institutions struggling to respond (OCHA 20/02/2025; OHCHR 28/01/2025).