Negotiations Affairs Department
Negotiations And Support Unit

Annexation Policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) - 2024

"The year 2025 will be the year of sovereignty in the West Bank. I have instructed the Defense Ministry and the Civil Administration to begin comprehensive, professional groundwork to prepare the necessary infrastructure for applying sovereignty,"

Israeli Finance Minister
Bezalel Smotrich

Palestinian territorial interests in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are declining daily as Israel relentlessly continues its settlement and annexation planned policies. Today, approximately 740,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank settlements, including 240,000 living in East Jerusalem. Israel has accelerated its settlement construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, to consolidate its interests and implement its annexation plans.

In December 2024, Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich described in explicit terms his active effort to annex area C of the West Bank to Israel, compromising an area of 60% of the OPT, which is currently under complete Israeli administrative and security control.

Establishing a record number of illegal outposts, i.e., outposts that the Israeli government had not authorised, has become the appropriate tool for the realisation of the annexation plans that Smotrich had in mind, in addition to a sharp increase in Israeli settler violence, closures of roads and highways, and unprecedented measures to legalise and fund illicit outposts.

At the same time, the Israeli government is completing an administrative infrastructure for the annexation of the West Bank by transferring powers from the Civil Administration, a military body, to the newly created Settlement Administration, a civil and political administration under the direct authority and control of Israel's far-right Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich.

Israel has also designed a new set of measures to tighten its control over the occupied Palestinian Territories and promote the annexation of area C in the West Bank during the year 2025:

Annexation Process:

Israel created a mechanism in their government where the civil administration, part of the military rule in the occupied West Bank, became an executive body that answered to the additional minister appointed in the Ministry of Defense. This move aimed to disguise the nature of the annexation process while pretending that the military rule that started in June 1967 was still there.

This structure transfers all management, staff work, powers, and decision-making from the Central Command to the Settlement Administration. Through the division of powers agreement, which allowed for the appointment of a civilian as the Deputy Head of the Civil Administration, the additional minister, Smotrich, assumed the authority to give direct orders to the military, bypassing the Minister of Defense and the chain of command.

- Smotrich announced a series of government administrative moves that have led to the *de facto* annexation of the West Bank and the transfer of management of all settlement matters from the hands of the military to civilian officials, a clear breach of international law. Below are the main steps of the Israeli government:

    1. The transfer of power from the army to an administration under Smotrich was completed, and a “Civilian Deputy” was appointed who received the powers of the Head of the Civil Administration regarding the settlements.
    2. Creating a “legalisation bypass route” for financing and providing services to 63 outposts and allocating NIS 85 million for constructing security components in outposts.

3. Legalising agricultural outposts, reforming the enforcement system against Palestinian construction, declaring approximately 24,193 dunams as “state land,” and regularly promoting plans in the settlements.
4. NIS 1 billion will be added to cover security needs in the settlements in 2024-2025, and NIS 7 billion will be allocated for settler roads.
5. Leading the "Equal Citizenship Reform" – improving services provided to settlers through government ministries.
6. Completing the application of Israeli law to settlers through military orders.

- A new legal advisory unit was established and manned in the Israeli Ministry of Defense under Smotrich, taking responsibilities previously held by the IOF through the Civil Administration.
- Israeli Defense Minister Gallant announced the cancellation of the order prohibiting Israelis from entering areas in the northern West Bank, which Israel withdrew from after the 2005 disengagement. This is the first step towards potentially establishing future settlements in these areas, as Israeli settlers are now allowed to visit, stay, and potentially build there.
- The Israeli Knesset seeks to legislate a law that would apply to territories outside Israeli sovereignty (applying Israeli law to the OPT). The proposed law states, “Any person is permitted to acquire rights to real estate in the Judea and Samaria area”. Judea and Samaria is the Israeli term for the Occupied West Bank. This is a blatant violation of international law, as the Hague Convention prohibits the occupying power from changing existing rules in an occupied territory.
- The Israeli government took over enforcement powers in parts of Area B. The Commanding Officer (OF) of the Central Command signed two orders granting Israel enforcement, planning, and building authorities in territories transferred under the Oslo Accords to the Palestinian Authority. According to the orders, an Israeli official appointed by the government (the Civilian Deputy to the Minister of Civil Administration, under Minister Smotrich) can now instruct the demolition of Palestinian structures in the “Agreed-Upon

Reserve" areas in the West Bank. According to the Wye Agreement between Israel and the PLO from 1998, the "Agreed-Upon Reserve" encompasses approximately 167,000 dunams (about 41,300 acres), constituting around 3% of the West Bank.

- The Knesset's Education, Culture, and Sports Committee has discussed an amendment to the Israel Antiquities Authority Law. This amendment seeks to transfer responsibility for antiquities sites in the West Bank from the Israeli Civil Administration to the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). Currently, the Civil Administration holds this responsibility with its Archaeology Unit.
- The Israeli government decided to build two power plants and promote the planning of additional power plants in the West Bank. In addition, the government intends to allow Israeli settlers and entrepreneurs to set up solar electricity fields in 2,000 dunams in the West Bank. There are solar fields in the settlements covering an area of over 925 dunams, most of them in the Jordan Valley. [1]
- The Israeli government decided to optimise the medical workforce in the health system and deal with the expected shortage. The government intends to significantly increase the quotas for medical students at Ariel University, named after the settlement in the heart of the West Bank, in an open and flagrant violation of international law and UNSC Resolution 2336.

Massive Expansion of the Settlement Enterprise:

- During 2024, the Israeli Government approved the advancement of 27,589 housing units in dozens of West Bank colonies throughout the OPT, including 9,421 housing units in Israeli settlements in the West Bank and 18,358 housing units in occupied East Jerusalem[2].
- 24,193 dunams were declared as "state land," including 20,859 dunams in the Jordan Valley's Jericho Governorate between the Palestinian villages of Fasayil and Al Jiftlik. It also included the declaration of 2,640 dunams as

[1] https://www.timesofisrael.com/cabinet-allocates-nis-75-million-for-security-needs-of-illegal-settlements/
[2] Ir Amim

"state land between the settlements of Ma'ale Adumim and Keidar, 116.2 dunams for the Migdal Oz settlement West of Bethlehem, and the declaration of 170 dunams near Herodion, East of Bethlehem. Since the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993, the year 2024 marked a peak in the extent of Israel's declaration of West Bank areas as state lands.[3]

- The establishment of five new Israeli settlements: Evyatar, Givat Assaf, Sde Efrayim, Adorayim, and the Nahal Heletz settlement.[4] All five are currently illegal outposts, which will become official settlements.[5] Palestinians either privately own these lands or have complicated ownership difficulties that require complicated legal proceedings to undo the Israeli classification of these lands as "state land," making their legalisation easier.
- 43 new outposts have been established in Area C this year, most of which are agricultural outposts ("farms") focused on land takeover and the systematic expulsion of Palestinians from the area. The number of new outposts is unprecedented. For example, fewer than seven outposts were established yearly since the signing of the Oslo Accord.[6]
- Also, since the signing of the Oslo Accord, the Israeli government established seven outposts within Area B. Five outposts were established in the area known as the "Agreed-Upon Reserve," located east and south of Bethlehem. Two additional outposts were established near Ramallah, one south of the settlement of Ofra on lands belonging to the Palestinian village of Ein Yabrud and another on lands of the town of Turmus Ayya, south of the outpost Adi Ad and the settlement of Amichai.[7]
- The Israeli Government approved a payment of around NIS 1.5 million for illegal agricultural farms in the OPT. Support allocations have totalled approximately NIS 1.66 million over the past six years. Today, 77 settler's farm outposts in the OPT are designated for sheep and cattle grazing. The

[3] https://themedialine.org/mideast-daily-news/israel-declares-nearly-3000-acres-in-jordan-valley-as-state-land-sparking-outcry/
[4] (Note: All Israeli settlements built in the territories that Israel occupied in the June 1967 war are illegal under international law and as stipulated by UNSC Resolution 2334 on 23 December 2016. The reference to illegal outposts in this context underlines the fact that the previous Israeli governments did not legalise those outposts. Therefore, they are illegal even under Israeli laws.)
[5] https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-approves-flashpoint-west-bank-settlements-de-facto-annexation
[6] https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/at-least-43-illegal-outposts-established-throughout-west-bank-in-year-since-oct-7-onslaught/
[7] https://peacenow.org.il/en/at-least-seven-outposts-established-in-palestinian-controlled-area-b

great majority of these outposts were established over the past decade. The territory seized by settlers through grazing totals some 243,000 dunums (~7% of the entire Area C), and one-third of the total area is located within areas declared by the Israeli military as "firing zones" on the eastern edges of the occupied West Bank. According to military law, these are "closed military areas."[8]

- Three outposts were designated as "neighbourhoods" of existing settlements through plan approvals by the Higher Planning Council: Machane Gadi, Kedem Arava, and Givat Chanan.[9]
- 70 illegal outposts were recognised as eligible for funding and infrastructure. Minister Smotrich instructed government ministries and other authorities to fund these 70 illegal outposts, connecting them to water, electricity, and other utilities.[10]
- A five-year plan allocating USD 2 billion for roads in Israeli settlements to further connect them; about 20% of Israel's road budget is allocated to roads in settlements.[11]
- USD 114 million were allocated for the preservation of antiquities in the West Bank, the restoration of the "Tel Sebastia" in the Palestinian village of Sebastia in the Nablus Governorate, strengthening the connection of the Old City of Jerusalem and the surrounding area to West Jerusalem, projects related to the Elad settler organisation in Silwan in East Jerusalem.[12]
- Funding for illegal outposts and farms—USD 21 million has been allocated to illicit outposts, including approximately USD 11 million for unlawful shepherding farms.[13]
- The Ministry of Communications presented a comprehensive plan to settlement leaders to enhance Israeli cellular coverage in the West Bank,

8 https://www.keremnavot.org/thewildwest

9 https://www.wionews.com/world/israel-approves-three-wildcat-settlement-outposts-in-west-bank-watchdog-737931

10 https://www.timesofisrael.com/cabinet-allocates-nis-75-million-for-security-needs-of-illegal-settlements/

11 https://www.timesofisrael.com/budget-dedicates-billions-for-west-bank-roads-settlements-and-illegal-outposts/

12 https://emekshaveh.org/en/sebastia-and-jlm-day/

13 https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-10-11/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/israel-not-only-permits-jewish-terror-in-the-west-bank-but-also-finances-it/00000192-7780-d2b4-afbe-ff99a3220000

with a budget of 50 million shekels. The plan's first phase includes establishing cellular sites at 20 locations selected by the Civil Administration, identified as urgent and quick to implement. Subsequently, dozens of additional cellular sites are expected to be established in coordination with settler leaders and, according to the settlers' needs, who use Israeli networks.

List of the plans approved by the Israeli Government:[14]

Settlement	Housing Units
Ma'ale Adumim	2402
Beitar Illit	711
Efrat	694
Givat Zeev	452
Neria	436
Mitzpe Yericho	365
Keidar	330
Heit Hogla	316
Modiin Illit	300
Nokdim	290
Elon Moreh	269
Immanuel	266
Masu'a (Machane Gadi)	260
Gva'ot	250
Nofim	168
Yakir	168
Kiryat Arba	165
Negohot	158

Settlement	Housing Units
Eli	142
Kiryat Netafim	136
Hagai	135
Maale Shomron (Elamatan)	120
Ma'ale Amos	112
Susya	107
Almon (Anatot)	91
Shilo	90
Mitzpe Yishai	79
Tzofim	74
Ganei Modiin	46
Pduel	37
Etz Efraim	36
Revava	16
Elkana	8
Mitzad (Asfar)	6
Shaarei Tikva	6
Total	**9,241**

[14] https://peacenow.org.il/en

Israeli Settlement Expansion Plans in Occupied East Jerusalem during 2024: [15]

Total Number of Israeli Settlement Plans: 38 plans with 18,348 housing units;

New Settlements - Five plans of 6,265 housing units were planned for three new settlements and their intended expansion:

Givat Shaked - 1115 housing units.
Um Lisun – 450 housing units.
Givat Hamatos – 4700 housing units.

Expansion of Existing Israeli Settlements - Seven plans with 2,921 housing units are for expanding five existing settlements:

Har Homa – 150 housing units.
Ramot – 1133 housing units.
Pisgat Zeev – 150 housing units.
Gilo – 1288 housing units.
Nof Zion – 200 housing units.

Expansion of Existing Israeli Settlements within built-up areas - Twenty-six plans with 9,162 housing units planned.

Arnona:	175 housing units.
East Talpiyot:	2132 housing units.
French Hill:	1309 housing units.
Gilo:	3785 housing units.
Neve Yaacov:	485 housing units.
Ramat Eshkol:	118 housing units.
Ramot:	1168 housing units.

[15] Ir Amim

Triangular Israeli Settlements around Occupied East Jerusalem:

Israeli settlement activity in and around Jerusalem has increased under the incumbent Israeli government, planning to create a triangular settlement expansion around Occupied East Jerusalem to completely sever the city from the remainder of the West Bank. Extensive settlement planning is taking place in Occupied East Jerusalem around three areas in particular: in the South, to separate East Jerusalem from Bethlehem; in the East, to separate East Jerusalem from Jordan Valley and Jericho; and in the north, to separate East Jerusalem from Ramallah. The wall links this triangular settlement expansion, an elaborate "ring road" system, and tunnels.

Today, these settlement plans are in the advanced stages of approval and/or implementation:

- In the South, several settlement plans are underway to strengthen the Gilo-Har Homa axis south of Occupied East Jerusalem. Gilo, Givat Hamatos, Hebron Road “Strip” Plan, Givat Hashaked, Lower Aqueduct plan, Har Homa East. Once these settlements are expanded in the south, Israel will have absolute territorial contiguity over the southern-occupied city. They would further isolate occupied East Jerusalem from Bethlehem.
- To the East of Occupied East Jerusalem, E1-plan (3,426 housing Units), Maale Adumim. The massive size of the E-1 Plan and Adumim settlements assures Israeli control over key junction areas connecting the northern West Bank to the south. More importantly, this area has the highest economic and habitation potential for Palestinians. If implemented, such contiguity and control will be impossible, and the development area will be incorporated into Israel, thus turning off any prospect for the viability of East Jerusalem, the Palestinian Capital.
- To the North, a plan for 9,000 housing units in the Atarot Airport area, between the Palestinian neighbourhoods of Kfar Aqab, Qalandia and A-Ram north of Occupied East Jerusalem. Once expanded in the north, Israel will

have absolute territorial contiguity over the northern occupied city, thus further isolating Occupied East Jerusalem from Ramallah.

The negative impact of these triangular settlements on the prospects of establishing a viable Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem cannot be underestimated. Once implemented, these settlements will severely impact Palestinian aspirations for a socio-economically viable capital in Jerusalem, while access to Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jordan Valley, and Jericho will be diminished. These settlements will limit the last available space for much-needed Palestinian growth in occupied East Jerusalem while facilitating the construction and expansion of illegal settlements that restrict trade and commerce in, through and around Jerusalem, the traditional Palestinian economic centre. Furthermore, it severs the national transportation axis that connects the rest of the occupied West Bank with East Jerusalem, maximising Israeli contiguous territory with a minimum Palestinian population within the city's boundaries and territorially separating Jerusalem from the Palestinian West Bank. If these triangular settlements are implemented, Palestinian contiguity and control will be impossible, and the development area will be incorporated into Israel, thus turning off any prospect for the viability of the Palestinian Capital in East Jerusalem.

More on Israeli illegal policies and measures against Palestinians:

- According to OCHA, IOF demolished 1,745 Palestinian structures during the year 2024, including 750 homes and 91 donor-funded structures, displacing 939 families comprising 4,215 people, including 1,693 children, and otherwise affecting many families comprising 164,971 people, including 79,732 children. In occupied Jerusalem alone, IOF demolished 213 structures, including 114 homes, displacing 126 families comprising 560 people, including 233 children. The demolitions in Jerusalem mainly concentrated in the towns of Sur Baher, Beit Safafa, Silwan, Beit Hanina, Isawiya, Shufat and its refugee camp, Jabal Al-Mukabber, Sheikh Jarrah, Wadi El Joz, Ras Al-Mud, Athuri and Az Za'ayyem.

- **Israeli settler attacks:** The year 2024 recorded more than 2,224 incidents of violence by Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians, the highest of which occurred in May, October, and November and concentrated across all governorates. Israeli settlers have killed at least 11 Palestinians. Israeli settlers gathered on the outskirts of Palestinian villages and towns, closed roads, threw stones at Palestinian cars, entered Palestinians' agricultural lands, and set fire to crops and shops. The Israeli settler attacks included deliberate running over Palestinian children and adults, direct shooting during their storming, assaulting Palestinians by beating and physically harming them, and detaining and kidnapping some of them, including children. (NAD- Palestine Monitoring Group)
- **Palestinian Martyrs:** In addition to the bodies of 256 martyrs buried in the Numbers' Cemeteries, Israel currently withholds the bodies of 379 Palestinian martyrs, including 36 children, 58 prisoners, and five women. In 2024, the occupation authority withheld the bodies of 197 martyrs from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Regarding martyrs' bodies held in the Gaza Strip, estimates indicate that there are hundreds of bodies withheld in the 'Sde Teiman' detention centre. The National Campaign for the Recovery of Martyrs' Bodies documented the release of 325 bodies from Gaza during 2024.
- **Restricted Access to Agricultural Land:** Palestinians are being denied access to hundreds of thousands of dunams of agricultural land. The Israeli military and Israeli settlers prevent Palestinians from cultivating large areas around settlements, employing hundreds of physical blocks, earth mounds, and iron gates established by the Israeli army or Israeli settlers, as well as evictions carried out by settlers or soldiers. These practices increased during the olive harvest season of 2024.
- **No Residential Building Permits for Palestinians:** The Higher Planning Council at the Israeli Civil Administration has not approved any plans for residential buildings for Palestinians in Area C. Out of the 110 appeals to the courts, 109 were denied.

International Court of Justice:

On July 19, 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) reaffirmed Palestinians' right to self-determination, asserting that Israeli settlements on the occupied land must be dismantled; the court ruled that the occupied Palestinian territories constitute a "single territorial unit" to be protected and respected. The ICJ also stated that Israeli policies in these areas amount to de facto annexation and expressed doubt that extending Israeli law to include the West Bank and East Jerusalem could be justified. In addition, the international community considers Israel's actions to be illegal and has strongly condemned them through several UN resolutions.

A few days before the ICJ's ruling, Israeli far-right finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich vowed to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian State by advancing the construction of more illegal settlements, calling on PM Netanyahu to annex the West Bank if the ICJ rules that settlements are illegal "I hereby call on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – if the International Court of Justice in The Hague does decide that the settlement enterprise is illegal – respond to them with a historic decision of applying sovereignty to the territories of the homeland." Right after the ruling came out, Smotrich slammed the ICJ, labelling it an 'anti-Semitic body' and wrote on platform X ", The answer to The Hague - Sovereignty now".

On September 18, 2024, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution demanding that Israel end its "unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory" and do so within the next 12 months. The UNGA resolution comes a few weeks after the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of July 19, 2024, on the "legal consequences arising from Israel's policies and practices in the OPT".

Both texts asserted that the "Israeli settlements and their associated regime, including the transfer by Israel of settlers to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem […] have been established and are being maintained in violation of international law."

Conclusion:

The current and future construction of settlements and their annexation plans further reduce the options for a negotiated two-state solution. Options for achieving a durable solution can only be salvaged if the international community enforces a complete settlement freeze on Israel. Only such a step will preserve the possibility of serious negotiations.

The challenges of implementing a complete settlement freeze are significant. Israel has soundly reaffirmed its resolve to continue its settlement policies, and the international community has never mustered sufficient political will to ensure a cessation of settlement activity. Without a settlement freeze, settlements can expand to five times their current size on expropriated land.

Israel's policies are quickly, and in many respects, irreversibly, eliminating prospects for establishing two viable states. The establishment of an unviable Palestinian state would perpetuate Palestinian sub-standard living conditions, fall short of Palestinian political and national aspirations, and make such a state perpetually dependent on Israel and the international community. In short, it would deny Palestinians any absolute independence or sovereignty, an option Palestinians cannot accept. Suppose such an option becomes a pre-determined certainty; in that case, Palestinian policymakers will have to re-evaluate the efficacy of advocating the two-state solution and be forced to consider other options.

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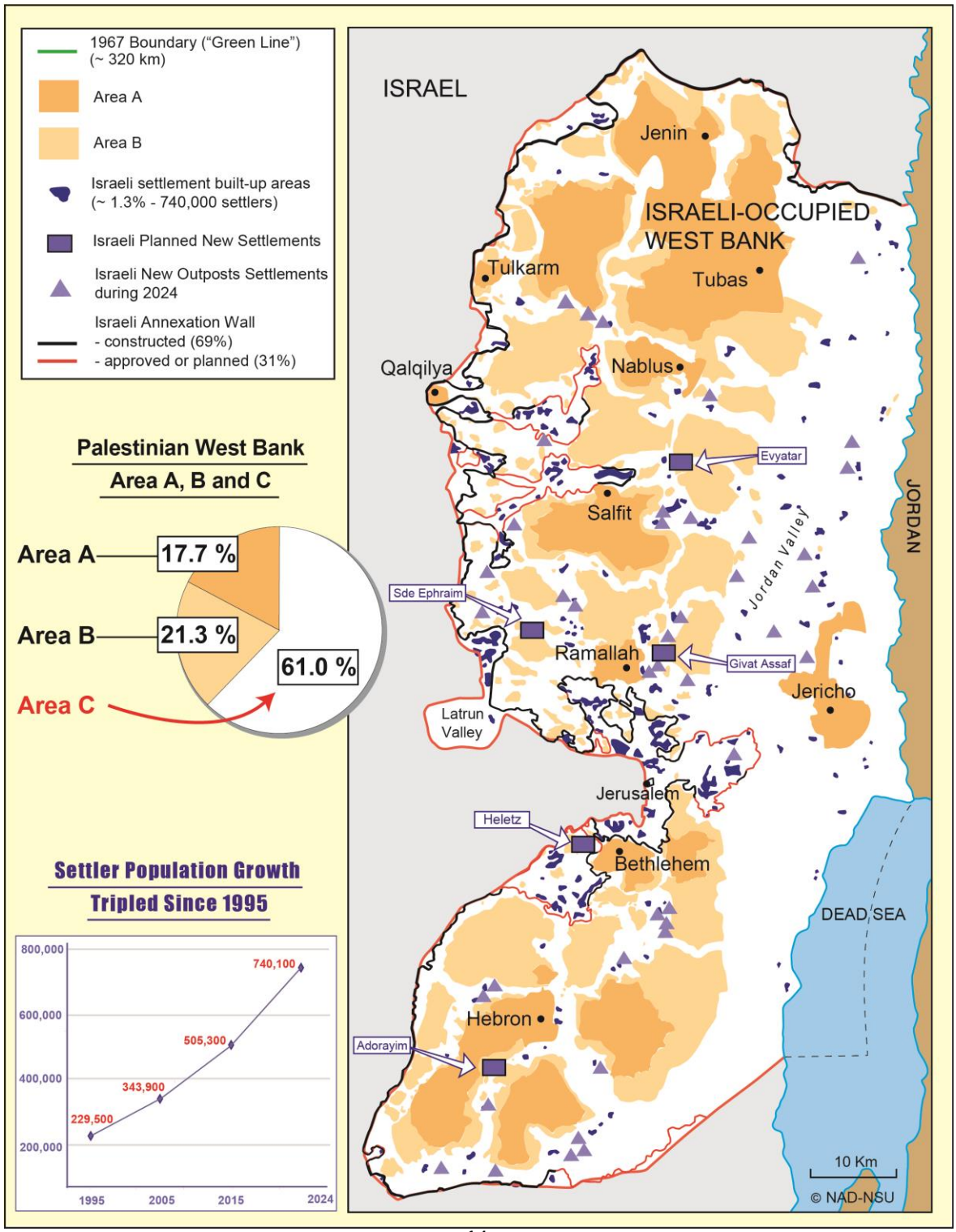
Israel's Wall and Settlements (Colonies)

During the Year 2024