



Israel is Accelerating Building Illegal Settlements in the West Bank While the World's Attention is on Gaza

With much of the world's focus and outrage directed at the appalling human rights abuses unfolding in Gaza, it has become increasingly important to not lose sight of the violations that are also taking place in the West Bank at an alarming rate. Since the onset of the Gaza War, there has been a significant uptick in plans for building new illegal settlements and most concerning, a growing prevalence of state-backed settler violence and attacks. This has consisted of harassment, property destruction, physical assaults, and even murders, and has seen an unprecedented number of Palestinians killed at the hands of settlers and Israeli forces – including many Americans. Rights groups have documented the troubling development, recently unveiling that at least 750 settler attacks have been committed against Palestinians and their property in the first half of 2025 alone – representing the highest monthly average since the recording of this data began almost 20 years ago. Analysts have noted that the spike has clearly been motivated by a number of factors such as global attention elsewhere, Israeli authorities' enabling and emboldening of the behavior, and the complete lack of accountability for these criminal acts – all demonstrating the systematic and calculated nature of the phenomenon as well. As a result, observers contend that Israeli forces and illegal settlers in the West Bank are currently carrying out one of the most violent campaigns of land grabbing and intimidation in decades.

In total, over 1,000 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed by Israeli forces and settlers since the onset of the Gaza War. There have been several Palestinian-American victims as well, with prominent recent cases including those of Sayfollah Musallet and Khamis Ayyad – both murdered as a result of Israeli settler violence that continues to go unpunished. The number of those injured or killed in these attacks has more than doubled in June and July 2025, compared to previous months. Additionally, the more than 750 settler attacks against Palestinians since January alone is a 13 percent rise from 2024, according to UN rights organizations. This is particularly disturbing considering that last year in 2024, there were already a record high number of incidents of settler violence (over 1,400) which exceeded that of the previous largest documented total from 2023. As such, should this trend continue over the latter half of 2025, that would mark three consecutive years of newly set highs in occurrences of settler violence.

On top of the rise in settler violence, there has also been a huge increase in unlawful Israeli land seizures and the number of illegal settlements and outposts, with peace activist groups documenting that the amount of both the land grabs and settlements/outposts built between 2023 and now surpasses that of the previous two decades combined. One of the latest plans for further illegal settlement expansion to draw widespread international condemnation was the E1 area project, which Israeli authorities gave final approval for this week. The planned settlement would in essence divide the occupied West Bank into northern and southern regions – hindering the potential establishment of a contiguous Palestinian state. For many analysts, this plan is purposefully being pushed now, in large part due to the recent growing number of countries that have announced their intent to formally recognize a Palestinian state – which has included France, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and others. In fact, current Israeli government officials have openly acknowledged that the E1 and the continued expansion of illegal settlements is a response to these moves and is aimed at preventing the feasibility of a Palestinian state. Israel's approval of the E1 plan also highlights how pervasive and out in the open support for blatant violations of

international law have become under the current government, as well as the degree to which it seeks to defy the global community.

While illegal Israeli settlement expansion plans like the E1 project have elicited universal denunciation, the one notable absence from this has been Trump administration officials. U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee stated that the United States would not oppose it, remarking that the plan “was not a violation of international law” despite worldwide agreement to the contrary. Harmful and dangerous rhetoric such as this from Huckabee amounts to complicity in Israel’s illegal actions and undoubtedly emboldens the continuation of these violations, which are the major obstacle to peace. This is precisely why illegal Israeli settlement development in the E1 area was previously frozen due to pressure from past U.S. administrations and countries in Europe. However, now, a failure to hold the Israeli government accountable for its repeated egregious human rights abuses, war crimes, and breaches of international law has opened the door for more of these to be committed.