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Position paper

The Risk of Strategic Deterioration in the West Bank: Intersections of Israeli Elections, Emerging Palestinian Leadership, and the Requirements of the Jordanian Response.

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Contents

Introduction: The West Bank and the Context of Complex Strategic Acceleration.....	3
First: Structural Diagnosis of the Crisis – The West Bank as a Conflict Arena (Structure – Security – Legitimacy)	5
Second: Elections in Israel – Temporal Framework, Competitive Dynamics, and Strategic Implications	7
Third: Leadership in the Next Phase in Palestine – Names, Mechanisms, and Post- Abbas Implications	11
Fourth: Where the Real Risk Lies in the Event of Netanyahu’s Success or Continuation of His Approach	15
Fifth: Arab Citizens of Israel and the Knesset: Why They Are Integral to the West Bank Equation	18
Sixth: The Illusion of Strategy: Why Jordanian and Arab Action Is No Longer Feasible	21
Conclusion	23



Introduction: The West Bank and the Context of Complex Strategic Acceleration

The West Bank is currently experiencing a qualitative shift that can be described as a state of “complex strategic acceleration,” resulting from the simultaneous interaction of multiple political, structural, and security transformations operating across different levels. These transformations unfold within dynamics characterized by sudden qualitative leaps and unexpected tipping points, thereby constraining the effectiveness of traditional control mechanisms and undermining the feasibility of managing the conflict through incremental or purely security-based approaches. This shift reflects a fundamental change in the nature and trajectory of risks, as the West Bank moves from being a relatively containable political arena to an open space for internal and regional reconfiguration.

This transformation emerges from the intersection of four main trajectories that do not merely operate in parallel but actively reinforce one another within an escalating cycle of interaction.

The first trajectory is linked to **internal transformations within Israel**, particularly the nature of the ruling right-wing coalition and the mounting political pressures it faces. The rise of competition from the “center-right” spectrum, fluctuations in opinion polls, and the persistent possibility of early elections—driven by budgetary crises and the deep polarization left in the wake of the recent war—have collectively pushed Israeli political actors, both within and outside the government, to instrumentalize the West Bank as a tool for domestic political mobilization. Within this context, the West Bank is no longer managed solely as a security file but increasingly as a political asset subject to electoral investment and partisan repositioning.

The second trajectory lies in **the fragility of the Palestinian Authority’s political legitimacy**—a fragility that has accumulated over many years due to the prolonged absence of elections, the erosion of popular trust, and the decline of the Authority’s functional and institutional capacity. The impact of this factor is further magnified by the approach of what may be termed the current leadership’s “biological–political moment,” which not only raises the issue of succession but also pushes the Palestinian political system into a state of heightened structural vulnerability.

The third trajectory is **connected to the escalation of both field-level and structural dynamics within the West Bank**. This escalation is not limited to an increase in the frequency of clashes or security operations; rather, it manifests more profoundly in the accelerated expansion of settlements, the rise of settler violence to unprecedented levels,



and the tightening of control mechanisms through checkpoints, incursions, and punitive measures. These dynamics transform the daily lives of Palestinians into a space of constant pressure, thereby weakening what remains

of the Palestinian Authority's capacity to perform its core functions and undermining its presence as an effective actor in the public sphere.

The fourth trajectory lies in the **declining Arab and international engagement with the West Bank**, as it is increasingly treated as a secondary file within the hierarchy of post-Gaza war priorities. This marginalization has negatively affected the prospects for advancing any strategic political approach capable of addressing the roots of deterioration or reintegrating the West Bank into a credible horizon for a sustainable settlement.

Why Does the West Bank Today Constitute a Regional Center of Gravity?

The significance of the West Bank extends beyond its role as an internal Palestinian arena. It represents a geopolitical hinge connecting four interrelated systems simultaneously:

1. The system of occupation and settlement, in which control is increasingly being transformed from a primarily military mode into a civilian-legal framework;
2. The eroding system of Palestinian legitimacy, where security and economic mechanisms are repurposed as tools of survival rather than instruments of a coherent political project;
3. The regional system, foremost among them Jordan, given the deep entanglement of borders, demography, and sovereignty;
4. The system of major powers, which has shifted toward managing the crisis rather than seeking its resolution.

It is the interaction among these systems that grants the West Bank its exceptional weight in the current phase. Accordingly, the situation in the West Bank is moving toward a process of gradual disintegration that does not take the form of outright collapse, but rather **unfolds through the erosion of the Palestinian Authority's governing functions within its nominal areas of control, the expansion of authority vacuums, and the acceleration of creeping annexation**. This trajectory produces a pattern of low-intensity conflict that **serves the calculations of the Israeli right by managing the conflict at controlled costs**, while simultaneously exhausting Palestinian society and generating direct and cumulative risks to Jordan's security and stability.

From a **Jordanian perspective**, the emerging threat posed by developments in the West Bank cannot be reduced to conventional security dimensions alone; it extends to the



reconfiguration of the strategic environment along the Kingdom’s western border. The shift of the West Bank from a politically manageable file to an open arena of pressure directly impacts a range of critical issues.

These issues include border security, smuggling and infiltration routes, demographic and political pressures associated with potential displacement or partial collapse, the status of crossings and the border economy, and the Hashemite custodianship of the holy sites, which carries both sovereign and symbolic weight, in addition to the standing of the Jordanian national state within the evolving regional equation.

The level of threat is further amplified if the current Israeli right-wing government-or its return to power with a parliamentary majority-accelerates the implementation of unilateral facts on the ground, including the spread of outposts, the expansion of settlements, the financial and functional strangulation of the Palestinian Authority, and the opening of “legal–procedural–functional” annexation pathways.

First: Structural Diagnosis of the Crisis – The West Bank as a Conflict Arena (Structure – Security – Legitimacy)

The escalating strategic threat in the West Bank cannot be understood solely through episodic indicators of violence or by tracking daily field events as isolated phenomena. Rather, it requires a disaggregation of the crisis structure, viewing the West Bank as an arena where three principal structural layers intersect: material–institutional, field-level security, and political legitimacy. These layers operate within a circular interactive relationship, cumulatively creating dynamics that are difficult to contain using traditional tools.

1. Material–Institutional Structure of Occupation (Territorial–Administrative Regime)

The West Bank is experiencing an accelerated production of a quasi-permanent regional-administrative reality, driven by Israel through an integrated system of instruments that extend beyond the direct scope of settlement activity. These policies include the fragmentation of Palestinian geography through bypass roads, changes in land registration systems, and the construction of new administrative and legal frameworks, effectively transforming control from a temporary security measure into a permanent sovereign regime on the ground.



The implication is that the occupation is redefining the relationship between land, population, and authority, gradually reducing the feasibility of a future political settlement without incurring enormous institutional dismantling costs.¹

2. Field Security Dynamics

At the operational level, the West Bank functions as a highly fragile security arena, continuously open to transformation. Multiple factors intersect, including intensified raids and arrests, escalating armed clashes, the arming and radicalization of settlers, and the disintegration of local control systems.² This interplay transforms major cities and refugee camps into open arenas of contestation, no longer managed according to a logic of stable security containment.

Empirical indicators on the ground point to a qualitative shift in the structure of violence, where security incidents no longer remain exceptional but instead manifest as repetitive and reproducible daily patterns.

3. Palestinian Legitimacy and Governance

Reports from AP News provide a stark depiction of the Palestinian leadership³, noting that President Mahmoud Abbas has become “highly unpopular”, with over 80% of Palestinians calling for his resignation according to recent opinion polls, against the backdrop of nearly two decades without elections. This crisis is not limited to individual leadership; it extends to the Palestinian governance system itself, which is progressively losing its claim to political representation and its capacity to exercise effective control over the public sphere.

In summary, the West Bank’s current reality cannot be interpreted as a transient security escalation, but rather as the gradual formation of a long-term strategic threat, affecting the foundations of control, governance, and legitimacy. This structure emerges from the triadic

¹ European Union. (2025, August 14). Report on Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem: Reporting period January–December 2024. Office of the European Union Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA). Available at:

[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025/documents/Report%20on%20Israeli%20Settlements%20in%20the%20occupied%20West%20Bank%20including%20East%20Jerusalem%20\(Reporting%20period%20January%20-%20December%202024\).](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025/documents/Report%20on%20Israeli%20Settlements%20in%20the%20occupied%20West%20Bank%20including%20East%20Jerusalem%20(Reporting%20period%20January%20-%20December%202024).)

² United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. (2025, November 14). Occupied West Bank: Increased Israeli violence against Palestinians must stop (Press briefing note). Available at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2025/11/occupied-west-bank-increased-israeli-violence-against-palestinians>

³ Reuters. (2025, December 26). Israeli reservist rams vehicle into Palestinian man praying in West Bank. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-reservist-rams-vehicle-into-palestinian-man-praying-west-bank-2025-12-26>



interaction of an integrated creeping annexation system, the accelerating functional and legitimacy erosion of the Palestinian Authority, and the transformation of the conflict into a low-intensity, prolonged localized armed pattern.

This assessment aligns with U.S. and Western security analyses, which have warned that the weakening of Palestinian leadership is no longer merely an internal crisis but a constraining factor for any potential political or security arrangements in the near term.⁴

Within this context, the West Bank has become a structurally unstable arena where conflict is managed rather than resolved, driven by internal Israeli dynamics that render these processes institutional rather than tactical or temporary. The implications of this reality extend beyond Palestinian society to the regional level, particularly to Jordan, which faces the risk of its western borders transforming from a manageable contact line into a fragile space prone to prolonged disturbances. Consequently, the current trajectory in the West Bank does not lay the groundwork for a settlement but instead heralds a prolonged period of managed instability, redefining security and political equations throughout the region.

Second: Elections in Israel – Temporal Framework, Competitive Dynamics, and Strategic Implications

The upcoming Israeli elections represent a crucial variable in understanding the trajectory of the West Bank, not merely as a routine democratic exercise but as a mechanism for reproducing existing policies toward the Palestinians within an intensely polarized political environment. The significance of this electoral cycle is heightened by the convergence of two factors: the fragility of the ruling coalition on one hand, and the West Bank's emergence as a central leverage point in electoral competition on the other.

1. Constitutional–Temporal Framework and the Likelihood of Early Elections

Legally, the next Israeli legislative elections are scheduled to take place no later than 27 October 2026, in accordance with the statutory regulations governing the Knesset cycle and the established judicial interpretation regarding election timing. Historically⁵, the state budget constitutes the most sensitive factor. Reliable reports indicate that the 2026 budget

⁴ AP News. (2025, December 28). Palestinians, Abbas react to Israel-Gaza Strip developments. AP News. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/palestinians-abbas-israel-gaza-strip-ffcff2f8e9e69ab6f9f8e850f3e75b53>

⁵ International Crisis Group. (2025, October). Annexation in the West Bank: Dynamics, implications and policy options (Report No. 252). International Crisis Group. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/252-annexation-west-bank>.

must be approved by the Knesset by the end of March 2026, and failure to do so automatically triggers the dissolution of the Knesset and calls for early elections.

This scenario provides small coalition parties, particularly religious and far-right factions, with a powerful tool for political leverage, making early elections a tangible possibility. Beyond the budget, other factors contribute to keeping the early-election scenario on the table, including coalition fractures, disputes over Haredi conscription, the repercussions of the recent war, and ongoing judicial and political files. Israeli media estimates at the end of 2025 suggested that elections could be brought forward to June 2026, several months prior to the legally scheduled date.⁶

The strategic implication is that even treating early elections as a plausible option reshapes the behavior of all political actors:

- The far-right escalates its demands and intensifies policies to generate “tangible achievements” for electoral marketing;
- Opponents of the Prime Minister adjust their strategies to account for potentially accelerated electoral timelines.

This political climate directly affects the West Bank, resulting in heightened field-level rigidity, accelerated settlement expansion, and unilateral, performative decisions on the ground.

Table 1: Israeli Electoral Scenarios and Their Strategic Implications for the West Bank

Comparative Dimension	Key Data	Political Implication	Impact on the West Bank
Legal-Temporal Framework	Latest possible election date: 27 October 2026	Formal stability does not reflect actual political stability	Continuation of current policies without long-term political commitment
Early Election Possibility	Potential advancement to June 2026 if the 2026 budget is not approved by end of March	Budget serves as a pressure tool for small coalition parties	Acceleration of settlement expansion and unilateral decisions before elections
Coalition Fractures	Disputes over conscription, the war,	Structural fragility in governance prevents long-term settlements	Field-level tightening to compensate for internal political weakness

⁶ The Times of Israel. (n.d.). Judge sets date for next scheduled elections for October 2026. The Times of Israel. Available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/judge-sets-date-for-next-scheduled-elections-for-october-2026>



	ongoing judicial and political files		
Pre-Election Climate	Rising populist and competitive rhetoric	The West Bank is used as an electoral “achievement” card	Increased raids, settler violence, and settlement expansion

2. Interpreting Opinion Polls: The Question Is Not “Who Will Win?” but “Who Can Form a Coalition?”

In the Israeli political system, electoral victory is not measured by the party with the largest number of seats, but rather by the ability of any bloc to **surpass the 61-seat threshold** in the Knesset. From this perspective, opinion polls published in late **2025** reveal a fragile landscape, with no decisive outcome for any political actor.⁷

Multiple central polls indicate that the Likud party hovers between the high twenties and low thirties in terms of seats, while the remaining seats are distributed among centrist blocs and opposition parties, which in most scenarios fail to reach a clear majority. Meanwhile, Netanyahu’s traditional bloc repeatedly falls short of the governing threshold by **4 to 10 seats**, while opposition blocs sometimes approach a majority without being able to surpass it.⁸

These polls also show a relative stability in **Arab party** representation, at roughly **10 seats**, rendering them in some scenarios a “kingmaker” capable of either blocking or enabling government formation, even if they are not directly part of a coalition. The technical factor of the electoral threshold is also critical, as the success or failure of a small party-particularly from the religious right-can shift the balance of all blocs.

Differences between polling houses reflect methodological variations and divergent assumptions regarding potential candidates, especially in the event of the rise of figures from the center-right. Nonetheless, a common denominator across all polls is the **inability of any single bloc to decisively shape the political landscape on its own.**

Table 2: Comparative Reading of Opinion Polls – Blocs, Not Parties

⁷ Reuters. (2025, December 4). Israel cabinet set to approve 2026 budget but faces battle for final approval. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-cabinet-set-approve-2026-budget-faces-battle-final-approval-2025-12-04>

⁸ The Times of Israel. (n.d.). Channel 12 poll: Likud would be largest Knesset party if elections held today, but Netanyahu bloc wouldn’t have ruling majority. The Times of Israel. Available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog-entry/channel-12-poll-likud-would-be-largest-knesset-party-if-elections-held-today-but-netanyahu-bloc-wouldnt-have-ruling-majority>



Variable / Bloc	Repeated Poll Results (Late 2025)	Structural Implication
Likud	26–31 seats, occasionally higher depending on strongest party	Structural shortfall preventing an outright majority without crucial partners
Netanyahu Bloc	51–57 seats in most scenarios	Close to a majority but not decisive
Zionist Opposition Bloc	53–59 seats	Approaches majority at times but cannot surpass it
Arab Parties	~10 seats, relatively stable	“Kingmaker” in scenarios enabling or blocking government formation
Small Parties (Religious Right)	Occasionally near the electoral threshold	Success or failure of a single small party can shift the balance of all blocs

Key Political Implications from the Polls

Three primary political implications can be drawn from these indicators:

1. Benjamin Netanyahu remains **the central figure** in Israeli politics, both as a leader and as the head of a parliamentary bloc, even amid the erosion of his traditional base.
2. Electoral outcomes are not determined by the largest party, but by the ability of blocs to form a coalition surpassing the 61-seat threshold, which grants Arab parties or pragmatic center-right forces a decisive, albeit uncomfortable, role in the political system.
3. From a security-military perspective, public sentiment leans to the right; however, issues such as corruption and the absence of a clear political horizon create space for the emergence of figures presented as “conservative alternatives”, without signaling a fundamental shift in policies toward the Palestinians.

General Political Summary

In short, the upcoming Israeli elections-whether held on schedule in **2026** or brought forward-are likely to serve as a complex referendum on four interrelated questions:

- The performance of the current leadership in war and judicial matters;



- The future of the right following its reconfiguration or reshaping;
- The profile of the liberal center–right bloc; and
- The role of Arab parties in participation, abstention, and the reconstruction of shared frameworks.

Across all scenarios, the West Bank remains a central instrument in **electoral competition**, not merely a peripheral security file. This explains the escalation of unilateral policies at this stage and the continued use of land and population as leverage within Israel’s domestic political equation, rather than as subjects for a political settlement.

Table 3: Projected Scenarios for the West Bank – Political Characterization and Feasibility

Scenario	Feasibility	Political Characterization / Implications
Acceleration of creeping annexation, establishment of outposts, field-level escalation	Medium	Hardline right + religious elements; continuation of Netanyahu’s current coalition
Maintenance of control with lower international confrontation	Relatively high	Soft external rhetoric; no fundamental policy changes; ongoing management of the West Bank
Right–center coalition (Netanyahu or alternative)	High	Use of the West Bank as a theater of escalation to compensate for domestic political stagnation
Inability of any bloc to form a majority	Theoretically possible, difficult in practice	Political paralysis; internal Israeli tensions increase pressure on the West Bank; external actors may attempt to support or block government formation

Third: Leadership in the Next Phase in Palestine – Names, Mechanisms, and Post-Abbas Implications

1. Succession as an Institutional Equation, Not a Personal Race

Analyses that treat the post-Mahmoud Abbas phase as merely a personal contest for the presidency are mistaken. The more accurate approach is to understand the “succession

moment” as a process of repositioning centers of power within the Palestinian political system, encompassing the presidency, Fatah (its organizational structure and mechanisms of control), the PLO (the Executive Committee and the Central Council), and the security apparatuses. A crucial dimension is the external legitimacy economy, tied to international recognition, funding, and channels of communication with the United States, Europe, and influential Arab capitals.

Within this framework, succession is a question of mechanism before it is a question of individual names. The ability to ensure a stable transition depends not only on who succeeds Abbas, but on how the relationships among these interlinked levels are managed, and on who controls the institutional, security, and financial levers simultaneously.

Procedurally, 2025 marked a pivotal moment with the establishment of a Deputy / Vice President position within the PLO/PA structure, aimed at alleviating fears of political vacuum. However, this development was not interpreted as opening a competitive space, but rather as a deliberate attempt to engineer a managed transition, reducing the element of surprise and minimizing the risk of division.

2. Succession Models: Implications of the Proposed Options

Rather than presenting a list of names as “equally plausible candidates,” it is more accurate to classify potential figures according to succession models, reflecting the type of legitimacy each option represents and its inherent limitations.

a. Hussein al-Sheikh: Managed Institutional Continuity Model

Hussein al-Sheikh emerges as the clearest expression of the managed administrative-political continuity option. His network of international relations, oversight of civil affairs affecting Palestinians’ daily lives, and proximity to the decision-making center position him as a choice that reassures international actors concerned about a post-Abbas vacuum. His appointment as Deputy within the PLO strengthened his role in the transition equation, but also highlighted a fundamental dilemma: internally, he is seen as part of a governing structure accused of corruption, ineffectiveness, and prioritizing “coordination” over political representation.

The significance of this option lies in maintaining a “functionally viable” authority for international engagement, but potentially deepening the gap in popular legitimacy unless an electoral horizon is opened or a meaningful internal reconciliation is achieved.

b. Majed Faraj: Security Stability and Legitimacy Through Control

Majed Faraj, as head of the Intelligence/General Security Service, represents an alternative model based on the legitimacy of stability. His influence derives from his capacity to manage security networks and maintain minimal order, rather than from mass political support. In this context, a scenario emerges of shared influence between Faraj and Hussein al-Sheikh, primarily designed to prevent institutional collapse rather than to generate new political legitimacy.

This option could ensure the continuation of the PA's functional role as an administrative and security apparatus, yet it remains politically fragile without clear Fatah backing, sustained external funding, and broader social acceptance. Absent these conditions, it risks being perceived merely as a security arrangement lacking political mandate.⁹

c. Traditional Fatah Figures: Organizational Legitimacy and Its Limits

Figures such as Jibril Rajoub and other traditional Fatah leaders emerge as potential options if broader internal competition within the movement is allowed, rather than relying solely on a top-down managed transition. This path may generate internal organizational legitimacy, but it is fraught with risks of internal polarization, institutional balancing, and donor sensitivities, particularly regarding leadership that may not guarantee stability of security and administrative functions.

d. Marwan Barghouti: Popular Legitimacy Confronting Political Reality

Marwan Barghouti's name frequently arises as a figure with substantial popular capital, capable of redefining the relationship between the street and the institutional framework. PCPSR polls (October 2025) indicate his strong presence as a figure filling the trust vacuum within Palestinian public opinion. However, his potential transition into an executive leadership role remains contingent on exceptional developments, including conditions of incarceration, anticipated Israeli resistance, complications in external funding, and internal Fatah dynamics.¹⁰

If realized through a major deal or under significant international pressure, this option could reconfigure the concept of legitimacy, yet it would simultaneously trigger acute confrontations with Israel and the existing system.

⁹ The Times of Israel. (n.d.). Poll: Netanyahu's Likud remains largest party while Bennet continues to lose ground. The Times of Israel. Available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/poll-netanyahus-likud-remains-largest-party-while-bennet-continues-to-lose-ground>

¹⁰ The Media Line. (n.d.). The day after Abbas. The Media Line. Available at: <https://themedialine.org/by-region/the-day-after-abbas>



e. **Mohammed Dahlan:** A Regional Actor More Than an Institutional Candidate

Mohammed Dahlan is frequently mentioned in succession analyses more as a factor in regional calculations than as a realistic institutional candidate. His practical feasibility remains contingent upon power balances within Fatah, the position of the presidency, and security apparatus dynamics, making his presence closer to a hypothetical scenario than a likely succession path.

Implications of the Succession Equation for Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority

Implications for Mahmoud Abbas

Within the transition context, Abbas gradually shifts from daily executive ruler to architect of the succession process. His decisions regarding appointments and the reorganization of positions within the PLO and Fatah are interpreted as efforts to minimize surprises, prevent a chaotic transition that could destabilize the security and administrative apparatuses, or trigger internal Fatah conflicts.

Implications for the Palestinian Authority: Three Realistic Scenarios

1. Managed Administrative-Security Succession

- Continuation of the PA as a service, administrative, and coordination apparatus
- Limited reforms aimed at appeasing donors
- Does not address the underlying legitimacy crisis

2. Conditional Popular Legitimacy Option

- Attempt to inject internal popular legitimacy
- Confronts obstacles such as Israeli rejection, internal Fatah balances, funding conditions, and incarceration-related constraints

3. Contested Succession Scenario

- The riskiest scenario, where competition between centers of power erodes the PA's functional capacity
- Expands local governance vacuums
- Transforms the West Bank into a less controllable arena



Any transition not accompanied by a new legitimacy track-whether through gradual elections, structural reconciliation, or the reconstruction of PLO representation-will likely lead to one of two outcomes:

- A PA without sovereignty in the West Bank, functionally managed under the framework of occupation;
- Multiple centers of power, making the “day after” primarily a security issue, while Gaza remains a separately complex file in post-war arrangements.

Fourth: Where the Real Risk Lies in the Event of Netanyahu’s Success or Continuation of His Approach

The core risk does not reside in Benjamin Netanyahu as an individual actor, but in the logic of political continuity that his success reinforces, consolidating a governance model based on a right-wing, religious, and settlement-oriented coalition. This model redefines the West Bank from a postponed negotiation file into a space of gradual sovereign determination.

Within this framework, international pressures or domestic objections are not central obstacles, but rather manageable costs.

Thus, the critical question shifts from “Who governs Israel?” to “How are the rules of the game changing?”-that is, a transition from an occupation presumed negotiable to the entrenchment of an irreversible reality, characterized by chronic low- to medium-intensity friction and the accumulation of unilateral facts, which raise the cost of any future settlement to near-impossible levels.

1. Settlements as State Policy: From Expansion to Institutional Leap

The December 2025 decision to grant legal status to 19 West Bank settlements/communities marks a qualitative turning point. Its significance lies in the formal and systematic expansion of settlements, embedding them as state policy rather than mere field practices.



Official figures indicate a remarkable quantitative jump: the number of settlements increased from 141 in 2022 to 210 following the decision¹¹, representing nearly a 50% increase under the current right-wing government.

This shift produces interconnected structural effects, including:

- Development of new roads and security infrastructure, buffer zones, and additional land expropriations;
- Planning systems that redefine the Palestinian geographic space.

The structural outcome is accelerated **fragmentation of Palestinian geography**, raising the “cost of dismantling” to a level that renders any subsequent political solution closer to a comprehensive territorial reengineering project than a gradual negotiated settlement. In this context, the two-state solution becomes not only stalled, but increasingly **politically and operationally costly**, undermining its practical feasibility over time.

2. Settler Violence: From Accompanying Phenomenon to Tool of Gradual Displacement

Even more concerning than settlement expansion per se is the functional integration between settlements and violence. Violence is no longer a marginal behavior; it has become an organized instrument used to reshape the field reality. Data indicate that over 750 Palestinians were injured in settler-related violence, alongside an unprecedented expansion of outposts and settlement outposts.¹²

The strategic significance of this violence lies in its cumulative impact, rather than isolated incidents:

- Slow forced displacement, particularly in Area C and herder communities;
- Disruption of rural and agricultural economies and de facto land ownership;
- Creation of daily friction that increases the likelihood of scattered armed responses;
- Justification for subsequent expansion of closures, raids, and repression under security pretexts.

¹¹ JAP News. (2025, December 30). Palestinian prisoners' families urge action amid Israel-Hamas tensions. AP News. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/palestinian-prisoners-israel-hamas-barghouti-5a4b1de8d7e314835c6106f3c7744fd7>

¹² Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research. (2025, October 28). Press release: Public Opinion Poll No. 96 - A dual crisis: Palestinian public opinion amidst occupation and a leadership vacuum. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research. Available at: <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/1000>



Through this pattern, the West Bank transforms into a space of continuous friction: not full-scale war, but reproducible violence that exhausts Palestinian society and reshapes the living space in favor of the unilateral annexation project.

3. Political and Electoral Hardening

Even under scenarios of competition between right-wing and center-right blocs, Israeli politics tends toward a security auction, with the West Bank as a central arena.

- Any rollback of settlement activity or restraint of settler groups is perceived within the right-wing as a loss of electoral achievement and coalition currency.
- Additionally, Netanyahu's politically sensitive position makes legitimacy battles with institutions and public opinion a routine part of governance, driving policies that deliver rapid, tangible results, with the West Bank serving as a primary proving ground of leadership.

4. The Risk to Jordan: The West Bank as a Fragile Space and Politicization of Crossing Arteries

The threat to Jordan extends beyond the likelihood of violence. It lies in the transformation of the West Bank into a fragile zone adjacent to Jordanian borders, characterized by:

- A weakened Palestinian Authority,
- A shrinking Palestinian economy,
- Expanded unilateral Israeli facts on the ground.

This reality generates cumulative security, economic, and political pressures on Jordan.¹³

5. Limited International Deterrence: Condemnation Without Behavioral Change

In December 2025, there was a surge in European and international condemnation, including denunciations of the “massive increase” in settler violence, threats of forced displacement and annexation in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and calls to adhere to international law and protect Palestinian civilians.¹⁴

¹³ AP News. (2025, December 31). Israel, Palestinians spar over settlements as violence rages in West Bank. AP News. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-settlements-west-bank-6923448a5956ff4d90b240d871db33e6>

¹⁴ Reuters. (2025, December 26). Israeli reservist rams vehicle into Palestinian man praying in West Bank. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-reservist-rams-vehicle-into-palestinian-man-praying-west-bank-2025-12-26>



However, a clear gap exists between rhetoric and deterrence. Verbal condemnation has not been matched by tools capable of changing Israeli government behavior, reinforcing within the right-wing coalition the perception that the costs of annexation and violence are “manageable” within a contained diplomatic crisis framework.

In Summary: What Changes if Netanyahu “Succeeds”?

If Netanyahu succeeds or his approach emerges from crises with a stronger majority, the likely outcome is not merely temporary escalation, but the entrenchment of a governance model that entails:

- Accelerated creeping annexation through outposts and institutional expansion of settlements;
- Integration of settler violence as a tool of field control and slow displacement;
- Redefinition of the Palestinian Authority as a limited administrative-security apparatus with no political horizon;
- Spillover effects into Jordan through border security, crossings, and economic-political pressure.

In this sense, the danger is not the persistence of a single individual, but a long-term structural transformation that reshapes the conflict, gradually closes political solution windows, and converts the “day after” into a matter of managing chronic crises rather than achieving historical settlement.

Fifth: Arab Citizens of Israel and the Knesset: Why They Are Integral to the West Bank Equation

The position of **Palestinians within Israel** (the “**Arab 48**” population) in the Knesset cannot be understood merely as an internal civil representation issue. Rather, it constitutes **a structurally significant element in the Israeli governance equation**, whose influence becomes particularly pronounced in moments of **electoral deadlock**.

When the government’s majority hinges on **one or two seats**, Arab representation can shift from **a marginal opposition role** to a **potential tipping lever in the balance of power**. However, this leverage **does not operate automatically**; it is conditioned by three critical factors:

1. Unity or fragmentation of Arab political lists,
2. Participation rates within the Arab community,



3. The ceiling of political legitimacy granted to Arab participation within the broader Jewish society.

Within these conditions, the question is no longer whether the Arab 48 population is “in the game”, but rather **how and to what extent they can influence its outcomes**, particularly regarding policies related to the West Bank. This influence encompasses two dimensions:

1. Voting Trends and Representation

When numbers translate into qualitative leverage, the impact becomes significant. Digital models produced by the Ibrahim Initiatives (February 2025) provide a clear indicator of this shift.¹⁵ In a scenario where the four main Arab parties (Hadash/Balad/Ra’am/Ta’al) run on a unified list, expected representation varies as follows:

- **60% participation:** approximately **14.8 seats**
- **70% participation:** approximately **17.3 seats**

The strategic significance of these figures lies not merely in their numerical increase, but in their potential to act as a **qualitative force** within a closely divided bloc system, where Jewish blocs may fail to reach the **61-seat** majority threshold without external support. In such cases, Arab representation becomes part of coalition calculations, even if it does not translate into a direct governing partnership.

However, the same report highlights a structural gap between the positions of the Arab public in Israel and the general Jewish sample regarding the participation of an Arab party in a governing coalition. This gap does not eliminate the possibility of influence but **defines the ceiling of bargaining power and the limits of potential gains**.

2. Parliamentary Weight and Institutional Limits

Results from the 2022 elections, according to the Central Elections Committee, show that Arab lists exceeded the electoral threshold (3.25%) and achieved representation sufficient to play a tipping role in a deeply divided Knesset. This reality allows them to be perceived within Israeli calculations-as reflected in Knesset seating arrangements and voting behavior-as a **“functional bloc”** capable of:

- Providing external support,
- Withholding such support,

¹⁵ Badshah, N. (2025, December 24). UK, Canada and Germany condemn Israel for 19 new West Bank settlements. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/24/israel-condemned-approval-19-settlements-occupied-west-bank>



- Imposing implicit political conditions.

Yet this weight remains fragile, constrained by three factors:

1. Internal cohesion and resilience of the Arab bloc,
2. Cost of participation or support in a highly charged political environment,
3. Limits of Jewish public acceptance before Arab participation becomes a mobilizing target against them.

Thus, Arab influence is measured not solely by seat count, but by **its capacity to manage the political risks accompanying that influence.**

3. The Key Shift: Arab Public Sentiment Within Israel

The deeper significance of this issue goes beyond parliamentary calculations and lies in the transformation of Arab public opinion. A study conducted by Tel Aviv University, published in December 2025, indicated that over 75% of Arabs in Israel support the inclusion of an Arab party in a governing coalition.¹⁶

This figure reflects the erosion of the “taboo” against government participation, even amid rising Arab-Jewish tensions, and signals the shift of “influence from within” from an ethical/political exception to a realistic and publicly debatable option.

Conversely, the Israeli political and media discourse frequently employs the phrase: “no government without the Arabs.” This statement is not a normative judgment; rather, it reflects a mathematical reality in a closely contested electoral system, where one or two seats can determine the fate of an entire coalition.

Here, the Arab 48 issue intersects directly with the West Bank equation. When any Israeli bloc requires Arab support-whether through direct participation or external backing-two possible pathways emerge:

1. **Internal Deal Pathway:** tangible internal concessions are offered (budgets for Arab local authorities, crime prevention programs, infrastructure projects, symbolic recognition of civil rights) in exchange for **limiting confrontation** over West Bank policies, or for adopting rhetorical positions that do not threaten coalition cohesion.

¹⁶ Abraham Initiatives. (2025, March). Election survey results. Abraham Initiatives. Available at: <https://abrahaminitiatives.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Election-Survey-Results.pdf>



2. **Incitement Backlash Pathway:** the right exploits Arab participation or support as a mobilization tool, framing it as an “internal threat”, which in turn results **in further hardening of West Bank policies** as a political and ideological compensation mechanism to reaffirm legitimacy among the right-wing base.

In both pathways, the Arab 48 population is not outside the equation; rather, it forms part of the indirect influence dynamics on West Bank policies-either by relatively constraining them or by pushing them toward further extremism.

Sixth: The Illusion of Strategy: Why Jordanian and Arab Action Is No Longer Feasible

The current reality has shifted the question from “**what is required?**” to “**why is it no longer possible at all?**”. After years of recommendations, plans, and “roadmaps,” the Jordanian-Arab dilemma regarding the West Bank is no longer primarily a matter of lacking vision or tools. Rather, **it reflects the collapse of the very conditions necessary for political action.**

The tools are known, the risks identified, and the scenarios pre-drafted, yet the fundamental gap lies **in the absence of a political actor capable of bearing their costs.**

Discussions of “strategic responsiveness” implicitly assume the existence of an actor who:

- possesses decision-making authority,
- can withstand U.S. pressure,
- is willing to bear the cost of confrontation with Israel, and
- enjoys internal legitimacy sufficient to take political risks.
- this actor does not exist.

Within this context, analyses that treat Jordan as an initiative-driven regional player in the West Bank file are flawed. In reality, Jordan has become-by virtue of geography, demographics, and economy-a risk management actor, focused on absorbing shocks rather than shaping outcomes. Consequently, Jordanian policy is not framed around the question “**what do we want to change?**”, but rather around more cautious questions such as:

- how to prevent spillover from the West Bank into Jordan,
- how to buy time in the face of uncontrollable shifts, and
- how to reduce the likelihood of worst-case scenarios when unable to enforce better ones.

This is not political negligence; it is a structural limit:

- an economy dependent on external aid,
- national security tied to stability rather than adventurous policies,
- sensitive domestic legitimacy linked to Jerusalem and national identity, constrained by an American alliance that leaves no room for open confrontation.

Given these constraints, talk of a “coordinated Jordanian escalation” or “imposing red lines” is largely rhetorical, ignoring the actual balance of power. Jordan’s instruments in this file are focused on containment and damage reduction, not deterrence or enforcement.

Regarding the Arab system more broadly, its retreat from the West Bank cannot be explained merely as moral neglect or temporary political failure. Rather, it is a direct consequence of structural transformations in the nature and mechanisms of the Arab system. The issue is not the absence of a position, but the erosion of the institutional framework that allows a position to translate into political action.

Key changes include:

- the absence of a **centralized Arab decision-making** authority capable of coordinating policies or imposing shared priorities,
- the decline of any **regional project capable of providing the Palestinian** cause with a strategic framework **beyond reactive measures**, and
- the lack of shared costs for intervention; each state bears its own risks independently, without mechanisms for risk-sharing or burden distribution.

Moreover, there is no leadership actor prepared to bear the political or economic consequences of failure or confrontation, pushing the Arab system as a whole toward less risky, more cautious choices.

As a result, Arab states do not operate according to a cohesive collective strategy, but according to individual survival calculations, governed by domestic priorities and asymmetric economic and security pressures. Under this transformation, Palestine-and the West Bank in particular-has shifted from a unifying cause with symbolic and strategic returns to a high-cost, low-yield issue in national policy calculations.

Within this paradigm:

1. **Political statements** become a **lower-cost** substitute for practical initiatives.



2. Verbal condemnation **replaces** concrete pressure.
3. **Measured silence** is seen as safer than engagement in paths that may incur uncertain political or economic costs.

Another common misconception in Arab discourse is the belief that the United States can be “**persuaded**” to change its stance on the West Bank through evidence or intensified diplomatic pressure. This assumption does not align with the actual logic of U.S. decision-making. Washington does not treat the West Bank as an urgent strategic crisis; rather, it is **a manageable file within existing Israeli security and political arrangements.**

As long as the current situation does not impose practical isolation on Israel, does not generate direct economic costs, and does not pose a tangible threat to core U.S. interests in the region, the American incentive to invest politically in altering the trajectory remains limited. Consequently, **the West Bank is not perceived as a source of instability** necessitating strategic intervention, but as an issue that can be contained within existing security arrangements, even if these arrangements produce **gradual deterioration over the medium term.**

Accordingly, the West Bank **does not occupy** a top spot on the U.S. agenda; it is classified as a deferred file among a crowded list of matters deemed, from Washington’s perspective, more urgent and directly relevant to its interests.

Conclusion

In the absence of deterrence or enforceable leverage, Jordanian and broader Arab policy has shifted from **conflict management** to **time management.**

What does this mean in practical terms? It delays explosions rather than preventing them, mitigates deterioration without reversing it, and prevents total collapse without constructing a new pathway. This is not a “strategy of weakness,” but a **strategy of necessity** within a profoundly imbalanced power equation.

The danger of this approach lies in its cumulative effects: it consumes political time, entrenches Israeli facts on the ground, and empties **any future solution of substantive content.**

Much political analysis tends to await the so-called “big explosion” as a decisive turning point in the West Bank. Yet this perspective neglects **the more likely and more dangerous** scenario: a slow erosion that reshapes the conflict **without a single shock event or clearly decisive moment.**



This erosion manifests in a series of simultaneous transformations:

- A continuous decline in the **Palestinian Authority's** legitimacy and governance capacity,
- **Increasing geographic fragmentation** undermining any realistic possibility of a viable state,
- **Socioeconomic exhaustion** limiting the Palestinian society's long-term resilience, and
- Persistent **pressure on Jordan** resulting from unstable spillovers that do not take the form of a single crisis justifying radical policy adjustments.

It is no longer accurate to treat developments in the West Bank as isolated Israeli policies or contingent deviations tied to specific governments. What is taking shape on the ground is a **comprehensive, undeclared political trajectory**, led by successive right-wing Israeli governments and reaching unprecedented cohesion under Benjamin Netanyahu's approach.

This trajectory follows a clear logic: **maintaining full Israeli control over the territory** while **externalizing demographic and political burdens beyond Israel's sovereign domain**.

This path does not fall within formal annexation nor a negotiated solution. Rather, it represents **calculated cost management**: territorial control expands gradually, populations are pushed to the margins without direct expulsion, and the resulting crisis is redirected toward external actors capable of absorbing its consequences.

A common analytical mistake is to await an explicit Israeli declaration of a "final solution." Such expectations ignore the operational logic of Israeli policy, which relies on quiet accumulation rather than abrupt decisions. Actual policy aims to **prevent the emergence of a viable Palestinian state**, maintain Palestinians in a state of non-sovereignty, fragment the West Bank into discrete geographic units, and shift the burden of population management externally.

This trajectory unfolds without the need for a single unifying decision, using overlapping tools such as:

- Settlement expansion and legal codification of outposts,
- Settler violence,



- Gradual erosion of the Palestinian Authority's function, and
- Limited international humanitarian engagement that does not open a political horizon.

In this sense, the “alternative solution” is not a **pre-written plan, but the logical outcome of a long-term cumulative process.**

In this context, the Palestinian Authority is no longer a political actor capable of managing the conflict; it has gradually transformed into an **administrative apparatus for population management**, tasked with preventing total collapse and delaying explosions, without possessing genuine tools to alter the structural conditions on the ground. This situation does not serve the

Palestinian people, but **it serves Israel at a critical point:** keeping Palestinians in place without granting them a state, and without bearing the costs of direct governance.

With each further erosion of the Authority's legitimacy or governance capacity, the existing system approaches a critical point of exposure: either a return to **high-cost direct occupation, or the externalization of political and humanitarian burdens.**

It is essential to name the reality clearly. Jordan is not merely a neighbor affected by developments in the West Bank; it is the most realistic candidate to **bear the cost of failure** in the Israeli-Palestinian trajectory. The Jordanian risk does not lie in a sudden mass expulsion scenario, but in a **long-term cumulative** slide, based on continuous economic constriction in the West Bank, the slow depopulation of rural areas and the Jordan Valley, the politicization and congestion of crossings, and the gradual erosion of Palestinian capacity for survival and sustainability.

This trajectory does not require an explicit expulsion decision; it is sufficient that living conditions become unsustainable. At this stage, the Jordanian demographic dimension enters the equation-not as a humanitarian concern, but as **a matter of sovereignty, identity, and political legitimacy.** Any Arab or international delay in addressing the root causes does not freeze the crisis; it merely shifts it **gradually eastward.**

A major risk of political misrepresentation in the current phase is the discourse asserting that “**no alternative solution exists.**” This statement is inaccurate. More precisely, the alternative is being **implemented quietly**, because announcement is politically costly, whereas silent implementation is feasible and sustainable. Israel does not need to inform Jordan or others of its responsibility; it suffices to **weaken the Authority, strangle the West Bank**, and rely on international condemnation alone. The practical international question



then becomes: **who can prevent the collapse?** The realistic answer, in most scenarios, is **Jordan**.

Arab states are aware of this trajectory, but they **lack the instruments to disrupt it**. The incapacity here is not one of intent, but structural, stemming from the absence of a central decision-making body, fear of confrontation costs, and preference for loss management over confronting the trajectory. Yet this option carries a clear paradox: each delay reduces the **immediate cost of intervention**, but increases the cost of **coercive action later**, when the danger becomes more entrenched and less containable.

Accordingly, what is unfolding in the West Bank is neither a purely internal Palestinian crisis nor a conventional bilateral dispute. It is a **gradual redistribution of the conflict's cost**: Israel consolidates territorial control, Palestinians are left without a political horizon, Jordan is pushed into the role of last line of defense, and Arab states **observe a slowly advancing threat**.

If this trajectory continues, the question will no longer be whether a political solution exists, but **who will bear the ultimate cost of its collapse**-a question that Jordan cannot afford to ignore, and which the region cannot afford to postpone indefinitely.

Thus, the Jordanian response requires **a shift from containment to degradation prevention**, through a comprehensive approach linking security with political strategy and diplomacy with operational readiness. Jordan does not face the risk of a sudden West Bank explosion, but the risk of **gradual erosion that reshapes its western border and stability equation**. Any delay in establishing a clear strategic repositioning will increase the cost of response and narrow the maneuvering options over time.