



By: TA | AP Insight

# Are Israel's new measures diminishing Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank?



A top Israeli official said Tuesday that measures adopted by the government that deepen Israeli control in the occupied West Bank amounted to implementing “de facto sovereignty,” using language that mirrors critics’ warnings about the intent behind the moves.

The steps “actually establish a fact on the ground that there will not be a Palestinian state,” Energy Minister Eli Cohen told Israel’s Army Radio.

Palestinians, Arab countries and human rights groups have called the moves announced Sunday an **annexation of the territory**, home to roughly 3.4 million Palestinians who seek it for a future state.

Cohen’s comments followed similar remarks by other members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government, including Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Defense Minister Israel Katz.

The moves – and Israeli officials’ own descriptions of them – put the country at odds with both regional allies and previous statements from U.S. President Donald Trump. **Netanyahu** has traveled to Washington to meet with him later this week.

Last year, Trump said he wouldn’t allow Israel to **annex the West Bank**. The U.S.-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas that aimed to stop the war in Gaza also acknowledged **Palestinian aspirations for statehood**.

## Widespread condemnation

The measures further erode the Palestinian Authority’s limited powers, and it’s unclear the extent to which it can oppose them.

In a statement on Tuesday, President Mahmoud Abbas’ cabinet “instructed all public and private Palestinian institutions not to engage with these Israeli measures and to strictly adhere to Palestinian laws and regulations in force.”

A group of eight Arab and Muslim-majority countries expressed their “absolute rejection” of the measures, calling them in a joint statement Monday illegal and warning they would “fuel violence and conflict in the region.”

**They are driving us further and further away from a two-State solution - Antonio Guterres**

Israel’s pledge not to annex the West Bank is embedded in its **diplomatic agreements** with some of those countries and renewed warnings that it was a “red line” for the Emirates led Israel to shelve some high-level discussions on the matter last year.

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he was “gravely concerned” by the measures.

“They are driving us further and further away from a two-State solution and from the ability of the Palestinian authority and the Palestinian people to control their own destiny,” his spokesperson, Stephane Dujarric, said on Monday.

## What the measures mean

The measures, approved by Netanyahu’s Security Cabinet on Sunday, expand Israel’s enforcement authority over land use and planning in areas run by the Palestinian Authority, making it easier for **Jewish settlers** to force Palestinians to give up land.

Smotrich and Katz on Sunday said they would lift long-standing restrictions on land sales to Israeli Jews in the West Bank, shift some control over sensitive holy sites – including Hebron’s Ibrahimi Mosque, also known as the Tomb of the Patriarchs – and declassify land registry records to ease property acquisitions.



Taken together, the moves add an official stamp to Israel's accelerating expansion

They also revive a government committee empowered to make what officials described as "proactive" land purchases in the territory, a step intended to reserve land for future settlement expansion.

Taken together, the moves add an official stamp to Israel's accelerating expansion and would override parts of decades-old agreements that split the West Bank between areas under Israeli control and areas where the Palestinian Authority exercises limited autonomy.

Israel has increasingly **legalized settler outposts** built on land Palestinians say documents show they have long owned, evicted Palestinian communities from areas declared state land, firing zones or nature reserves.

More than 700,000 Israelis live in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories captured by Israel in 1967 and sought by the Palestinians for an independent state along with the Gaza Strip.

Palestinians are not permitted to sell land privately to Israelis. Settlers can buy homes on land controlled by Israel's government.

The international community overwhelmingly considers Israeli settlement construction to be illegal and an obstacle to peace.

"These decisions constitute a direct violation of the international agreements to which Israel is committed and are steps toward the

annexation of Areas A and B," anti-settlement watchdog group Peace Now said on Sunday, referring to parts of the West Bank where the Palestinian Authority exercised some autonomy.