

A Policy That Breaks Up the West Bank Into Islands Does Not Create Stability, Not for Palestinians and Not for Israelis

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The checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank are not a collection of isolated measures put in place as a temporary response to a security threat. They constitute an entire system of control that dictates the lives of millions of Palestinians. On the main roads alone there are 98 checkpoints and crossings, 135 gates and 70 roadblocks — a total of 303 physical obstacles. Added to these are restrictions on entry into the “Seam Zone” and East Jerusalem, movement restrictions on sections of Routes 5 and 557, and the subjection of Palestinian use of Route 443 to security checks. The result is the spatial fragmentation of the West Bank, which severely harms daily life and the governance of the Palestinian Authority, particularly in the economic sphere.

The full picture is even more serious. In a field survey published in April 2026, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs documented 925 movement obstacles in the West Bank, including trenches and local roadblocks, including East Jerusalem. This is the highest number recorded in the past 20 years, and 43% above the multi-year average. The obstacles restrict the movement of 3.4 million Palestinians. In 2025 alone, more than 120 road gates were installed. At least 459 of the obstacles block or impede the connection between Palestinian communities and the main roads; 121 of them impair access to Route 60, the West Bank’s central “lifeline.”

Added to these obstacles are the security and separation barrier and the permit regime accompanying it. The planned route is 712 kilometers long. Sixty-four percent of it has already been built, and 85% runs through the West Bank rather than along the Green Line. In the area between the barrier and the Green Line, which covers 4.5% of the West Bank, Palestinians are prohibited from entering, except for those who have received a permit because they live there or own property there. Of the 34 crossings along the barrier, only a few allow holders of Palestinian identity cards and Israeli permits to reach East Jerusalem and Israel. More than 14,000 Palestinians living between the barrier and the Green Line are required to coordinate their passage in order to reach services, markets and even family members.

For an Israeli, the length of the journey to work, to a hospital or to visit family depends on distance and traffic congestion. For a Palestinian, it also depends on whether the gate is open,

whether the checkpoint is staffed, whether a flying checkpoint has been set up, whether a permit is required, and whether the shortest route has been blocked and replaced by a long detour. It is impossible to plan a workday, a supply chain, medical treatment or regular studies. The World Bank estimated that the West Bank economy contracted by 17% in 2024. In the background were the intensification of movement restrictions, the loss of access to the Israeli labor market and the fiscal crisis. The unemployment rate reached 29% by the end of that year, compared with 13% before the war. The checkpoints are not to blame for everything. But no economy can function when workers, goods, customers and services do not know when they will reach their destination.

Israel has the right and the duty to protect its citizens and thwart terrorism. But the words “security need” do not exempt it from the obligation to examine every restriction according to its necessity, effectiveness and proportionality. The High Court of Justice made this clear in the case of Route 443. In 2009, it struck down the blanket prohibition on Palestinian traffic on the road and ruled that a security order in itself was insufficient, and that the authority of the military commander was also intended to ensure the needs of the local population. The current arrangement differs somewhat from the complete closure that was struck down then, but the principle remains the same: security does not grant an unlimited license to deprive an entire population of the use of a public road.

The International Court of Justice also determined, in its advisory opinion of July 2024, that the regime of movement restrictions creates differential treatment of Palestinians and discriminatorily infringes freedom of movement and the rights associated with it. Even those who disagree with the advisory opinion cannot ignore the reality it identified: two transportation systems operate in the same territory. One is designed to provide Israelis with continuity, speed and accessibility; the other imposes blockage, supervision and dependence on Palestinians. The problem is not only moral. It is also a political and security failure. A policy that breaks up the West Bank into islands weakens the Palestinian economy, erodes the Palestinian Authority and deepens the sense of humiliation — and does not create stability. It increases friction, strengthens extremists and pushes further away the possibility of separation into two states. And this is indeed the policy of the current Israeli government.

The alternative is not abandoning security but adopting a more precise security policy: removing restrictions that lack justification, replacing sweeping blockages with targeted measures, examining the necessity of every checkpoint, and firmly enforcing the law against terrorism and violence from any side. At the same time, transportation and functional continuity must be restored to the Palestinians, and a political horizon to Israel. Those who seek security for Israelis cannot settle for yet another bypass road. Real security also rests on a system of regional alliances, on the quality of relations between states and on the border regime between them. Otherwise, this system will not remain temporary. It will become the permanent blueprint for one state, in which one people enjoys broad freedom of movement and the other enjoys freedom of movement that is conditional and restricted.