

From Temporary Measures to Permanent Policy: How the Expansion and Deepening of the "Seam Zone" Regime Are Reshaping Control Over West Bank Lands

Context

Approximately 85% of the separation barrier's route runs inside the West Bank rather than along the Green Line, creating a geographic enclave between the barrier and the Green Line known as the "Seam Zone." Covering approximately 9.4% of the West Bank, the "Seam Zone" is designated a closed military area, which Palestinians may enter only with military-issued permits.¹

Since the barrier's construction, the "Seam Zone" permit regime has increasingly restricted Palestinian access to land. **Since 7 October 2023, it has expanded geographically and become significantly more restrictive, accelerating dispossession and reshaping effective control over large parts of the West Bank.**

Increased scrutiny of permit holders in the "Seam Zone"



19,000

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF
FARMERS DENIED
MEANINGFUL ACCESS
TO THEIR LANDS



44%

PERCENTAGE OF
BUSINESS PERMITS
APPROVED IN 2025,
ALMOST **2,500** FEWER
THAN IN REGULAR YEARS



33%

PERCENTAGE OF DECLINE
IN AGRICULTURAL AND
BUSINESS PERMITS IN
2024-2025

Founded by Dr. Lotte
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from foreign state entities.

In November 2025, the army published updated entry regulations for the "Seam Zone." **The new regulations severely restrict land access for olive growers, who**

¹ [Map of the barrier route in the West Bank, July 2011, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory.](#)

account for approximately 95%² of Palestinian farmers in the area, limiting access to only a few days each year.

For some 19,000 farmers³, the consequences are already visible. The prolonged absence of farmers from their land has damaged crops, reduced incomes during one of the West Bank's worst economic crises and **facilitated land encroachment by Israeli citizens and settlers.**

Around 10,000 business owners and workers who depend on access to the "Seam Zone" have also faced a sharp decline in permit approvals despite the deepening economic crisis. **In 2025, only 5,093 of 11,549 permit applications (44%) were approved—fewer than the roughly 7,500 permits approved annually in pre-war years, despite significantly higher demand.**⁴

The story of Adnan

For decades, Adnan relied on agricultural land beyond the separation barrier for his livelihood. After being denied access for nearly two years, he was allowed to enter for just one day in November 2025, only to find his land overgrown and neglected. Reflecting on the experience, he said: **"Seeing your land like this is painful. I wish I had never entered in the first place."** Today, Adnan remains unable to access his land regularly. He is now considering selling it, saying that he would rather lose his land than continue to watch it lie barren and neglected.

Geographic Expansion and Displacement of Permanent Residents

Rather than remaining a temporary security measure, **the "Seam Zone" continues to expand to additional Palestinian communities, extending military control over movement and access throughout the West Bank**

In September 2025, the military designated approximately 20 km² (20,000 dunams) north-west of Jerusalem, including the Palestinian communities of Nabi Samuel, Beit Iksa and al-Khalayleh, as part of the "Seam Zone." As a result, **approximately 3,200**

² Based on the State's estimate submitted in HCJ 6896/18, *Ta'ameh et al. v. Military Commander in the West Bank et al.*

³ Based on an estimate provided by Palestinian District Coordination Offices (DCO) to the courts during HCJ 4285/24, *al- Odeh et al. V. Military Commander of the West Bank Area*

⁴ All data on "Seam Zone" permits presented in this section was obtained through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted by HaMoked to the Civil Administration's Public Inquiries Officer between 2014 and 2025.

residents⁵ who had previously entered their communities based on standing resident lists are now required to obtain renewable permits.

The expansion of the permit regime is not merely a technical administrative change. Once an area is designated as part of the "Seam Zone," residents who have lived there for decades become subject to a system of renewable "Permanent Resident" permits, valid for up to two years and conditioned on stringent "center of life" examinations, including home visits and close scrutiny of their presence in the area. **Failure to satisfy these requirements may result in the loss of the permit—and with it, the legal ability to remain in their own homes.**

How an Extended Family Lost Their Home Due to Wartime Access Restrictions

In some cases, the strict requirements for maintaining permanent resident status [can become a mechanism for the displacement of long-established Palestinian communities](#). This is what happened to one extended family from a Bedouin Palestinian community near Qalqilya. Following the harsh wartime restrictions, the family had little choice but to reside outside the "Seam Zone" to access work, schools, and essential services beyond the separation barrier. **The military later relied on this forced absence to revoke their permanent resident permits, barring them from returning to their homes and agricultural land, where they had sustained their traditional way of life for decades.**

Legal and Policy Implications

The barrier's route has been widely condemned internationally, culminating in the [ICJ Advisory Opinion](#), the International Court of Justice found that the construction of the barrier inside the occupied West Bank violates international law and infringes the rights of the local Palestinian population.

The Israeli High Court of Justice approved the legality of the wall, while [instructing the State](#) to preserve, as much as possible, the pre-existing fabric of life of local communities, subject to security needs. Although the HCJ upheld the barrier's legality

⁵ Based on data provided by to HaMoked by village councils and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS).

on the condition that harm to local communities be minimized, **it has largely declined to intervene as restrictions have intensified, most recently rejecting [HaMoked's petition against the new access regime](#).**

The new measures undermine rights recognized by the Advisory Opinion, including freedom of movement, the right to work and an adequate standard of living. By restricting Palestinian access to extensive areas of the West Bank and entrenching their prolonged absence, **they also reshape effective control over the territory and undermine the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.**

Conclusion

The recent changes demonstrate that the Seam Zone regime is not only becoming increasingly restrictive but also expanding geographically. Together, these measures are reshaping patterns of movement, land use and effective control in the West Bank. **They risk creating long-term changes on the ground that facilitate de facto annexation.**

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