

B'Tselem's *The Elimination Project*: Dismantling Palestinian collective existence in the West Bank is Israeli policy

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B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, has published a report arguing that Israel is pursuing a systematic and ongoing political project to dismantle the conditions required for Palestinian collective existence in the occupied West Bank.

The Elimination Project, spanning 249 pages, documents how Israel's restrictions on Palestinians—illegally occupied since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war—are making collective life progressively more difficult. Israel is “dramatically intensifying its attacks on every aspect of Palestinian life in the West Bank”, including “the ability to get to work, take children to school or university, receive medical treatment or municipal services, meet family and friends, cultivate land or go on vacation ... routine activities that make up human life”.

Drawing on more than 2,000 testimonies collected since October 2023, alongside three decades of documentation, it argues that these abuses are “governed by a coherent organising logic”: five apparently distinct but “interwoven domains of action” through which Israel is entrenching Jewish control. These are: violence and intimidation, restrictions on movement, economic strangulation, the destruction of social and political life, and ethnic cleansing and territorial takeover.

B'Tselem explicitly links this process to what has happened in Gaza, where “the logic of elimination has assumed a genocidal form; in the West Bank, it is realized through an integrated mechanism of dispossession, ethnic cleansing, violence, control of movement and the economy, and the destruction of social and political life. The genocide in Gaza and the elimination project in the West Bank are different manifestations of the same regime project, directed against Palestinians' ability to exist as a people.”

It defines “elimination” as the “sustained harm to the conditions that enable Palestinians to exist as a people with land, institutions, language, culture, social ties, leadership, shared memory and history, and a social and political

horizon.”

B'Tselem concludes that Gaza and the West Bank are part of “an ongoing political project that seeks to re-organise space and the conditions of life so that Jewish presence becomes contiguous, institutionalised and permanent, while Palestinian existence becomes fragmented, vulnerable and dependent.”

The report traces the historical development of the Zionist project and its attempt to establish Jewish sovereignty over a territory in which Palestinians already lived and continue to live. Between 1947 and 1949, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled or fled their homes in what became known as the Nakba. Their property was expropriated and their lands made available for Israeli settlement. Following the June 1967 war, Israel extended its control over the remaining Palestinian territories, imposing military rule on millions of Palestinians, expropriating land, establishing settlements, restricting Palestinian planning and development, and fragmenting the territory.

B'Tselem's executive director, Yuli Novak, explained in a guest column in the *New York Times* how this historical process has developed into the policy pursued by Bezalel Smotrich, Israel's finance minister, who has been given sweeping powers over Israeli rule in the West Bank. In a plan published in 2017, Smotrich set out three options for Palestinians: abandon their national aspirations and accept life under Jewish supremacy, leave, or face military force if they resist. Since becoming a minister in December 2022, under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government, he has worked to implement this programme.

Although Smotrich did not invent this system, his Decisive Plan explicitly articulates the logic of Jewish supremacy.

Smotrich has repeatedly stated that his aim is “to prevent the danger of a Palestinian state”. This includes seeking to bring about the collapse of the Palestinian Authority through “economic strangulation”. This has included: withholding over \$5 billion in tax funds that provide much of the PA's

annual income, leading to unpaid public sector wages and reduced hours for schools and clinics; banking restrictions; and the revoking of permits for more than 100,000 Palestinians to work in Israel, causing unemployment and poverty.

Smotrich uses the Decisive Plan's Hebrew name, *hachra'ah*, which carries the stronger meaning of bringing a struggle to an irreversible end through the decisive defeat of the other side. Its methods include "initiating friction": deliberately creating confrontations with Palestinian communities over their land, often through violence and intimidation, until people are worn down and leave. "Shaping operations" involve physically remaking the landscape, including uprooting olive trees that provide Palestinians with an important source of income. "Encouraging emigration" presents departure under such conditions as a voluntary choice.

For Palestinians, this situation has become truly terrifying, with its everyday reality of restrictions, roadblocks, violent settler attacks and killings, arrests and, increasingly, aerial strikes.

B'Tselem says that the problem cannot be solved by removing individual checkpoints, restraining particularly violent settlers, freezing some settlements, or making other isolated policy adjustments, because such measures would leave the basic structure intact. "Ending them requires changing the structure that produces them" and "Protecting human rights requires ending the Israeli apartheid regime, not fixing it."

B'Tselem argues that efforts to maintain and strengthen Jewish domination within a Zionist state through the systematic elimination of Palestinian collective life are incapable of providing a lasting solution to Israel's security or demographic dilemma, given that Palestinians now outnumber Jews in Israel and the occupied territories.

B'Tselem's 2021 report, *A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid*, explained that the system is designed to maintain Jewish supremacy and that the appropriate alternative was a future in which "human rights, democracy, liberty and equality are ensured to all people, both Palestinian and Israeli, living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea." Its 2025 report, "Our Genocide", argued that the regime's logic had produced genocide in Gaza and warned that it could spread to other areas under Israeli control.

The Elimination Project argues that its concerns have been vindicated as some of the practices employed in Gaza have already been extended to the West Bank. It states, "A regime based on Jewish supremacy, apartheid, and dispossession is illegitimate. It cannot be accepted or normalized, nor is it

enough merely to reduce some of the violence and dispossession it produces."

That an Israeli organization has concluded that Israel is an apartheid state that operates a "regime of Jewish supremacy", is carrying out a genocide in Gaza and is seeking to eliminate the Palestinians as a collective social and political entity in the West Bank, exposes the fraudulent claim of the Israel lobby in Europe and the United States, based upon the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism, equating criticism of Israeli government policy, including its racist policies towards the Palestinians, with anti-Semitism.

The report thus contributes to the broader crisis of legitimacy of the entire Israeli political establishment, including the nominally liberal opposition and the "peace camp", which have spent decades concealing the same process behind the language of the "two-state solution" and "security".

B'Tselem includes an appeal to "states and international institutions to do everything in their power and use all means at their disposal under international law to prevent Israel from continuing its crimes and to protect Palestinians from them". But this is an appeal to the same powers, above all the US, that have funded, organised and armed the genocide.

The only force capable of stopping the genocide is the international working class — a united movement of Israeli, Palestinian, American, and European workers against their own ruling classes, to overthrow Zionism and imperialism, and establish a Palestinian state as part of the United Socialist States of the Middle East and the world.



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