



Position Paper

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Land Challenges and Illegal Construction in IDF Firing Zones in Judea and Samaria

Executive Summary: Findings and Recommendations

In recent years—and with increasing intensity following the Palestinian Authority’s “Fayyad Plan”—a coordinated campaign has emerged aimed at seizing control of IDF firing zones in Judea and Samaria. What began as a marginal phenomenon has evolved into a systematic and organized operation involving extensive agricultural encroachment and the large-scale construction of access roads. Since 2008, the number of illegal structures within firing zones has surged by approximately **560%**, and as of this writing stands at nearly **6,000 illegal structures**.

This activity, which benefits from massive European funding, is designed to establish facts on the ground and to create Arab territorial continuity within **Area C**.

The takeover strategy is anchored in the development of permanent infrastructure, illegal connections to water and electricity networks, and a legal envelope intended to delay enforcement proceedings in Israeli courts. Beyond the erosion of sovereignty, the growing civilian presence displaces IDF forces from designated training areas, undermines operational readiness, and generates severe environmental and security hazards—both along the Seam Line and deep within the State of Israel.

In light of the data, which underscore the critical need for continuous territorial control, this report recommends intensifying government enforcement efforts, instituting a regular training program in areas of widespread violation, and implementing the High Court of Justice ruling requiring the restoration of **Firing Zone 918** to full security use by the end of **2026**.

IDF Firing Zones in Judea and Samaria – Background

IDF firing zones in Judea and Samaria extend across approximately **one million dunams** (out of Area C's total area of **3.8 million dunams**). The vast majority of these firing zones are located along the eastern ridge of the central mountain range, stretching toward the

Jordan Valley, with additional zones situated along the western Seam Line of Judea and Samaria.

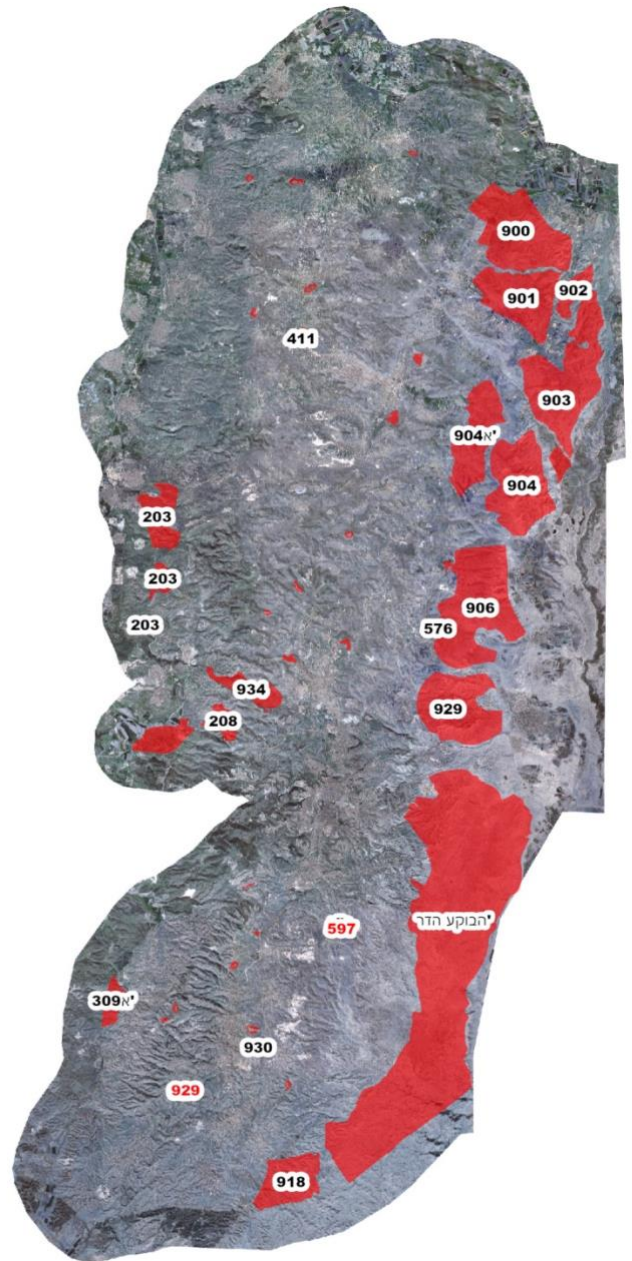
Most firing zones in Judea and Samaria were declared in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in areas that were historically uninhabited and devoid of permanent settlement at the time. Some of these zones overlap with designated nature reserves.

Beyond their original designation as “dry” and “live-fire” training areas for IDF units, the very presence of IDF activity in these zones—and their closure to civilian use through military orders—has historically served as an effective mechanism for preventing unauthorized and illegal land use.

Palestinian Authority Takeover of Firing Zones

Over the years, and particularly in firing zones located in the southern Hebron Hills (notably **Firing Zones 917 and 918**), a growing phenomenon of illegal encroachment and construction has taken hold. In these areas, the expanding civilian presence has progressively restricted IDF use of the firing zones in general, and has specifically prevented essential live-fire training exercises.

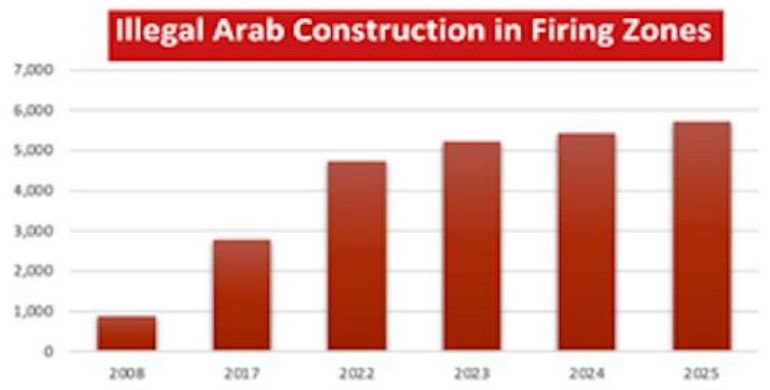
Actors involved in clusters of illegal construction receive direct backing from the Palestinian Authority, alongside a comprehensive support system that includes financial assistance, infrastructure development, facilitation of agricultural encroachment, and the funding of legal challenges against enforcement actions undertaken by the IDF and the Civil Administration. This constitutes a systematic apparatus that includes direct budgetary transfers from the Palestinian



Authority to local actors, the supply of construction materials, illegal connections to water and electricity, and the construction of access roads designed to reinforce Arab settlement continuity from the Negev to northern Samaria.

Legal organizations supported by the Palestinian Authority and the European Union accompany Arab populations in court proceedings, with the explicit aim of delaying Israeli enforcement measures and conferring de facto legitimacy on illegal settlement activity. The involvement of the Palestinian Authority and foreign funding is part of a structured, national-level strategy aimed at creating contiguous zones of geographic control in Area C and effectively expanding Palestinian Authority political control over Judea and Samaria through the establishment of facts on the ground.

At the core of this policy lies the “**Fayyad Plan**”—a political program formulated in 2009 by then-Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, **Salam Fayyad**, under the title “*Palestine: Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State.*”¹ The plan was based on the premise that a de facto Palestinian state could be established through the construction of governing institutions and civilian infrastructure throughout Judea and Samaria, even in the absence of political negotiations or an agreement with Israel. The plan’s guiding principles included the creation of Arab territorial continuity across Judea and Samaria, the fragmentation of Jewish communities, and the establishment of independent governing institutions and infrastructure.



The Palestinian Authority began implementing the plan immediately and has continued its execution even after Fayyad’s resignation—primarily through a large-scale planning and land-use campaign in Area C, which remains under full Israeli control, including within IDF firing zones. Massive construction, road-building, and the establishment of public institutions have created tangible markers of de facto sovereignty and expanded Arab control over open spaces.

¹ <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-208331/>

Firing Zone 918

The Case of Firing Zone 918 Case – A Representative Example

IDF firing zones in Judea and Samaria, and particularly those in the southern Hebron Hills, function as buffer zones, providing defensive depth for the State of Israel. Accordingly, the Palestinian Authority has focused its efforts on establishing a foothold precisely in these strategically sensitive areas. A particularly prominent example of this dynamic can be seen in the legal and operational struggle surrounding **Firing Zone 918**, which spans approximately **33,000 dunams** along the Judean Desert frontier in the Hebron Hills.



During the 1980s and 1990s, the firing zone was used for training exercises by various IDF units.

Throughout this period, the Civil Administration actively enforced the firing zone designation and removed permanent illegal structures that violated the military closure orders. However, under the cover of legal proceedings, initiated by the encroachers with the support and funding of the Palestinian Authority—and with the help of interim injunctions issued by Israel’s High Court of Justice, ostensibly freezing the situation on the ground in order to consider the squatters’ claims—approximately **twelve illegal Arab outposts and villages** were established within Firing Zone 918. This process was led by the Palestinian Authority and supported by massive European funding, including direct involvement by the European Union.

Following the conclusion of two separate legal proceedings that spanned nearly **two decades**,² the High Court of Justice fully accepted the State’s position, ruling that the Palestinian settlement in the area was **illegal, of recent vintage and not related to any historical settlement or presence**, that the residents held **no property rights** to the land, and that the expansion of construction during the course of the legal proceedings was carried out in **bad faith and in violation of the Court’s orders**.

Despite the comprehensive and unequivocal nature of the ruling, the fact that it was handed down after twenty years of non-enforcement caused a new reality to form on the ground. During this period, the desert firing zone—largely free of construction until the early 2000s—was filled with **hundreds of illegal structures**. To date, the IDF and enforcement authorities have encountered significant difficulty in implementing the ruling. This case exemplifies a systematic pattern: The Palestinian Authority has methodically seized control over firing zones, gradually eroding training

² HCI 517/00 and HCI 413/13

areas under the protective umbrella of prolonged legal proceedings. It also exemplifies the immense challenge now faced by the State of Israel of restoring a firing zone to its original status—even when the judicial process concludes with a decisive ruling in favor of the State.

Illegal Construction in Firing Zones – A Multi-Year Overview

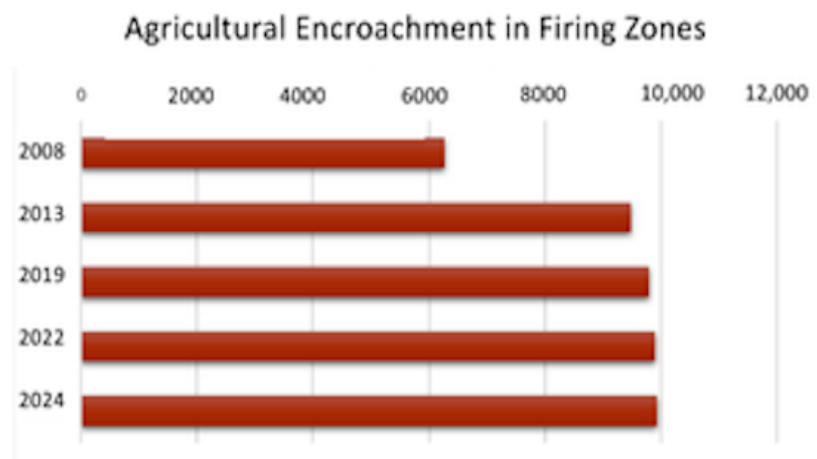
From the specific case to the broader pattern:

A mapping study conducted by Regavim’s GIS Department analyzed a series of aerial photographs from **2009**—shortly after the launch of the Fayyad Plan—through **2025**. The findings reveal that since 2009, the number of illegal structures across all IDF firing zones in Judea and Samaria has increased by approximately **560%**, reaching a total of **5,722 illegal structures** as of 2025.

See the Appendix below for a detailed breakdown of illegal construction in each individual firing zone.

Agricultural Encroachment in Firing Zones

In addition to illegal construction, firing zones have been subject to extensive **agricultural encroachment** across thousands of dunams, including on declared state land and nature reserves. This activity is designed to establish legal possession through cultivation and continuous use, pursuant to the land laws applicable in the area. Given the legal framework, the Palestinian Authority—with generous foreign funding—facilitates and upgrades an extensive network of agricultural access roads to reach the land it has targeted for encroachment, assists in creating the necessary infrastructure, electricity and water connections, schools, and public buildings. The objective of these efforts is to entrench and expand sporadic construction and transform it into permanent settlement.

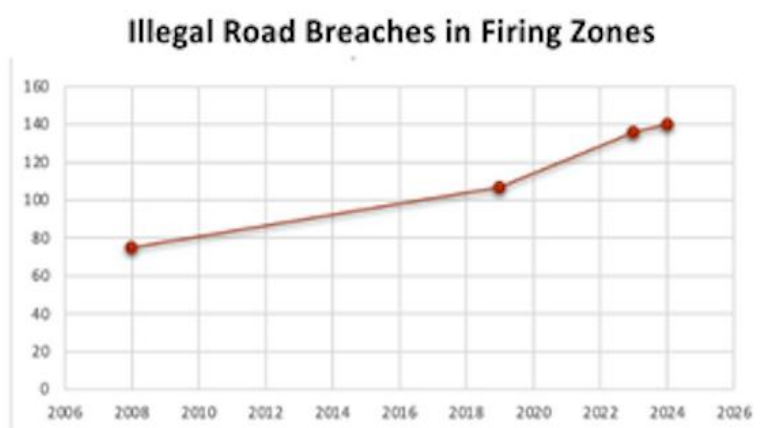


Regavim’s GIS study also examined the scope of agricultural encroachment in firing zones in the Hebron Hills and the Binyamin region. The findings indicate that agricultural encroachment

currently covers **9,929 dunams**. This record figure remained consistently stable between **2013 and 2024**, reflecting a strategic shift by the Palestinian Authority toward agricultural takeover rather than additional illegal construction during this period. For illustrative purposes, this represents an area comparable in size to—and even exceeding—the entire municipal jurisdiction of the city of Bat Yam.

Despite the absence of significant changes in the scope of agricultural encroachment during this period, no enforcement policy was implemented to restore the land to its original designated use.

In parallel with its efforts to seize control of Area C, the Palestinian Authority—assisted by European states and civil organizations—has undertaken the construction of more than **5,600 kilometers of roads**, including within firing zones. This illegal road-building project constitutes a central and critical component of the plan to establish a Palestinian state in the heart of the State of Israel. Analysis of aerial imagery clearly demonstrates a steady increase in illegal road construction throughout Area C between **2008 and 2024**.



Notably, despite this long-term upward trend, an unprecedented **decline in new road breaches** was recorded between **2023 and 2024**, reflecting the implementation of an effective enforcement and deterrence policy by the current government, in contrast to the preceding Bennett–Lapid government.

Firing Zones Adjacent to the Seam Line

Firing zones adjacent to the security barrier constitute peripheral spaces, as they are generally not located near Israeli communities or permanent IDF bases. As a result, they often have minimal Israeli presence. Over time, these areas have effectively become enclaves of extensive Palestinian takeover activity.

Their sensitive location—immediately adjacent to the barrier and at a significant distance from Israeli population centers—creates zones with particularly weak security and civilian oversight. This reality is systematically exploited to advance illegal construction, intensive agricultural cultivation, road breaches, and infrastructure development, all aimed at creating territorial continuity within Area C.

As detailed in Regavim’s report on illegal construction in the Seam Line area (December 2023), the past decade has seen extensive illegal construction and agricultural encroachment in areas designated as “sterile” buffer zones located less than **one kilometer** from the security barrier, in areas where there is virtually no permanent Israeli security or civilian presence. The Palestinian Authority has connected many of the structures and agricultural projects to water and electricity networks.

Environmental Hazards

The issue of environmental hazards in Judea and Samaria is directly linked to the status of IDF firing zones. According to a study conducted by *Green Now* on cross-border environmental hazards and the severe harm this phenomenon continues to cause to public health and sanitation, a substantial portion of these hazards occur within firing zones located adjacent to the security barrier.

Environmental offenders exploit the absence of an Israeli security or civilian presence in these areas and operate waste-burning sites within firing zones, including the incineration of particularly hazardous **electronic waste**. The thick smoke they produce creates major cross-border environmental harm, severely impacting the health and quality of life of residents of Rosh HaAyin, Elad, Modi’in and surrounding communities, as well as residents of the Lachish region.



Figure 1: Shuqba dumping ground, Firing Zone 203

This problem is particularly acute in Firing Zone 203, which overlooks the cities of Rosh HaAyin, Shoham, and Elad.

Summary

IDF firing zones constitute a vital component of the IDF’s ability to maintain operational readiness and safeguard the security of Israeli civilians. The Palestinian Authority understands the strategic importance of these areas and has therefore concentrated a systematic and planned campaign of illegal construction, agricultural encroachment, and the establishment of facts on the ground within them—as part of a broader effort to expand de facto control over open spaces.

In light of the dramatic expansion of illegal construction—an increase of approximately **560% since 2008**—the State of Israel cannot afford the loss of buffer zones that provide territorial control and

defensive depth that are essential to national security. This reality is especially acute in the aftermath of the **October 7** attacks, which underscored the necessity of continuous presence and effective control on the ground. The data clearly demonstrate that sustained and active IDF use of firing zones, combined with focused and consistent enforcement, constitute a central tool in preventing illegal land seizures and in ensuring stability and security throughout the region.

Recommendations

- **Implement the High Court of Justice ruling** in Firing Zone 918 and restore the entire area to full military operational use by the end of **2026**.
- **Establish a regular, multi-year IDF training program** across all firing zones, with particular emphasis on zones experiencing widespread violations
- **Intensify enforcement activities** in firing zones, based on objectives and priorities formulated jointly by the IDF and the Ministry of Defense.
- **Strengthen inter-ministerial oversight** of foreign-funded projects and employ all relevant legal and administrative tools to address violations.
- **Focus enforcement efforts on illegal roadworks and construction**, including the seizure and forfeiture of engineering equipment and the imposition of significant economic costs for violations of the law.

Appendix

Detailed Breakdown of Construction in Individual Firing Zones

Below is a focused overview of each firing zone in Judea and Samaria, divided into eastern and western regions. The firing zones are listed from north to south.

Eastern Region

1. **Firing Zone 900 – 591 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **47** in 2008. “*Kfar al-‘Aqaba*” - established entirely within the firing zone near Taysir, subject of prolonged legal proceedings (HCJ 3950/99). The center and southern area of the firing zone have been overtaken by Bedouin clusters, agricultural encroachment, road breaches, and land leveling projects. Some construction has occurred within the **Upper Bezeq Stream Nature Reserve**.

2. **Firing Zone 901 – 393 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **23** in 2008. Approximately ten Bedouin clusters along the “Bedouin axis” from Route 578 (opposite Beka’ot) to the villages of Tammun and Tubas. A large cluster is situated on an archaeological site along the slopes of Mount Gadir.

3. **Firing Zone 902 – 1 single illegal structure**, with no change over time. This is an active “live-fire” zone, illustrating the deterrent effect of continuous security use in preventing encroachment.

4. **Firing Zone 903 – 225 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **38** in 2008. Numerous Bedouin clusters on the southern edge of the firing zone (north of Camp Tirtza and southeast of the community of Beka’ot), along with agricultural encroachment, road breaches and land leveling projects.

5. **Firing Zone 904 – 47 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **0** in 2008. Spillover from the village of Jiftlik in the northern part of the firing zone, and Bedouin encampments north of Ma’ale Ephraim on the periphery of the firing zone.

Firing # Zone	2008	2025
900	47	591
901	23	393
902	1	1
903	38	225
904	0	47
≈ 904	12	207
906	10	67
929	4	61
912	147	565
Other Jordan Valley Firing Zones	8	143
918	71	719

6. **Firing Zone 904A – 207 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **12** in 2008. Extensive road breaches from the direction of Beit Dajan and ‘Aqraba toward the Jordan Valley, massive agricultural cultivation, and several clusters in the southwest and central portions of the zone, west of Yanun.

7. **Firing Zone 906 – 67 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **10** in 2008. Illegal construction at Khirbet Jib’it, north of the Mevo Shilo IDF base.

8. **Firing Zone 929 – 61 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **4** in 2008.

9. **Firing Zone 912 – 565 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to 147 in 2008. Clusters extending northward toward Route 1, large clusters east of Ma’ale Adumim (Wadi Abu Hindi), and extensive agricultural cultivation along wadis and ridgelines.

10. **Jordan Valley Firing Zones (aggregate) – 143 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **8** in 2008. (Includes Firing Zones 912A, 913, 914, 915A, 915, 916, 916A and others, excluding 912 and 917.) Primary activity is concentrated in the Nahal Kidron area, south of the Marsaba Monastery, including several clusters and agricultural activity.

11. **Firing Zone 918 – 719 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **71** in 2008. Partially overlaps a nature reserve and contains **12 clusters** that were at the center of HCJ 413/13. A major smuggling route to the Arad Valley runs through the zone. Recently, a section of the separation barrier was breached in an effort to prevent vehicular passage.

Western Region

1. **Firing Zone 203 (North) – 415 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **28** in 2008. Massive illegal construction originating from the village of **Deir Ballut**, including construction carried out in violation of a military construction prohibition order and, in part, on declared state land. The area has also seen mass planting campaigns by the Palestinian Authority, extensive agricultural encroachment, road breaches, land leveling and large-scale burning of electronic waste and tires resulting in severe environmental pollution.

Firing Zone #	2008	2025
203	47	591
934	23	393
208	1	1
309	38	225

2. **Firing Zone 203 (South) – Currently no permanent construction**; however, the area is characterized by agricultural encroachment, road breaches, land preparation, and the operation of a polluting bus-scraping facility.

3. **Firing Zone 934 – 81 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **4** in 2008. Illegal construction and land encroachment originating from the village of **Deir Ibzi'a**, including agricultural takeover, road breaches, and land leveling.
4. **Firing Zone 208A – 351 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to 40 in 2008. Illegal structures originating from the village of Beit Liqya encroaching into the firing zone. Additional illegal construction from the village of Beit 'Anan, creating the potential for a problematic territorial connection between the two villages. The firing zone also suffers from agricultural encroachment, road breaches, and land preparation.
5. **Firing Zone 208** – On the western side of the zone, several illegal structures are present, alongside agricultural encroachment, road breaches, and land leveling work.
6. **Firing Zone 309A – 650 illegal structures** in 2025, compared to **130** in 2008. A firing zone adjacent to the security barrier, marked by massive illegal construction originating from the village of **Idhna** (between **Adora** and the **Tarqumiya crossing**). The area exhibits an extremely high level of agricultural encroachment, extensive road breaches, and large-scale land preparation.
7. **Firing Zone 309B** – A small segment of a firing zone located within the Green Line and adjacent to the security barrier. Marginal in scope and impact.