
ISRAEL-PALESTINE

Systemic Conflict Assessment

A Red-Team Intelligence Analysis of Sovereignty, Settlement, Warfare, Demography,
Nationalism and Political Radicalization

Classification: Analytical / Open-Source Intelligence Assessment

Date: 9 August 2026

Assessment Period: 1917–2026

Analytical Frame: Historical, Geopolitical, Legal, Demographic, Military and Ideological

Primary Question: What structural mechanisms reproduce the Israel–Palestine conflict, and why has the international system repeatedly failed to terminate them?

KEY JUDGMENTS

KJ-1 — The conflict is not adequately explained by religion.

High Confidence

Religion is an important mobilizing and legitimizing factor, particularly concerning Jerusalem, holy sites and territorial claims. However, the core modern conflict is fundamentally about territory, sovereignty, national self-determination, security and political power.^[1]

The decisive modern institutional sequence begins with the collapse of Ottoman rule, British administration, the Balfour Declaration, competing Jewish and Palestinian national projects, demographic transformation, partition, war, Palestinian displacement, Israeli state formation and the post-1967 occupation.^[2]

KJ-2 — The conflict is best understood as a collision of two national self-determination projects.

High Confidence

Modern Zionism sought Jewish national self-determination. Palestinian nationalism sought Palestinian Arab self-determination. The central structural problem was that both projects developed claims to political authority over the same territory. This is more explanatory than the proposition that Israelis and Palestinians simply "hate each other."^[3]

KJ-3 — 1967 represents a major structural transformation.

High Confidence

The 1967 war transformed the problem from primarily one of competing claims to state formation into one involving prolonged occupation and control over Palestinian territory and population.^[4]

The International Court of Justice's 2024 advisory opinion specifically examined Israel's occupation since 1967, settlement policy, annexation, demographic measures and discriminatory legislation. The Court concluded that Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful and that Israel must end that presence as rapidly as possible.^[5]

KJ-4 — Settlement and territorial incorporation are central—not peripheral—to the contemporary conflict.

High Confidence

The settlement question is not merely a dispute over housing. The ICJ found that settlement policy, annexation and related measures interfere with Palestinian self-determination and violate international law. It further ordered that new settlement activity cease and that measures maintaining the unlawful situation be terminated.^[6]

This makes territorial transformation a core strategic variable.

KJ-5 — The settler-colonial framework has substantial explanatory value but is not a complete description of Israel's history.

Moderate-to-High Confidence

Israel exhibits characteristics associated with settler colonialism, particularly regarding settlement, territorial acquisition, displacement, occupation and the political subordination of Palestinians. However, the Israeli case differs materially from classical British settler colonies such as Australia because Jewish nationalism emerged partly from historical Jewish attachment to the territory, diaspora, European antisemitism and existential persecution.^[7]

KJ-7 — Hamas's attacks on Israeli civilians and hostage-taking are independently unlawful.

High Confidence

The existence of occupation, Palestinian dispossession or Israeli policy does not eliminate Hamas's obligations under international humanitarian law. The civilian/combatant distinction applies to all parties. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) identifies distinction between civilians and combatants as a fundamental rule of international humanitarian law and states that civilians may not be attacked as such.^[8]

KJ-8 — Israel's security concerns are genuine, but security does not eliminate civilian protection.

High Confidence

Israel faces real armed threats, including Hamas. However, international humanitarian law does not provide an unlimited security exception. Parties must distinguish civilians from combatants and take precautions to spare civilians.^[9]

The analytical question is therefore not whether Israel may defend itself. It is whether particular methods of doing so comply with international law and whether military objectives are being distinguished from civilian populations.

KJ-9 — Dehumanizing rhetoric and territorial policy should be analyzed together.

Moderate Confidence

The intelligence question is not whether an inflammatory statement exists. It is whether rhetoric is connected to military orders, siege policies, displacement, settlement expansion, land confiscation, demographic measures, or political proposals for permanent territorial control. That is the difference between political rhetoric and operational intent.^[10]

KJ-10 — The conflict contains a self-reinforcing security dilemma.

High Confidence

The cycle is: Israeli threat perception → military action → Palestinian civilian suffering/displacement → grievance → radicalization/recruitment → armed resistance → Israeli threat perception → further military action. This does not imply moral equivalence between all actors or actions. It describes a feedback mechanism.^[11]

I. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The conflict is best modeled as an interacting system:^[12]

LAND
PEOPLE
SOVEREIGNTY
NATIONALISM
SECURITY
DEMOGRAPHY
MILITARY POWER
LAW
HISTORICAL MEMORY
EXTERNAL SUPPORT
= **CONFLICT SYSTEM**

The system persists because each component reinforces the others. To change the conflict requires not merely eliminating one actor or organization, but rather transforming the structural relationships that reproduce the conflict across time.

II. THE BALFOUR DECLARATION AND BRITISH MANDATE (1917-1947)

On 2 November 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour issued a public statement expressing support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine.^[13] The full text stated:

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."^[14]

Strategic Significance

Britain created a political commitment involving a national project without simultaneously resolving the sovereignty aspirations of Palestine's existing Arab population. This became a foundational contradiction: two distinct national movements were being encouraged or permitted to develop competing claims to the same territory under the framework of a single mandate.^[15]

British Mandate Period (1920s-1940s)

Jewish immigration increased substantially, particularly as European antisemitism intensified in the 1930s and 1940s. Palestinian Arab opposition grew correspondingly. Jewish and Palestinian political institutions developed separately. Violence escalated.^[16]

The strategic mechanism was clear:

Immigration → Demographic Change → Competing Political Expectations → Insecurity → Mobilization → Violence

III. 1948: STATE FORMATION AND THE NAKBA

Israel declared independence in 1948. War followed immediately. Large numbers of Palestinians were displaced from their homes—an event that became known in Palestinian memory as the "Nakba" (catastrophe).^[17]

These foundational events established competing historical narratives that would structure conflict dynamics for generations:

Israeli Collective Memory:

Holocaust → Persecution → Statelessness → Existential Vulnerability → Jewish Sovereignty → Military Preparedness

Palestinian Collective Memory:

Nakba → Dispossession → Refugeehood → Occupation → Settlement → Resistance → Demand for Return/Self-Determination

A major intelligence error is to treat historical memory as merely emotional. It is operational. Each narrative validates the other's threat perception.^[18]

IV. 1967: THE OCCUPATION SYSTEM

Israel captured the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza during the Six-Day War. The post-1967 situation introduced a fundamental structural transformation: One state exercises extensive control over territory populated by another national population whose sovereignty remains unresolved.^[19]

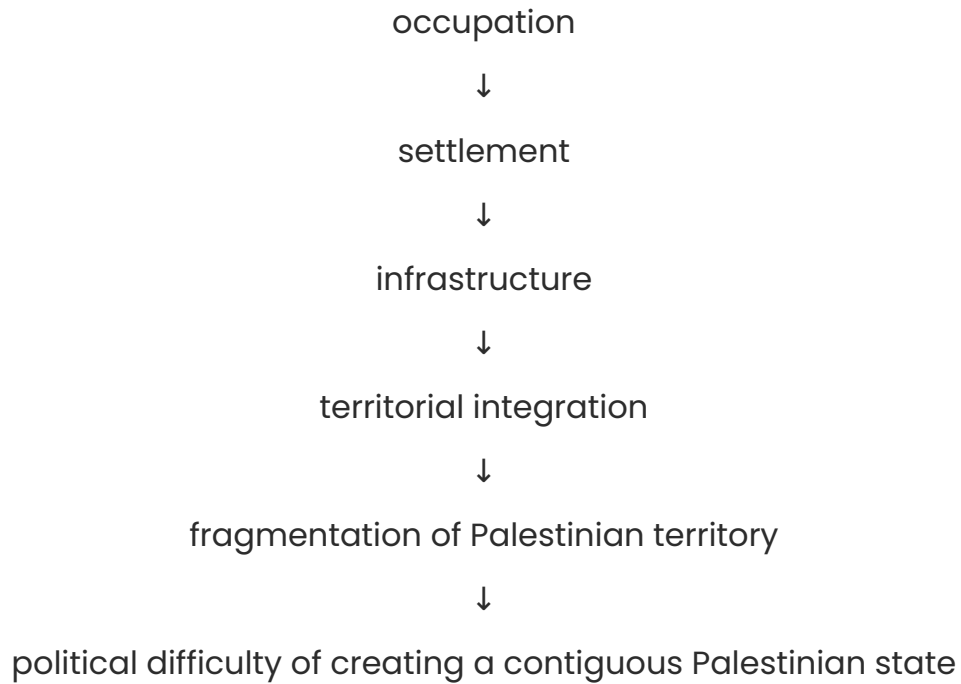
The International Court of Justice's July 19, 2024 advisory opinion is among the most important legal documents in the contemporary conflict. The Court concluded that:^[20]

- Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful^[21]
- Israel must end that presence as rapidly as possible^[21]
- Israel must immediately cease new settlement activity^[21]
- Israel must repeal measures maintaining the unlawful situation^[21]
- Measures altering demographic composition must cease^[21]
- Palestinian self-determination must be respected^[21]
- Reparations are required for internationally wrongful acts^[21]

The Court further concluded that the principles governing occupation are legally understood as temporary and do not transfer sovereignty to the occupying power.^[22]

V. SETTLEMENT AS A TERRITORIAL TECHNOLOGY

The relevant analytical sequence is:



The ICJ specifically identified settlement policy, annexation and demographic measures as central to its legal analysis.^[23] This is why settlement expansion should be treated as a strategic indicator, not merely a domestic political issue. Territorial transformation is not incidental to the conflict; it is a core mechanism through which control is institutionalized.^[24]

VI. ISRAELI NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE NATION-STATE LAW

Israel's 2018 Basic Law: Israel—The Nation-State of the Jewish People represents a constitutional articulation of state identity that carries significant strategic implications.^[25] The law establishes that:

- The Land of Israel is the historical homeland of the Jewish people^[26]
- Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people in which the Jewish people realizes its natural, cultural, religious and historical right to self-determination^[26]
- The realization of the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel is exclusive to the Jewish people^[26]
- The state considers Jewish settlement to be a national value and will act to encourage and promote its establishment and development^[27]
- Hebrew is the official language of the state, with Arabic designated as having "special status"^[28]

Intelligence Significance

This law does not by itself establish a legal conclusion of apartheid or racism. But it provides primary-source evidence of the state's constitutional articulation of Jewish national self-determination. That becomes relevant when analyzing how national self-determination interacts with Palestinian claims to the same territory.^[29]

VII. DEHUMANIZATION RHETORIC AND SIEGE POLICY (OCTOBER 2023)

On 9 October 2023, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant announced a "complete siege" of Gaza and made statements regarding the characterization of Hamas and the civilian population:^[30]

"I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly."^[31]

— Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, October 9, 2023

The analytical issue is the scope of the rhetoric and its relationship to the siege policy implemented simultaneously.^[32] The statement is independently documented by multiple contemporaneous sources.^[33]

The "No Innocents" Rhetoric

In 2024, Israeli Knesset member Tzvika Foghel stated:

"There are no innocents. They're all Hamas. It's time to deal decisively with Gaza. Take off the gloves. Stop all humanitarian aid - no electricity, no water - and begin destruction and promoting voluntary migration. In my view, there are no uninvolved civilians left there. There are no innocents. They're all Hamas."^[34]

— MK Tzvika Foghel, quoted in Israel National News

These statements should be classified as HIGH-VALUE ESCALATION INDICATORS—not automatically as proof of genocidal intent, state policy, or collective Israeli belief. That distinction protects analytical credibility.^[35]

However, the rhetoric becomes strategically significant when connected to concrete policy. An Israeli organization linked to Hebrew University found that 76 percent of the Jewish Israeli public surveyed agreed with the statement "there are no innocents in Gaza."^[36]

VIII. TERRITORIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROPOSALS (2025-2026)

The rhetoric became strategically consequential when connected to concrete settlement and territorial proposals announced in 2025 and 2026.

Gaza Settlement and Population Transfer Plans

In March 2025, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich announced that the government was establishing a "migration administration" to oversee what he characterized as "voluntary emigration" of Palestinians from Gaza.^[37] He stated:

"The government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz, is working to establish a 'migration administration' that will oversee the exodus of Palestinian residents from the Gaza Strip. The plan is 'taking shape' and Israel is working with the Trump administration to find countries that will take in Gazans who leave."^[38]

— Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, March 9, 2025

In May 2025, Smotrich stated that Gaza's population would be concentrated in a small area and that Palestinians would become "totally despairing, understanding that there is no hope and nothing to look for in Gaza, and will be looking for relocation to begin a new life in other places."^[39]

By November 2024, Smotrich had claimed that "it is possible to create a situation where Gaza's population will be reduced to half its current size in two years" through what he termed "encouraging voluntary emigration."^[40]

West Bank Annexation and Settlement Expansion

In February 2026, Smotrich called for Israel to "effectively annex the West Bank and Gaza Strip, calling for the establishment of new settlements deep inside Palestinian

areas." He also stated he would pursue a policy of "encouraging the migration" of Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza, announcing: "We will eliminate the idea of an Arab terror state."^[41]

Intelligence Assessment

These statements are particularly significant because they connect: military control + population movement + settlement + territorial permanence. That is considerably more strategically significant than inflammatory rhetoric alone. The statements indicate a transition from long-term military occupation to plans for permanent territorial incorporation and demographic transformation.^[42]

IX. COMPETING HYPOTHESES

H1 — National Self-Determination Conflict

Proposition: The conflict primarily reflects two national movements seeking self-determination over overlapping territory.^[43]

Supporting Evidence: Zionist national movement, Palestinian nationalism, competing state claims, partition attempt, continuing sovereignty dispute.

Limitation: Does not adequately explain settlement expansion and prolonged occupation.

Assessment: Strong explanatory component.

H2 — Settler-Colonial Territorial Conflict

Proposition: The dominant mechanism is settlement, territorial acquisition, demographic transformation and political subordination of Palestinians.^[44]

Supporting Evidence: Settlement expansion, displacement, occupation, territorial fragmentation, annexation policies, ICJ findings concerning settlements, annexation and self-determination.

Limitation: Can understate Jewish historical indigeneity, diaspora, persecution and the national-liberation dimensions of Zionism.

Assessment: Strong explanatory framework, particularly post-1967.

H3 — Security/Counterinsurgency Conflict

Proposition: Israeli military policies are principally responses to genuine armed threats.^[45]

Supporting Evidence: October 7 attack, Hamas military capability, hostage-taking, rocket attacks, Israeli civilian casualties.

Limitation: Cannot adequately explain the pre-Hamas conflict or settlement/annexation dynamics.

Assessment: Essential but incomplete.

H4 — Hybrid System Model

Proposition: The conflict persists because several mechanisms reinforce each other: nationalism + territory + settlement + occupation + security dilemma + demography + historical trauma + political inequality + armed resistance + external support + international failure.^[46]

Assessment: Highest-confidence explanatory model. The conflict is unlikely to be reduced to any single ideology or actor.

X. INTELLIGENCE INDICATORS & WARNING SYSTEM

Intelligence organizations should monitor six categories of indicators to assess conflict escalation and structural change:

1. Territory

Warning Indicators: New settlements, outposts, road construction, land confiscation, annexation legislation, demolition, permanent military zones.

2. Demography

Warning Indicators: Mass displacement, restrictions on return, organized migration programs, settlement population growth, demographic restructuring, changes to residency status.

3. Rhetoric

Warning Indicators: "No civilians" rhetoric, collective responsibility, dehumanization, population-removal proposals, denial of opposing national existence, calls for permanent territorial control.

4. Military

Warning Indicators: Siege policies, changes in rules of engagement, attacks affecting civilian infrastructure, repeated evacuation zones, humanitarian-access restrictions, sustained military presence after declared objectives are achieved.

5. Political

Warning Indicators: Annexation proposals, coalition changes, constitutional changes, weakening of judicial constraints, expansion of settlement authority, Palestinian governance fragmentation.

6. International

Warning Indicators: Arms transfers, sanctions, recognition decisions, international court proceedings, diplomatic isolation, regional normalization, external state sponsorship.

Confidence Assessment Matrix

Finding	Confidence Level
British Mandate was foundational to contemporary conflict	Very High
Balfour Declaration is central to modern Israeli-Palestinian history	Very High
Two national movements developed competing claims	Very High
1948 involved large-scale Palestinian displacement	Very High
1967 fundamentally transformed the conflict structure	Very High
Israeli settlements are central to post-1967 territorial politics	Very High
ICJ found continued Israeli presence unlawful (July 19, 2024)	Very High
Palestinian self-determination is recognized under international law	Very High
Hamas is a major contemporary security actor	Very High
Israeli security concerns are genuine	Very High
Dehumanizing rhetoric exists among some Israeli officials	Very High
Such rhetoric necessarily determines state policy	Low-Moderate
Settler-colonial framework explains significant aspects	High
Settler colonialism explains the entire Israeli story	Low-Moderate
Military defeat of Hamas would end the conflict	Low
Political settlement is necessary for durable resolution	High

XI. THE STRATEGIC ROOT

The deepest root is not:

- *Jews vs Arabs*
- *Israel vs Hamas*
- *Muslims vs Jews*
- *Or simply: colonizer vs colonized*

The deepest structural problem is:^[47]

**COMPETING CLAIMS TO SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE SAME LAND,
COMBINED WITH ASYMMETRIC POWER AND THE FAILURE TO
ESTABLISH A POLITICAL ORDER THAT BOTH PEOPLES REGARD
AS LEGITIMATE AND SAFE.**

Everything else attaches to that.^[48]

XII. FINAL INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is best understood not as an inexplicable ancient hatred but as a self-reinforcing political system. Its historical roots include imperialism, nationalism, antisemitism, Jewish persecution, Palestinian nationalism, demographic transformation and competing sovereignty. Its modern reproduction mechanism consists of occupation, settlement, territorial fragmentation, armed resistance, Israeli security doctrine, historical trauma, political radicalization and international diplomatic failure.^[49]

The most consequential intelligence question is therefore not: "Who is good and who is evil?" Nor: "Who started the war?" It is:

"What incentives, institutions, territorial processes and threat perceptions cause violence to reproduce itself even after individual leaders and armed organizations change?"^[50]

The answer is the interaction of: territory + sovereignty + nationalism + security + demography + historical trauma + occupation + settlement + armed resistance + political inequality + external sponsorship + international institutional failure.

That is the conflict system. Hamas is part of it. Likud is part of it. The Israeli security establishment is part of it. Palestinian political factions are part of it. The United States, Iran, Arab states, Europe and other external actors are part of it. The British imperial legacy is part of its historical formation. But none of these actors individually created the entire system.^[51]

That distinction is the difference between intelligence analysis and political mythology.

Critical Warning

The most important operational warning is this: Whenever the opposing population is rhetorically converted from civilians into a collective enemy, whenever temporary military control becomes permanent territorial control, and whenever demographic change becomes an explicit political objective, the probability of a self-perpetuating conflict architecture rises sharply. That is where intelligence collection should concentrate. Not merely on who fires the next missile—but on who is changing the underlying system.^[52]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. (2018). "*The Basic Law: Israel – The Nation-State of the Jewish People*." Analysis and legal brief. <https://www.adalah.org/>

Al Jazeera. (2023). "Israeli defence minister orders 'complete siege' on Gaza." News report, October 9, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/>

Balfour, Arthur James. (1917). "*The Balfour Declaration*." Letter dated November 2, 1917. Published by the British Library and archived by multiple historical institutions including the Yale Avalon Project.

Britannica. (2025). "*Balfour Declaration*." Encyclopedia entry on the 1917 British policy statement. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/event/Balfour-Declaration>

CNN. (2025). "Israel approves controversial proposal to facilitate emigration of Palestinians from Gaza." News report, March 24, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/>

Duke University Press. (2021). "*The Nation-State Law*." In *Critical Times*, Vol. 4, No. 3. Academic analysis of Israel's 2018 Basic Law.

Encyclopedia 1914-1918-Online (WW1). (2024). "*Balfour Declaration*." Historical encyclopedic entry with contextual analysis. Retrieved from <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/balfour-declaration/>

Gaza Tribunal. (2025). "Describing Gazans as 'human animals,' Israel imposes total siege on Gaza." Analysis and documentation, October 19, 2025. Retrieved from <https://gazatribunal.com/>

Hebrew University / aChord Research Group. (2024). "*Survey on Israeli Attitudes Toward Gaza and Civilian Protection*." Social psychology research on public opinion, June 2024.

Haaretz. (2024–2025). Various reporting on Israeli political statements, settlement policy and demographic discussions. Israeli newspaper of record.