

MEMMO

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Israeli Measures in West Bank Easing Palestinian Travel, Boosting Economy

Increased Israeli steps to improve travel and boost economic activity are having a significant impact on the economy of the West Bank. The International Monetary Fund estimates that the West Bank will grow at a 7 percent rate this year amid one of the worst global recessions in decades. Israel has removed significant numbers of roadblocks and checkpoints, including more than two dozen manned roadblocks, opened major crossings to spur trade and allowed more Palestinian businessmen and workers to do business in Israel.

Israel has taken major steps to improve the daily lives of Palestinians in the West Bank despite continuing threats from terrorists.

- Israel has decreased manned checkpoints within the West Bank from 41 to 14 in the last two years, improving the freedom of movement and reducing travel time for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.
- In September, Israel removed 100 dirt roadblocks near Hebron, Nablus, and other areas in an effort to provide farmers with easier access to their fields, thereby helping boost the Palestinian economy in the West Bank.
- Palestinians can now travel throughout most of the northern West Bank without encountering security checks, excluding the Nablus area, which is subject to only random security checks.
- In Ramallah, the main checkpoint north of the city is no longer permanently staffed, while one of the two major checkpoints controlling access into the city of Qalqiliya was completely dismantled and the other is no longer permanently staffed.
- “I’m encouraged by some of the things that I’m seeing on the ground,” said President Obama. “We’ve been seeing reports in the West Bank, in particular, that check points have been removed in some situations.”
- These positive measures have earned some recognition by the U.N.’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which said in a recent report that “initial field observations indicate that these measures have significantly reduced the amount of time required for Palestinians to access these cities.” The Quartet also recently took note of Israel’s positive actions.



Palestinians shop at the high-end Herbawi home furnishings store in the West Bank city of Jenin.

The economy in the West Bank has improved amid a series of Israeli steps designed to spur business activity.

- The series of Israeli measures – such as Israel’s opening of the Allenby Bridge crossing between Jordan and the West Bank – has helped to dramatically improve the West Bank economy, with the International Monetary Fund reportedly forecasting a 7 percent growth rate for the West Bank in 2009. Palestinian GDP also grew by 5.6% from the first quarter of 2008.
- Improved economic activity in the West Bank began in 2008 and continued to 2009 amid steps by the previous government that are now being further strengthened. The increase in trade was facilitated by improvements at major cargo crossings.
- In one of the worst global real estate market in decades, Palestinians are planning to start building the first new Palestinian town in decades early next year, while a high-end home furnishings chain, Herbawi Home Furnishings, is investing tens of millions of dollars to open large stores in key cities throughout the West Bank.
- The greater loosening of travel restrictions for Israelis entering the West Bank has allowed thousands of Israeli Arabs to travel to Palestinian cities to shop and dine, significantly boosting the economy in Jericho, Jenin and Nablus. This has enabled the entry of Israeli Arabs into the West Bank, particularly Jenin, in order to stimulate the local economy.
- Improved security and greater access has led to a doubling in foreign investment in West Bank infrastructure, creating jobs and improving living conditions. The U.S. is spending tens of millions of dollars to upgrade nearly 20 roads, while Germany is providing more than \$50 million in funding for sewage treatment plants.

The improved security situation in the West Bank is allowing Israel to take risks by easing security and travel restrictions in the West Banks.

- Israel is working closely with the United States and the Palestinian Authority to enhance the capabilities and effectiveness of security forces in the West Bank.
- In concert with U.S. Security Coordinator General Keith Dayton, Israel has supported the training of more than 3,000 Palestinian security personnel at a Jordanian training base.
- Israel’s support for such high-level training of Palestinian security forces does not come without risk. During the height of Palestinian terrorism against Israel in the early 2000s, Palestinian security forces were heavily involved in attacks against Israeli civilians.
- Despite this risk, Israel has worked with Palestinian security officials to extend the hours Palestinian forces can operate in four key cities—Ramallah, Qalqiliya, Bethlehem and Jericho. The forces now operate freely to handle criminal activity and maintain order.
- Israel has facilitated the transfer of a substantial quantity of arms to the PA, including 900 rifles, one million bullets, and logistical equipment, including surveillance and communication gear. In the past, such equipment has been used in attacks against Israel.
- Israel has approved the establishment of 20 new Palestinian police stations in the West Bank in addition to the 29 existing stations. Nineteen of the new stations have already been opened.