

Trump gives green light for Israeli repression of Palestinians

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has embarked on a range of aggressive measures against the Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, whipping up a poisonous atmosphere of Zionist chauvinism against the Palestinians.

This comes in the wake of US President Donald Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the US embassy there from Tel Aviv.

Trump's move has provided a green light for the government to step up its oppression of the Palestinians, accelerate the expansion and creation of new Zionist settlements and escalate the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from East Jerusalem.

The centre-left parties that formally supported the peace process for fear of falling foul of the Obama administration have fallen in line. The recently elected leader of the opposition Zionist Union, a coalition that includes the former Labour party that once branded itself as the "party of peace," hailed Trump's announcement, saying that recognition of Jerusalem was more important than a peace deal with the Palestinians.

On Monday, Israel's parliament, the Knesset, passed the "United Jerusalem Bill," which makes it all but impossible for the government to hand over parts of Jerusalem to Palestinians under any future peace deal.

Education Minister Naftali Bennett of the Jewish Home party gloated on Facebook, "Just now we ensured that Jerusalem will be united forever. We initiated the law that guards Jerusalem so that it cannot be divided without a huge majority of 80 Mks [members of the Knesset]."

He added, "The Mount of Olives, the Old City, the Temple Mount and the City of David will remain in our hands forever. There will be no more political manoeuvres that will allow to tear our capital apart.

[sic] This is also Israel's response to the shameful United Nations vote against Jerusalem. A holiday for Israel!"

The new law paves the way for Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem, which Israel illegally annexed after its capture in the 1967 War, to be hived off into a separate local council. This would serve to strip their residents of their Jerusalem residency papers, reducing Jerusalem's Palestinian population by a third, and creating a Jewish majority in the city. This is in addition to plans to strip large numbers of Palestinians of their residency because they live outside the infamous separation wall that Israel built through the city.

The following day, a meeting of the ruling Likud Party's central committee unanimously supported a proposal calling on the government to effectively annex Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. By ending military jurisdiction and bringing the settlements under civilian jurisdiction—the settlers themselves are already subject to Israeli civilian law—it will make it easier to expand the settlements.

Netanyahu postponed a vote last October on a bill in the Knesset that was tantamount to the annexation of the Israeli settlements surrounding Jerusalem and was expected to pass. This time he has allowed the proposal to go ahead in the Likud party.

The government is planning a covert annexation of some of the settlements under proposals to bring large West Bank settlements under Jerusalem's municipal authority.

In a further measure, the Knesset set in motion the introduction of a capital punishment bill for terrorist-murderers, targeting the Palestinians. It will enable judges in civilian courts to issue the death penalty, hitherto reserved for Nazis and Nazi collaborators

convicted of committing murder during the Holocaust, and reduce the requirement for a unanimous vote to a simple majority of judges in military courts.

The ultra-orthodox religious authorities have been emboldened to encourage Jews to enter the al-Aqsa compound, previously off-limits to Jews, and pray there, while nationalist and far-right forces have demanded that it be divided between Israelis and Palestinians.

An Israeli court approved the administrative detention of the prominent rights campaigner Khalida Jarrar for another six months. Jarrar, a Palestinian MP, has been held without charge since July, supposedly for her involvement with the banned Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Israel deems the PFLP to be a terrorist group and has imprisoned many of its leaders. Jarrar's imprisonment is punishment for her role in the Palestinian Authority's application to join the International Criminal Court in 2015 and thereby lodge charges against Israel.

Twelve other Palestinian legislators are in jail, all but three held without charges under administrative detention. Of the 6,400 Palestinians currently held in Israeli prisons, at least 500 are being held under administrative detention, which allows the authorities to appeal to the courts to extend the prisoner's detention by six months, thus indefinitely, without trial or charges. According to data released by the army, of the 3,909 administrative detention orders issued between 2015 and the end of July 2017, more than half—2,441 (62.4 percent)—were extensions for a person already under administrative detention. Only 48 of the orders (1.2 percent) were cancelled.

On Monday, Israel filed 12 charges against 16-year-old Ahed Tamimi that could see her spend years in prison. The Palestinian girl was arrested on December 20 after a video of her and her cousin in a confrontation with two Israeli soldiers armed with M16 guns, helmets and body armour in the occupied West Bank went viral. She is widely viewed by Palestinians as a hero for slapping an Israeli soldier in the face.

An Israeli cabinet minister called for her to be imprisoned for life. Prominent *Ma'ariv* and *al-Monitor.com* journalist Ben Caspit, who considers himself liberal and "pro-peace," wrote, "In the case of the girls, we should exact a price at some other opportunity, in the dark, without witnesses and

cameras." He added that had he been one of the soldiers he would have been far less restrained, even to the extent of being arrested.

The altercation took place in Ahed's backyard in the village of Nabi Saleh, which according to Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, the Israel Defense Forces and the Border Police have raided 70 or 80 times in the past three months. The soldiers had come just half an hour after Israeli soldiers had shot her 14-year-old cousin, Mohammed, in the head on December 15, when he was protesting against Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. They had come to interview the family and one of the soldiers slapped Ahed on the face before she slapped him. Mohammed is now in a medically induced coma. Ahed's cousin and mother were also charged.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), Mohammed al-Tamimi is just one of at least 345 cases of Palestinian children wounded by Israeli security forces between December 5 and 18. More than a third of these injuries, including six head injuries, were the result of live ammunition. This is in addition to the 14 Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces.

Israel has carried out almost daily raids into Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The UN reported that Israeli forces carried out 162 search and arrest operations in the West Bank between December 5 and 18. More than 400 Palestinians have been arrested.

Moreover, 77 Palestinian children under the age of 18 have been imprisoned over the same period, double the number in the previous month. Every year, around 700 Palestinian children are detained and prosecuted in Israeli military courts without the right to a fair trial or protection.



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