

Israeli crackdown to crush insurgency in the occupied West Bank

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The last four weeks have seen escalating levels of violence—the worst since the Second Intifada that started in September 2000—against Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank by both Israeli security forces and far right settler groups, acting in concert.

Few days pass without reports of Israeli forces killing Palestinians, with two killed near the northern city of Nablus on Friday, and another shot in Hebron on Saturday after allegedly killing an Israeli in the southern city that has long been roiled by the provocative actions of religious zealots.

The violence follows months of almost daily wide-scale raids and arrest operations on the northern cities of Nablus and Jenin. These were placed under the security and administrative control of the Palestinian Authority (PA) by the Oslo Accords. The accompanying curfews, roadblocks and tight restrictions on movement have brought economic life to a standstill.

Operation “Break the Wave” was launched in April by the then Prime Minister Naftali Bennett after a spate of attacks by desperate Palestinians, with little known association to each other or any armed groups, killed 19 Israeli Jews. He put the military on high alert, dispatched extra troops to the West Bank and called on people to carry arms.

Bennett said, “Whoever has a gun license, this is the time to carry a gun,” giving the green light to ultra-nationalist and settler groups to set up militias and go on the rampage. It was a declaration of war on the Palestinians.

At least 175 Palestinians have been killed this year, more than 44 in the last two months, making 2022 the deadliest in the last 16 years. Hundreds more have been injured, while at least 1,500 people have been arrested, leaving detention centres full to overflowing.

Defence for Children International – Palestine reported that 29 children have been killed by Israeli soldiers, explaining, “All of the children were killed after being shot with live ammunition in their upper extremities. This is evidence of intentional killing.”

Jenin has been subjected to almost daily raids that have killed 40 people since March. It was in Jenin that Shireen

Abu-Akleh, the US-Palestinian journalist working for *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, was murdered by Israeli forces as she covered the clashes. The city is home to an impoverished refugee camp and a centre of Palestinian opposition to the repressive regime of Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority. Hamas’ influence has grown.

Nablus, which is surrounded by Israeli settlements, has become a focus of Israeli military activity in support of armed settlers that have staged one provocation after another against the Palestinians, attacking their vehicles, homes, property and olive groves.

Tensions mounted after 100 armed settlers blocked the city’s southern entrance near the town of Huwwara to recite prayers on October 4, at the start of Yom Kippur. Huwwara has been subjected to dozens of attacks over the past year. The provocation—described by the settlers as the “civil besiegement” of Nablus—was closely coordinated with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) that closed the gate to the city.

These ultra-nationalists have since maintained their siege, preventing Palestinians from entering or leaving the city. Their aim is to force the government to carry out a massive operation against “terror” in Nablus, akin to that carried out against Jenin in April 2002 that killed more than 50 Palestinians.

On October 12, the military seized on the shooting of an Israeli soldier by a militant group known as “Lions’ Den”. The soldier was protecting settlers from Shavei Shomron, west of Nablus, who were staging a blockade of the city. Nablus’ entire population was subjected to collective punishment, with the security forces only allowing Palestinians to enter or leave after checking their identities and belongings, causing hours-long delays.

Such is the ferocity of the opposition the IDF has encountered that Israel has deployed not just snipers but drones—hitherto only used against targets in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria—and planted an explosive device to kill Tamer al-Kilani, a Lions’ Den militant.

The Lions’ Den militia is made up of largely young and politically unaffiliated Palestinians born after the Second

Intifada and increasingly frustrated by the refusal of President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah-dominated PA to defend them against Israel. It has recently started targeting Israeli soldiers and settlers.

The despotic and corrupt PA is widely reviled as Israel's subcontractor in enforcing the decades-long occupation and increasing poverty while a handful of the Palestinian elite grow ever wealthier. It has been unable to hold elections to replace the 87-year-old and ailing president and disbanded the Palestinian Legislative Council. The arrest in September by PA security forces of Hamas fighter Musab Shtayyah at Israel's behest led to widespread demonstrations in Nablus against the PA.

According to a report in *Ha'aretz*, settlers have taken advantage of the military's blockade of Nablus to mount more than 100 attacks on Palestinians, mostly around Huwwara.

On October 25, after a two-week siege of Nablus and the surrounding district, Israeli security forces stormed the Old City in one of the largest operations in years, killing five Palestinians and wounding 20. According to the *Ma'an* news agency, Israeli forces also aimed their fire at PA security forces, injuring four officers.

Israel's Prime Minister Yair Lapid, speaking on television, said, "Israel will never be deterred from acting for its security." Defence Minister Benny Gantz pledged that the military would continue its crackdown on the Lions' Den and other armed groups, tweeting, "There aren't and won't be sanctuary cities for terrorists."

The Palestinians responded to this latest assault by bringing the West Bank to a halt, closing schools, businesses and offices, with the funeral processions drawing thousands of mourners, and leading to clashes with the security forces.

Tensions have also been rising in East Jerusalem:

* Jewish extremists were allowed into the al-Aqsa mosque compound in record breaking numbers during the recent Jewish holy days. This and restrictions placed on the entry of Muslim worshippers has raised fears of an attempt to take over the compound.

* The killing of an Israeli soldier and the wounding of another on October 8 by Udai Tamimi at a checkpoint in Shuafat, a refugee camp, led to raids, the closure of the camp, the spraying of foul-smelling skunk water and the firing of tear gas as the IDF sought Tamimi. Remaining at large for 11 days, he emerged to shoot at Israeli soldiers guarding the Ma'aleh Adumim settlement before being killed by the IDF. His death prompted angry demonstrations and a general strike on October 20 that hit businesses, schools, universities and transport across the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

* Israeli settlers, led by the fascistic legislator Itamar Ben-

Gvir, have poured into Sheikh Jarrah, an East Jerusalem neighbourhood. Ben-Gvir's Jewish Power has been gaining support in opinion polls and is aligned with former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, seeking a return to power in the November 1 elections. The settlers' aim is to terrorize Palestinians out of the city. Jewish Power has already established an armed militia in southern Israel and is seeking to form another in Bat Yam, a suburb of Tel Aviv, which has witnessed several violent attacks on Palestinians by far-right groups.

Columnist Amos Harel warned in *Ha'aretz*, "There's a danger that the events will slither across the Green Line again, including possible clashes in the mixed (Jewish-Arab) cities," as occurred in May 2021 when Israel's pounding of the densely populated and impoverished territory of Gaza with bombs, missiles and shells led to widespread unrest in Jerusalem and Israel's mixed towns and cities.

Tensions have been deliberately whipped up by Israel's promotion of communalist and ethno-religious politics, including the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, Israel's Arab citizens and migrant workers. This is in no small part due to the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor—one of the most extreme in the OECD group of rich countries—that has made the state reliant on the right-wing settlers and extreme nationalist zealots that now dominate the political arena. It testifies to the moral bankruptcy of the Zionist project and the dead-end of its reactionary perspective of carving out a sectarian Jewish capitalist state in the Middle East.

Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinians would not be possible without the political, diplomatic and military support of US imperialism and the European powers, alongside Egypt, the other Arab bourgeois states and the Palestinian bourgeois nationalists, secular and clerical, who appeal to the very Arab bourgeois forces and the imperialist-controlled United Nations that have utterly betrayed the Palestinian people. It poses the urgent necessity of building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International to fight for the program of socialist internationalism, the unity of the Arab and Jewish working class, and a common struggle against capitalism and imperialism.



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