

Netanyahu government mounts all-out offensive on Palestinians in Jenin

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Israel's military launched an aerial and armoured vehicle attack on the northern West Bank city of Jenin and the city's densely populated refugee camp in the early hours of Monday morning, killing at least 10 Palestinians, including three children, and wounding dozens more. With 10 of the wounded in serious condition, the death toll is expected to mount.

Some 2,000 Israeli soldiers are involved in a mass arrest operation, with at least 20 Palestinians thus far detained for further interrogation.

Israel's air strikes on Jenin have hit homes, the city's utilities, a hospital and a mosque, with ground troops storming the Al-Ansar Mosque, claiming—falsely—that armed men were holed up inside it and others were preventing ambulances from transporting people to the hospital. Israeli forces have surrounded the refugee camp that is home to 14,000 Palestinians and are not allowing anyone to enter or leave. Connections to the internet, the electricity network and water supplies have been cut. Soldiers attacked journalists wearing press vests, including staff from *Al Araby TV*, who were covering the offensive, and set their video cameras on fire.

The Lion's Den, a Palestinian militant group based in Jenin, called on people across the West Bank and Gaza to mobilise and demonstrate in support of the people in Jenin, urging them to close the roads and routes used by Israeli forces and settlers to get their supplies into the city. Palestinians in Gaza have responded by gathering along the border with Israel, waving flags and setting fire to tyres to protest Israel's attack on Jenin. They were met with tear gas from Israeli troops.

This criminal operation is the largest since Israel's siege of the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002 that killed at least 52 Palestinians and left many homeless. Twenty-three Israeli soldiers lost their lives in that battle. It follows repeated demands from the fascistic forces in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to launch a large-scale military operation to suppress the Palestinians—similar to its

murderous assaults on the besieged Gaza Strip—in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied illegally since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Such an operation, which would meet fierce resistance, would lead to mass killings and devastation. National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said the army needed to “demolish buildings” and kill “thousands of terrorists,” while encouraging his supporters to “run to the hill tops and settle them.”

IDF Chief Spokesman Brigadier General Daniel Hagari said the operation was a “wide scale effort against terror”, referring to the militant Palestinian groups, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Lions' Den, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and others. While it was focused on Jenin, it could expand to other parts of the northern West Bank. He refused to say how long the operation would last but gave the impression it would last at least a week. He added that the military was on high alert in case Islamist forces in Gaza, Lebanon's Hezbollah or other groups tried to intervene or attack Israel.

Israel's National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi claimed that “the intelligence that has been accumulated has indicated that there is an effort by Iran and its proxies, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to transfer a lot of money and weapons to terrorists.”

Major General Yehuda Fox, the chief of the IDF's Central Command, insisted the Jenin operation was not going to be a one-off. “There is a series of operations here, just like we were here a week ago and two weeks ago, we will finish this operation, and we will come back in a few days or a week, and we will not allow this city of refuge for terror.”

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, only recently lionised by opposition leaders for criticizing Netanyahu's plans to overhaul the judiciary, approved the attack. He said the military operation in the West Bank city of Jenin “is progressing as planned.” The troops “will receive full support to do whatever is necessary and to operate on the ground and in the air, in order to protect the citizens of Israel and preserve full freedom of action throughout [the West Bank].”

This was tantamount to announcing a military dictatorship over the West Bank, including in areas designated under the 1993 Oslo Accords as under the full control of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Furthermore, it makes explicit what has long been implicit, the PA's complete irrelevance as far as Israel—and Washington—is concerned.

According to *Ha'aretz*, Israel informed the US of its intention of carrying out the operation in Jenin and was evidently given the green light. On Monday, the White House National Security Council stated, "We support Israel's security and right to defend its people against Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other terrorist groups."

Far-right forces have repeatedly demanded the annexation of the West Bank—as has Netanyahu himself—in pursuit of their aim of establishing a Jewish supremacist state in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Monday's attack on Jenin follows a series of murderous military raids in the West Bank, constant settler violence watched over and protected by the Israel Defense Forces, and the government's announcement of 13,000 new settlement homes since the start of the year. The IDF's deployment of an Apache helicopter and armed drones in Jenin two weeks ago marked a significant escalation in Israeli aggression, which has seen around 190 Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and Israel killed since Netanyahu's far-right coalition took office.

Monday's assault on Jenin, following months of near nightly raids on Jenin and Nablus, comes as Palestinians in the West Bank face an increasingly desperate economic situation. The 1993 Oslo Accords, which saw foreign direct investment in Israel soar and in practice ended the Arab League boycott of Israel, have crippled the Palestinian economy. Israel imposed restrictions on the movement of people, labour and goods, fragmented the territories with settlements, settler-only access roads and nature reserves, confiscated land, water and other natural resources, tied the Palestinian economy to the Israeli economy and cut it off from international markets.

Industry has withered, farmers have been driven off their land and per capita income has remained stagnant since 1994. The PA is utterly dependent upon international aid, even as the UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, announced last month that the \$107 million in new funds falls significantly short of the \$300 million needed to support millions of Palestinians in the occupied territories and refugee camps in neighbouring countries.

Thirty percent of the young people in the West Bank—where 50 percent of the population is under 30 years of age—are unemployed. More than one-third of young people who are employed work in the informal sector, while

more than half of those working in the formal sector have no social security, medical insurance or entitlement to sick and holiday leave.

Netanyahu has deliberately stoked war, targeting the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, Israel's Arab citizens and neighbouring states, above all, Iran and Syria, as he faces widespread opposition to his efforts to assume dictatorial powers by neutering a largely compliant judiciary that has provided cover for Israel's expansionist drive and relentless attacks on the Palestinians. His aim is to deflect social tensions outwards against a perceived external enemy.

For 25 consecutive weeks, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have turned out to protest his judicial coup. But this movement is led by bourgeois Zionist parties whose opposition to Netanyahu reflects only their fears that he is endangering the interests of the state. They refuse to link the emerging fascist threat in Israel with opposition to the oppression of the Palestinians. Indeed, on Monday morning, the heads of the biggest opposition parties rushed to support the IDF's offensive against Jenin.

The Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories live under a regime of savage economic and military repression and brazen vigilante and settler violence—all upheld by Israel's judicial system. It is impossible to defend the democratic rights of Jewish Israelis at the same time as defending military dictatorship in the West Bank and Gaza. The main task is to overcome the reactionary Zionist leadership of the protest movement and fight to unite Arab and Jewish workers in a common struggle to defend jobs, living standards and democratic rights, including the national rights of the Palestinian people. This can only be done based on the programme and perspective of international socialism.



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