

# Israel tightens its grip on Jenin and the wider West Bank

## Gazans sift through 50 million tons of rubble, finding 200 bodies

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Israel is using the first phase of the ceasefire in Gaza as an opportunity to step up its war on the West Bank.

Given the green light by the Trump administration, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers and security forces have launched a massive operation centred on Jenin which Foreign Minister Israel Katz declared “will mark a shift in the IDF’s security strategy in Judea and Samaria [the Biblical name used by far-right Zionists to refer to the West Bank].”

Making clear the government’s intentions, fascist finance minister Bezalel Smotrich said, “After Gaza and Lebanon, today, with God’s help, we have begun to change the security concept in Judea and Samaria”.

Several reports suggest Smotrich secured a commitment to include “security” in the West Bank as one of Israel’s official war goals in exchange for his backing the Gaza ceasefire agreement.

United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory Francesca Albanese warned bluntly, “As the long awaited ceasefire in Gaza took place, Israel’s death machinery escalated its firing in the West Bank...”

“If it is not forced to stop, Israel’s genocide of Palestinians will not be confined to Gaza. Mark my words.”

The fear was echoed by UN secretary general Antonio Guterres, who coupled unfounded optimism for the ceasefire with the observation, “The other possibility is for Israel feeling emboldened by the military successes that it has had to think this is the moment to do the annexation of the West Bank and to keep Gaza in a kind of limbo situation.”

At least 10 Palestinians have been killed in Jenin, and 40 wounded. The numbers could be much higher, with ambulances blocked from reaching the wounded. Nebal

Farsakh, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Red Crescent, told reporters, “No one can break the siege on the refugee camp and the surrounding area.” The organisation said it was “deeply concerned” about the wellbeing of Jenin’s residents.

Repeating the tactics used in its criminal war of genocide in Gaza, Israeli forces have surrounded the Khalil Suleiman governmental hospital. In charge of the facility, Wissam Bakr told reporters, “The current situation is awful. Israeli forces destroyed the roads in front of the hospital. They put the rubble from the destroyed streets in front of hospital exits to prevent ambulances from entering or leaving.”

Two nurses and three doctors had been shot on the main road leading up to the building on Tuesday, he explained, adding that 600 staff and patients were now sheltering as best they could inside.

Bakr’s account was confirmed by Adel Beshar, who told Al Jazeera, “I slept ... in the yard of the hospital. Even though my house is 200 metres away from here, I couldn’t reach it.

“There were many injured people. Four from al-Amal Hospital were wounded, among them doctors, nurses and patients. There were also three or four people injured near my house and no one was able to rescue them.”

He added that “Israeli forces shot at whoever got near them. Two were injured while trying to rescue them.”

According to the Wafa news agency, residents in several Jenin neighbourhoods were ordered to leave their homes, and the city, by loudspeaker. Exact numbers have been difficult to count under siege conditions. Scores of people have been arrested and detained.

Roland Friedrich, the Director of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) Affairs for the West Bank described the camp as “nearly

uninhabitable, with some 2,000 families displaced since mid-December. UNRWA has been unable to provide full services to the camp in this time.” He added that the operation “using advanced weaponry and warfare methods including airstrikes... is expected to last days.”

Friedrich noted that the Israeli operation “follows more than a month of armed clashes inside Jenin Camp between PSF [Palestinian State Forces, commanded by the Palestinian Authority] and Palestinian armed actors.”

According to Middle East Eye, “PA security forces stormed al-Razi hospital in Jenin on Wednesday and arrested a wounded man believed to be a member of the Jenin Battalion and wanted by the Israeli army.

“The PA raid appeared to be the first time Palestinian forces publicly participated in an Israeli military assault in the West Bank.”

There are fears that Jenin’s fate awaits other cities in the West Bank, with Israeli forces massively increasing the number of military checkpoints and gates—to nearly 900 throughout the territory—sealing off entry and exit to major population centres. The Aida refugee camp was stormed on Wednesday, and raids carried out in Tulkarem and towns around Ramallah and el-Bireh.

Medical Aid for Palestinians member Aseel Baidoun, based in Ramallah, told the *Guardian*, “For two days we have been experiencing an extensive military lockdown. The Israeli army has placed hundreds of new checkpoints that are making the movement between towns and cities almost impossible...”

“It’s an open-air prison; we feel we cannot move around. If you want to go from Ramallah to Jericho it’s impossible, and it’s almost impossible to even reach nearby villages. There’s not only restrictions on movement but insane attacks from settlers.”

Dozens of masked settlers attacked the villages of Jinsafut and al-Funduq near Jerusalem on Monday night, bringing materials to set buildings and cars on fire, and attacking three houses, a nursery and a carpentry shop. They also threw stones and fired shots. Similar attacks have since taken place in the villages of Sinjil, Ein Siniya, Turmus Aya and Khirbet Aqwiwis. At least 21 Palestinians have been injured and hospitalised, including elderly people and three children.

Meanwhile, the residents of Gaza continue to sift through the 50 million tons of rubble that is all that remains of their levelled cities, with 80 percent of the buildings in northern Gaza destroyed, leaving 300,000 homeless.

Relatives and civil agencies are searching for an

estimated 10,000 bodies trapped underneath the wreckage. More than 200 have been found since the ceasefire came into effect four days ago. Frequently all that can be found are bones.

The work is slow going, in part because the IDF has killed roughly 100 staff members of the civil defence agency and destroyed many of its vehicles. It also takes place under fire. On Wednesday, 28-year-old Akram Atef Zanoun was shot and killed, and four others wounded, by an Israeli quadcopter while removing rubble from their mostly destroyed homes in Rafah city’s Shaboura camp.

The smooth passage of 2,400 aid trucks into Gaza since the ceasefire was signed, a vast increase, confirms that Israel deliberately restricted the flow of these vital supplies—using starvation and disease as a weapon of war—for over a year.

British Dr. James Smith, who volunteered at Gaza’s Al-Aqsa Hospital, told Al Jazeera, “One of the most important things to remember is a genocide doesn’t end with a ceasefire, particularly a ceasefire as fragile as this.”

“It’s simply ongoing now by other means,” he said, pointing to the Strip’s ruined healthcare system.

A correspondent for the news agency, Hind Khoudary, reported, “You can’t imagine how destroyed the infrastructure across the Gaza Strip is. Sewage is filling the streets.

“In some places, there’s a lack of water. Desalination plants are not working any more. The infrastructure has completely collapsed.”

The looming deadline for Israel’s ban on UNRWA threatens to plunge the region deeper into catastrophe, with over two million Gazans relying on the agency—plus many hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank.

A report from the Peace Research Institute Oslo, “Consequences of the Israeli UNRWA Ban”, warned of the dire impact the ban on the organisation would have. Co-author Jorgen Jensehaugen explained, “In less than one week’s time, its collapse in Israeli-controlled areas could cripple the humanitarian operation in Gaza”.



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