

Israel carrying out a second Gaza on West Bank with Trump's backing

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Under the cover of the Gaza ceasefire, the far-right government of indicted war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu has launched a military offensive focusing on the refugee camp in the northern city of Jenin in the occupied West Bank, and the towns of Tulkarem and Tammun.

The Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) Operation Iron Wall has pulverised whole neighbourhoods of Jenin and Tulkarem with massive aerial bombardments and drone attacks, forced the displacement of tens of thousands of Palestinians, and seen a new wave of house-to-house searches and mass killings.

Al-Haq, the Palestinian human rights group, warned that Israel is employing many of the same tactics in the West Bank that it used in Gaza, stating, "Israel's genocidal tactics to destroy the Palestinian group are further evident in the West Bank, including Jerusalem." UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories Francesca Albanese issued a similar warning on X, "If it is not forced to stop, Israel's genocide of Palestinians will not be confined to Gaza. Mark my words."

The IDF operation that began on January 21 comes just weeks after the Palestinian Authority of President Mahmoud Abbas, working as Israel's subcontractor, carried out a four-week long operation against militants in the Jenin area that left dozens dead, displaced thousands and caused widespread losses of water and power.

The IDF was far more destructive. It targeted 23 buildings in the Jenin refugee camp that it claimed were being used by "militants" and ripped up all the roads leading to the camp as well as some of the roads within the camp. The tactic, widely used in Gaza, is aimed at widening the roads to facilitate the IDF's movement of armoured vehicles through the area and the division of the camp into separate enclaves.

Almost 90 percent of the camp's population have been forced to flee their homes, with many seeking refuge in towns and villages across Jenin governorate. According to Al-Haq, "The remaining families are living in grave danger with no access to water, electricity, and other basic services."

The Israeli military also continued its wide-scale assault on Tulkarem city and its refugee camp in the western West Bank, causing extensive damage to infrastructure and civilian property. It stormed several areas in the Ramallah governorate

and assaulted and arrested two Palestinians in the Old City of Hebron as they were distributing bread.

Also in the northern area, the Israeli army continued its offensive in Tammun and the Far'a refugee camp, conducting house-to-house searches under the cover of air strikes and drone attacks targeting various locations in the town. Residents are reportedly suffering from a severe shortage of supplies and a near-total power outage.

As in Gaza, IDF strikes on hospitals, medical staff and patients have been a particular feature of the campaign. The army laid siege to Jenin Governmental Hospital, after bulldozing the main entrance and the main road leading to it in previous raids. It fired stun grenades directly at an ambulance responding to an emergency and wounded a paramedic during a raid in the town of Beita. It has besieged Thabet Thabet Governmental Hospital.

Medecins Sans Frontieres' report *Inflicting harm and denying care* cited World Health Organisation data showing 647 attacks on healthcare facilities and personnel in the West Bank in the first 12 months since the start of the Gaza war, "with Israeli forces routinely encircling hospitals, refugee camps, and villages—hence creating unprecedented barriers to medical access."

The IDF operation killed 25 people in the Jenin area and wounded 65 others, according to the Palestinian Authority's Health Ministry. It killed at least 10 others in other cities and arrested 100 people, bringing the total number killed in the West Bank to 70 since the beginning of the year and more than 900 since October 2023.

All this takes place as Israel's ban on UNRWA, the main United Nations aid agency for Palestinian refugees—preventing it from operating in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem—comes into effect. Aid organisations have warned of the disastrous impact on aid delivery jeopardizing regional stability. UNRWA provides vital aid and public services, including health and education, to around 2.5 million Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as 3 million more in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

Last August, Defense Minister Israel Katz, who was then foreign minister, called for Israel to display "the same

determination” in the West Bank as in Gaza to root out “terrorists” and called for the “temporary evacuation of Palestinian residents and any necessary measures.” More recently, he suggested that the IDF’s aim was to remove armed resistance from the Jenin refugee camp so that “terrorism does not return to the camp after the operation is over—the first lesson from the method of repeated raids in Gaza.” The IDF would, he said, remain in the Jenin refugee camp even after the operation is completed.

A few weeks ago, Finance Minister and Religious Zionism leader Bezalel Smotrich demanded the IDF employ the same violence in Jenin as that used in Gaza, saying, “Funduq, Nablus and Jenin need to look like Jabaliya [the refugee camp in Gaza].”

The online Israeli magazine +972 has published a study by Israeli NGO Kerem Navot, which monitors Israel’s dispossession of Palestinian land in the West Bank, showing that at least 57 Palestinian communities—mostly in the northern Jordan Valley, east of Ramallah, southeast of Bethlehem, and the South Hebron Hills—have been forced to flee their homes since the start of the war on Gaza as a result of Israeli settler attacks. Of these, seven have been partially displaced, while 50 have been wiped off the map entirely.

Kerem Navot and Peace Now estimate that Israeli settlers have established at least 41 settlement outposts and herding farms in the West Bank, of which at least 10 were set up close to the Palestinian communities forced to flee their lands. The settlers have also set up “observation posts” or planted Israeli flags to prevent the Palestinians returning to their property. According the Medecins Sans Frontieres’ report, they have impeded Palestinians’ access to healthcare, intimidating and attacking healthcare workers and implementing roads blocks that particularly affect the more remote communities.

All this proceeds with the collusion of the IDF. It is no longer a case of settlers in civilian clothes harassing and attacking the Palestinians and their property but settlers in military uniform and armed, taking advantage of their role as army reservists. They carry out violent raids, break into homes, steal livestock and even arrest Palestinians as well as Israeli and international activists who come to support vulnerable shepherding communities. In December, settler leaders called for the government to mount an operation in the West Bank “like in Gaza.”

Last month, dozens of masked Israelis ran riot through the village of Al-Funduq, setting fire to Palestinians’ property and a nursery. They surrounded a house where a family was sheltering and hurled stones. Settlers rioted in the nearby village of Jinsaput, setting fire to buildings and vehicles. None were arrested.

As well as a green light from Israel’s far-right politicians, the ultra-nationalist settler movement has the open support of the Trump administration.

In the three weeks since taking office, Trump has lifted the

Biden administration’s hold on the supply of 2,000 pounds bombs—amid a supposed ceasefire—and the sanctions against settlers and groups responsible for land grabs and violence against Palestinians in the West Bank. He has slapped sanctions on the International Criminal Court—accusing it of attacking Israel and the United States by way of its indictment of Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes—and is leading efforts at the UN to replace UNRWA.

On Friday, the US State Department told Congress that it plans to sell a more than \$7.4 billion package of weapons to Israel, including thousands of bombs and missiles, that “improves Israel’s capability to meet current and future threats, strengthen its homeland defence, and serves as a deterrent to regional threats,” confirming Israel’s role as Washington’s attack dog in the region.

These actions have been welcomed by Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel’s former security minister until he resigned in opposition to the Gaza ceasefire, and Smotrich, who added, “The state of Israel looks forward to continued fruitful cooperation to further enhance our national security, expand settlement across all parts of our homeland, and strengthen Israel’s standing in the world.”

Trump has said he will make an announcement about Israel’s annexation of the West Bank in four weeks’ time. His previous initiative, From Peace to Prosperity, announced in 2020, approved Israel’s unilateral annexation of more than one third of the West Bank, a move that has since been supported by his officials. These include his proposed ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, an evangelical Christian who has previously endorsed Israel’s “right” to the West Bank, which he refers to by its Hebrew and biblical name of Judea and Samaria, and Elise Stefanik, another evangelical Christian, as his ambassador-designate to the United Nations.

Trump, referring to Israel’s size, said. “It’s a pretty small piece of land, and it’s amazing that they’ve been able to do, what they’ve been able to do when you think about it. There’s a lot of good, smart brainpower. But it is a very small piece of land, no question about it.” Last August, he told a crowd at an event in New Jersey, “It’s really a tiny spot. I actually said, ‘Is there any way of getting more?’”



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