

# Israel's West Bank offensive continues

Thomas Scripps  
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Israel's intensified ethnic cleansing in the West Bank continued Thursday, taking the death toll since the military operation began to at least 18.

Five were killed in a mosque in the Tulkarem refugee camp, apparently amid a firefight. The camp was placed under siege by the Israeli military, with soldiers including special forces carrying out house raids, snipers taking up positions on rooftops and aircraft flying low overhead. The Thabet Thabet Governmental Hospital and al-Israa Specialised Hospital were blockaded, and the Palestinian Red Crescent prevented from entering the camp to douse fires and help the injured.

There were overnight raids in Far'a, al-Khader, Arroub, Nur Sham, Nablus and Nabi Saleh, with multiple Palestinians reported injured by shooting, beatings or fire. Electricity and Internet services were cut in a large swathe of Jenin city, where snipers shot "anyone who is moving" according to Mohammed al-Atrash of *Al Jazeera Arabic*, reporting from the scene. The Jenin Governmental Hospital was besieged, with ambulances blocked.

The huge deployment of lethal military force has been coupled with calls for mass evictions, with Foreign Minister Israel Katz leading the pack. He repeated his threats today, saying removals were necessary for the "dismantling of terror infrastructures" which must be accomplished "by all necessary means".

Multiple organisations have condemned the offensive. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Al-Haq, and Al Mezan Center for Human Rights issued a joint statement warning of "even more escalated violence in the West Bank, with the employment of tactics that mirror those used in Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza, particularly attacks on hospitals and healthcare facilities, and the use of excessive and indiscriminate force."

A statement issued on behalf of United Nations

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was "deeply concerned by the latest developments in the occupied West Bank, including Israel's launch today of large-scale military operations in Jenin, Tulkarm and Tubas governorates, involving the use of airstrikes, which resulted in casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. He strongly condemns the loss of lives, including of children."

Amnesty International's Erika Guevara explained that the "military assault on cities and towns across the occupied West Bank follows an escalation in unlawful killings by Israeli forces in recent months," a "horrifying spike in lethal force by Israeli forces and violent state-backed settler attacks".

She continued, "It is likely that these operations will result in an increase in forced displacement, destruction of critical infrastructure and measures of collective punishment, which have been key pillars of Israel's system of apartheid against Palestinians and of its unlawful occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory."

Over 600 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank by the Israeli military since October 7, over a fifth of them by airstrikes. Among the dead are more than 140 children. Just in the days August 20-26, before the latest assault began, 13 Palestinians were killed, eight in airstrikes, including four children.

Close to 10,000 have been arrested, held in prisons and detentions centres where abuses of human rights including torture and sexual violence are endemic.

Meanwhile, 12.7 square kilometres of land seizures have been officially approved by the Israeli government—the largest area in three decades. This process is spearheaded by far-right Israeli settlers who have carried out 1,270 attacks against Palestinians documented by the UN in the last 10 months, leading to 11 deaths and driving many communities out of their homes.

On Thursday, several dozen settlers staged a provocation in the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem again, under the protection of Israeli security forces and while they restricted the entry of Palestinian worshippers—under conditions of an effective lockdown of Palestinian quarters of the Old City.

Former director of Human Rights Watch Kenneth Roth told *Al Jazeera*, “Frankly, the dream of the far-right ministers in Netanyahu’s government is to ‘solve the problem’ of the West Bank. ‘Solve the problem’ of the apartheid regime that Israel is maintaining there, by just getting rid of the Palestinians... a massive war crime.”

This is true, but the project is shared by the whole Netanyahu regime currently implementing it. The gleefully vicious comments of the likes of Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich serve as a convenient scapegoat for sections of the ruling class keen to be seen condemning Israeli actions from time to time but totally committed to supporting its government.

The apartheid, Jewish supremacist character of the state was highlighted by the treatment even of one of the recently returned hostages—in whose name Israel is waging its war. Kaid Farhan al-Kadi, the latest hostage to be brought back alive, is returning to a demolition notice.

Al-Kadi is one of Israel’s 300,000 heavily discriminated against Bedouin Arabs. Seventy percent of the residents are being evicted from his home village Khirbet Karkur—among the one-third of Bedouin Arab settlements the Israeli government intends to destroy. A local authority spokesperson cynically commented that Al-Kadi and his family would be exempt “in light of the situation”.

Over 1,300 Bedouin homes have been demolished in the first half of 2024, a 50 percent increase over the same period in 2022, according to the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality.

While the war on the West Bank unfolds, scores of people continue to be killed in Gaza every day, amid a worsening humanitarian disaster. Israeli strikes killed and wounded Palestinians, including women and children, across the Strip, in Khan Younis, Rafah, Gaza City, the Nuseirat refugee camp and Deir el-Balah.

Hina Khoudary, reporting for *Al Jazeera*, described how “eight Palestinians were killed when Israeli forces targeted al-Amal Hotel. It was obvious that displaced

Palestinians were sheltering there, and they burned alive because no one was there to rescue them.” The ability of the Gaza Civil Defence to respond to these incidents has been massively cut back by Israel’s attacks on ambulances and fire trucks and on shops supplying spare parts.

Conditions for the almost entirely displaced population are so dire that Gaza has recorded its first polio case in 25 years, a 10-month-old baby now partially paralyzed by the infection, sparking fears of an epidemic. Hepatitis A is already spreading rapidly, with 40,000 cases reported earlier this month. For three months, the Israeli government has blocked Doctors Without Borders’ efforts to import 4,000 hygiene kits containing soap, toothbrushes, shampoo, and laundry powder.

Vials of polio vaccine have now been sent to Gaza but cannot be distributed due to the chaos of Israel’s repeated displacement and bombardment of the population. The issue has built up steam in the corporate media, where capitalist politicians are trying to gain a reputation for humanitarianism by insisting children must have the opportunity to be vaccinated before being buried under rubble.

Netanyahu has dismissed talk of any pause in the genocide, suggesting only the “designation of specific places” for vaccinations, a designation whose only practical impact is to require the Israeli military to claim their bombing is “accidental”.



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