

Eyewitness report from the West Bank: “The Israeli army is now commencing major military operations to drive us out”

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The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke at the weekend with Jassir Hamdan (name changed), who is currently in the West Bank. He has lived in Germany for many years and is visiting his family in Nablus. He spoke with Dietmar Gaisenkersting.

Dietmar Gaisenkersting: Our appointment on Thursday was cancelled because you had to go to your in-laws. What had happened?

Jassir Hamdan: I had traveled with my wife to my in-laws, who live on the other side of the city of Nablus after Israeli soldiers suddenly invaded the city with their vehicles and caused absolute chaos.

The soldiers were looking for certain people, shooting, killing people and photographing everything. Most of the time you do not know what they want or what they are up to. That is what happened to my in-laws in my neighbourhood on Thursday. They blocked a road for a few hours and everyone was scared. It is dangerous to drive a private car because the Israeli soldiers shoot indiscriminately. That is why everyone immediately tries to get to safety, to hide until the soldiers leave again. Only then is it reasonably safe to return home.

Nablus is a relatively large city, the second largest in Palestine. In eastern Nablus, where my parents-in-law live, there are two refugee camps nearby, Balata and Askar. That is why the Israelis always cause so many problems on that side of the city, because the fighters are concentrated on that side of the city, and also in the old town of Nablus.

DG: What kind of fighters are they?

JH: They are largely organised under Hamas, from the military wing of Fatah and, to a lesser extent, from Islamic Jihad. These are fighters who are fighting against the occupation, against the settlers, against the violence of the Israelis. However, they are relatively isolated as small groups in each town, because the West Bank is divided into many small, separate islands by the Israeli settlements. Persecuted both by the Israeli army and the Palestinian Authority, it is difficult for them to move around the country, which is why it is so difficult to organise.

Very few of them have homemade explosives, as in Jenin. There they blew up Israeli military vehicles. That was the reason for this ten-day operation in Jenin. The Israelis killed many people in the process, but also before and after the operation.

DG: What role does the Palestinian Authority [under President

Mahmoud Abbas] play in this? Is it acting against Israel?

JH: No, you can forget about them. I have spoken to so many acquaintances, friends and relatives who live here. No one has any confidence in the Palestinian Authority. They are now playing an absolutely treacherous role. They simply do what the Israelis want and they help the Israelis. For example, the fighters in the old city of Nablus have erected many umbrellas on the roofs so that Israeli drones and aeroplanes cannot observe the streets.

The Palestinian Authority regularly destroys these screens. And we know for a fact that a few hours later, or the next day at the latest, Israeli soldiers march in to kill the fighters. This is part of their co-operation with the Israeli army, and therefore we have no faith in the corrupt, treacherous Palestinian Authority.

DG: What is the situation in the West Bank, what can you tell us?

JH: The Israeli troops were in Jenin for around ten days. They killed many people there and completely destroyed the entire infrastructure of the city. That is in the northern regions, near Nablus. In the central region, around Ramallah, the situation is somewhat calmer because the Palestinian Authority and the Israelis have more power there and they control and suppress everything. There are therefore no fighters there, just as there are none in Jerusalem.

In the southern cities of the West Bank, for example in Hebron, we have had a few surprises in the last two or three weeks. Residents there got hold of weapons and killed a few Israeli settlers and that has made the whole situation even more difficult. How can I describe it? The Israelis are punishing the entire population, not just a few people or the fighters, but the entire population. This city is like a big prison.

The villages around each town are always under threat from settlers, who have military support from the Israeli army. The settlers are destroying olive trees, fields, people are being attacked.

And perhaps you heard what happened the day before yesterday. The Israeli army killed the American-Turkish peace activist Aysenur Ezgi Eygi near Nablus with a targeted shot to the head. This was in a village called Beita, where Israeli settlers have simply seized large pieces of land from the people living there and expelled the farmers. There have been very many problems and direct conflict with the settlers for several years. But now the settlers are acting even more aggressively because they have been

given the green light by the Israeli army and the Israeli government.

The army is now starting major military operations to drive people out of the West Bank to Jordan. Israeli politicians are constantly talking about a 'substitute solution' for the Palestinians in Jordan. They want to take the whole country away from us.

Jordanian and other Arab politicians say that they will not accept such a thing. But we also know that these Arab regimes and governments, especially in Jordan, are dependent on American and Western governments. They really don't want to do anything about it.

DG: What is the reaction of the Palestinian Authority? What do they say?

JH: They are silent. We don't see them at all. But when they want to do something for the Israelis, they go out and pursue the fighters. They also try to arrest fighters here. And they also enable and facilitate the work of the Israeli soldiers and their terror operations.

Today there was a shootout on the border between Palestine and Jordan, which is controlled by the Israeli army. A lorry driver was carrying a pistol and shot three soldiers. He was also killed. Now the army has completely closed the border since this morning and we don't know when they will open the border again. We are now like in a big prison.

DG: What about the supply of food, medicine and the like? We know that everything is sealed off in Gaza, but what about the West Bank? What is the situation there?

JH: There is a lot of agriculture here, the farmers are hard-working. There is currently no shortage of food, but the situation can of course change at any time. However, the economic situation is very, very difficult. Since last October, people have been receiving a maximum of 50 percent of their salary, so they hardly have any money for food. Normal day-to-day business is becoming increasingly difficult. They can no longer afford many things.

DG: Do you also have contacts in the Gaza Strip?

JH: I don't have any direct contacts, but you can hear what is happening there on the news every hour. Reporting from Gaza has lessened but the killing continues. The images we see, for example on Al Jazeera, are really frightening. The whole country is completely destroyed. I don't know how people still manage to live there.

We are organising a lot of aid for Gaza. I have many acquaintances and friends who are active here and are collecting aid, baby food, food, tents and trying to send them to Gaza. But the situation remains brutal.

DG: In one of your first messages, you wrote that everything was much worse than you thought. What were you referring to?

JH: That was in relation to the situation in the West Bank. For example, there is no freedom of movement here. You can stay relatively safe in the city. But if you travel from town to town—Jenin, for example, is only 25 kilometres from Nablus—the whole journey is really extremely dangerous. Because an Israeli settler or the Israeli army can shoot at you at any time on the way—they do it like the mafia, lying in wait for you.

The villages are particularly at risk. I hear from many people in

my family who live in a village near Nablus that people are constantly being attacked, beaten and shot at. You don't read about it in the media because the situation in Gaza is really much worse and that is why it is being reported on so intensively.

The whole world has heard about the peace activist who was killed by an Israeli sniper because she was an American. But the normal Palestinian population, they clearly have no value in the eyes of the world. When they are attacked or shot, you generally don't hear anything about it in the Western or international media.

DG: The German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Greens) has just been on her 11th Middle East trip to Israel and has once again defended the Israeli government and its crimes, the genocide against the Palestinians. What do you think needs to be done to end the genocide?

JH: Firstly, the unlimited Western support for Israel must be stopped. If the military, economic, political and media support is stopped, Israel cannot continue its actions. However, the Americans in particular are actively working against our history, against our existence in Palestine. The lip service paid by German and American politicians is false. Their actions speak the truth. They are working very closely with the Israelis to end our existence in Palestine. I have spoken to many people and they all consider the attitude of the European governments to be fatal. They do what the Americans dictate.

DG: You know us. Our assessment is that Israel is the bridgehead of imperialism there in the Middle East and the genocide of the Palestinians, the 'final solution' to the Palestinian problem, the preparation for a war in the Middle East, especially against Iran. Therefore, our perspective is for an international movement of the working class against genocide, war and capitalism, that is, against the root of all these crimes. How do you see that?

JH: I see it exactly as you described it. It is precisely the working people all over the world, who until now have had little or no information, who can now see the truth about Israel and Palestine. They see this outbreak of violence. But the problem with the Palestinians here in the West Bank is that they are actually suffering under two occupations, namely that of Israel and that of the Palestinian Authority, which co-operates closely with Israel.

DG: Is there anything else you would like to say to the readers of the WWSWS?

JH: Yes, I want to send a message to everyone that every little movement, every voice, every expression of opinion really does make a difference. Only together can we finally stop this unlimited support for Israel by Western governments.



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