

# Another Ramadan, Another Brutal Israeli Raids Into Al Aqsa

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*Once again, Haram Al Sharif, Al Aqsa Mosque, and the sublimely beautiful Dome of the Rock have become Ramadan flashpoints in the escalating conflict over possession of Palestine between Palestinians and Israelis. Brutal Israeli raids into the compound and Al Aqsa have soared tensions after more than a year of near constant Israeli military operations in occupied cities, towns and villages which killed 146 Palestinians in the West Bank in 2022 and at least 90 so far this year. As the overall figure stands at 222, the UN called last year the deadliest for Palestinians since 2005.*

For Palestinians who cannot envisage an end to Israel's occupation, repression and imposition of apartheid, resistance by any and all means seems to be their only way to respond. They face death by desperation.

The latest violent surge began in March last year when a Palestinian man killed four Israelis in a stabbing and car-ramming attack in the Israeli city of Beersheba. A week later a Palestinian shooter slew five in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish city of Bnei Brak. In early April a Palestinian gunman from the West Bank city of Jenin killed three Israelis and wounded a dozen in Tel Aviv. In May three Israelis were killed and several wounded when Palestinians wielding axes at the ultra-Orthodox city of Elad.

Israel responded to each of these incidents with raids and crackdowns, focusing on the West Bank cities of Nablus and Jenin. In May, Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh was shot dead while covering an Israeli army operation in Jenin. Her death was widely condemned as she held US as well as Palestinian citizenship and her death was seen internationally as an attack on the world press while covering the news.

Israel carried out more than 2,000 raids during 2022 when Israel had a mis-matched rotation coalition government headed for the first six months by right-wing ultra-nationalist Naftali Bennett and the subsequent six months by alleged "centrist" Yair Lapid. Bennett

promoted Israel's annexation of most of the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley, and rejected the emergence of a Palestinian state. Lapid favoured negotiations with the Palestinian Authority on the "two state" solution and called for annexation of large illegal Israeli colonies located on the old Green Line. To remain in power, this fragile coalition lashed out at Palestinians resisting the occupation. Despite its harsh treatment of Palestinians this coalition lost the October election.

The equally fragile, hard right, Jewish supremacist, ultra-religious coalition formed by Binyamin Netanyahu which took office in January has simply stepped up the raids, arrests, and killings prompting Palestinians to react by killing 19 Israelis and two foreign nationals. One commentator wrote that the ratio is five Palestinian deaths for each Israeli fatality.

Netanyahu's sixth coalition rejects the creation of a Palestinian state and is determined to pursue creeping if not formal annexation of the West Bank. East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights have already been illegally annexed by Israel while Gaza is besieged and blockaded.

However, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have not protested the new government's Palestine policy but Netanyahu's plan to overhaul the supreme court by ensuring that Knesset members are in the majority in the committee to appoint justices and the Knesset can overturn court rulings. Israeli opponents of this plan argue that such changes in the court would end its function as a check on the legislative and executive branches and put an end to Israeli "democracy".

While on trial for fraud, bribery and breach of trust, Netanyahu has jeopardised Israel's "democracy" in order to attempt to escape prison. He has done this by recruiting hard-line ultra-nationalist and ultra-religious politicians attached to the "settler" lobby for this coalition, making it the most extreme in Israel's 75-year history. To make matters worse, Netanyahu has made the extremists respectable and brought them into the mainstream of Israel's rightward shift on the political spectrum.

If he is convicted, he could be imprisoned for up to 10 years for bribery and a maximum of three years for fraud and breach of trust. He is Israel's first sitting prime minister to be charged with a crime. He believes he enjoys impunity as long as he heads a government. For Netanyahu jail time would be the ultimate humiliation although dozens of Israeli national and local politicians have already faced criminal proceedings and imprisonment.

Likud predecessor Ehud Olmert was sentenced to 10 years for bribery and breach of trust but served only 18 months. Likud politician and ex-President Moshe Katsav was tried and sentenced to seven years in prison for abusing staff but served five. Both were out of office when incarcerated. Eleven ministers, 18 Knesset members, and two chief rabbis have been tried and served jail terms or given suspended sentences or fined.

Netanyahu's legal troubles mirror those of ex-US president Donald Trump. Netanyahu's alleged crimes stem from personal greed and the desire to project a positive image of himself to Israeli voters.

He is charged with accepting expensive presents, including jewellery, champagne and Cuban cigars from wealthy foreign friends and offering political favours to media owners in exchange for positive coverage of the Netanyahu family. He is also accused of securing legislation that gave hundreds of millions of dollars to the owner of a major telecom

company in exchange for editorial control over coverage on the firm's popular news website.

Like Trump, Netanyahu has denied the charges and has declared he is being prosecuted in a left-wing "witch hunt". Israeli raids on Al Aqsa and the West Bank, strikes on Israel from Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria and Palestinian attacks on Israelis provide a distraction from Netanyahu's legal perils as well as the mass demonstrations against his widely unpopular plan to overhaul the supreme court.

He counts on rallying Israelis to form a united front against foreign enemies. But this is unlikely to resolve his problems with court cases, the majority of Israelis who reject his plan for the Court and hate his coalition, Palestinians, Arab neighbours and global public opinion which has begun to recognise that Israel, particularly under Netanyahu, is a threat to regional security and global peace.

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