

Israel's West Bank Attacks Fuel Its Annexation Plans. It's Genocide

Israel's military operations in the occupied West Bank have killed at least 20 Palestinians over three days.

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During a trip to the West Bank to conduct research and visit her family in Nablus in 2022, Yara Asi remembered the moments when Israel's military besieged the city, a major economic hub for the region, in an effort to weed out militants living there.

"Surely the world is going to intervene and they're not going to let this major city be closed," Asi recalled thinking.

The military siege [lasted more than three weeks](#), killing more than 23 Palestinians across the territory. That year, Israeli raids and airstrikes killed more than 150 Palestinians, marking the deadliest year for the West Bank since 2006. The attacks — [and the loss of life](#) — continued into 2023 and have only accelerated since then.

While most eyes remain on Gaza, Israeli military attacks on the West Bank killed more than 594 since October 7, including 115 children who were killed by live ammunition, and 1,411 children injured, according to the United Nations. Around a dozen of those deaths can be attributed to violence by extremist Israeli settlers.

"Nobody intervened — nothing happened — and since then we've seen military incursions increasing and increasing, and I don't see any real movement or even critique," said Asi, a professor at the University of Central Florida and policy member at the think tank Al-Shabaka.

This week, Israel expanded its military campaign in the West Bank with raids and airstrikes on the cities of Tulkarem, Jenin, and Tubas, marking its largest attack in the occupied territory since 2002 during the Second Intifada. In the span of three days, the Israeli military has killed at least 20 Palestinians in preemptive strikes. Footage has shown bulldozers [destroying roads](#) and other civilian infrastructure in the area. One strike at the Nur Shams refugee camp left five dead, including two boys, 13 and 15.

OCCUPIED WEST BANK

Israel cuts off water, power amid Jenin siege

The Israeli military – which has deployed armoured vehicles, bulldozers and snipers supported by drones and aircraft – has imposed a curfew in Jenin and cut off electricity and water supplies in the refugee camp, besieged since August 28.

Jenin camp | Established: 1953 | Area: 0.42 km²
Registered refugees: 23,628



An armoured vehicle passes by during an Israeli raid in Jenin, August 30, 2024 [Raneen Sawafta/Reuters]



Palestinian Civil Defence firefighters douse a fire in a fruit market in Jenin amid ongoing Israeli raids, August 31, 2024 [Ronaldo Schemidt/AFP]



Source: Al Jazeera, UNRWA | September 1, 2024



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Israel’s Foreign Minister Israel Katz called on the military to “take care of the threat in the exact way terror infrastructure in Gaza is taken care of, including the temporary evacuation of Palestinian civilians and every other necessary step.”

Footage circulating online shows Israeli bulldozers destroying roads and razing infrastructure, including sewage systems, water and electricity networks, in areas of the northern occupied West Bank, including Nur Shams refugee camp, Tulkarm, and Jenin. Israel launched a large... pic.twitter.com/rx6FTlv20S

— Middle East Eye (@MiddleEastEye) [August 28, 2024](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/2024/08/28)

“This is a war for everything and we must win it,” he wrote in a statement, according to English translations from Hebrew in [several reports](#). The statement prompted concerns from Palestinians who fear the level of destruction seen in Gaza may be imminent in the West Bank.

While the United Nations human rights office said the strikes are in violation of international law, the U.S. reiterated Israel’s right to carry out “very real security needs, which includes countering terrorist activity in the West Bank,” according to a State Department statement to [Middle East Eye](#).

The fear amid this climate, Asi said, is that such strikes could permanently push Palestinians out of the territory.

“For the first time, I’m really wondering: Will there be a place called Palestine for my kids and grandkids to go to?” said Asi, who was born in Nablus and immigrated to the U.S. in 1989 with her father when she was 4. While growing up, she continued to visit family each summer.

“I always figured the occupation would last, and it will never be good,” she said. “Now, I’m wondering, will it be at all? And that’s really terrifying.”

For Trita Parsi, co-founder and executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, such concerns of continued ethnic cleansing of the region are not unfounded. The nature of Israel’s strikes in the West Bank reveal what he says is Israel’s real motivation: total control of the region.

“This should be seen in the context of an ongoing and decades-long effort to slowly but surely annex as much Palestinian territory as possible,” Parsi said. “There was never an attack from the West Bank, and Hamas is not the dominant force in the West Bank, and it goes to show that this is not as much about Hamas as it is about the Israeli state’s long-term plan to eliminate, wipe Palestine off the map.”

Parsi said the Israeli government is capitalizing on a moment in which it has faced little accountability from the international community, most prominently, the United States.

“The strategy has always been to take advantage of moments in the international community where Israel can get away with as much as possible,” he said.

Evidence of human rights violations continues to mount in Israel’s operations in Gaza, including [bombing civilians](#) and [civilian infrastructure](#) such as [hospitals](#); [blocking aid](#); and [torturing and abusing](#) Palestinian detainees from both Gaza and the West Bank [in its prisons](#). Israel’s leaders face potential war crime charges from the International Criminal Court, along with an ongoing genocide case within the U.N. International Court of Justice. A [growing number of Democrats](#) have pushed President Joe Biden to [follow U.S. law](#), which [bars the transfer](#) of military aid if there is any evidence of human rights violations.

Even so, Israel has enjoyed the continued support from the U.S., with Biden’s administration continuing to send weapons.

According to Muhannad Ayyash, a professor of sociology at Mount Royal University and policy analyst at Al-Shabaka, Israel’s logic is simple:

“If we can get away with what we’re doing in Gaza, we can get away with it in the West Bank.”

“The context of the attack on the West Bank is that Israel sees basically an opportunity to continue to build toward its project of Greater Israel,” continued Ayyash, referring to the historical vision of Zionism in the region.

Yousef Munayyer, a political analyst who heads the Palestine/Israel Program at the D.C.-based Arab Center, called U.S. policy toward Israel, “a completely disjointed policy” with no vision beyond “allowing Israel to dominate.”

“We shouldn’t be surprised that the Israeli military feels that it has free reign when that’s the message that’s coming from its number one supporter and supplier,” he said.

This level of support, said Quincy Institute’s Parsi, also hurts the standing of the U.S. within the international community, [such as in the U.N. Security Council](#), where America has largely stood isolated from other member nations. Decades of U.S. involvement in other Middle East conflicts have hurt its international standing as well, he said.

“All of these different things have weakened the U.S.,” he said. “And on top of that, we’re seeing a generation of Americans that will have a lower standard of living than their parents on average, which is to a very large extent, a result of the massive amount of money and treasure and blood that has been wasted on these needless wars.”

[Despite rhetoric from Biden](#) and Vice President [Kamala Harris](#) supporting a two-state solution — which the international community has widely backed — the U.S. has shown little effort in actually getting Israel to end its illegal occupation.

Khaled Elgindy, who has served as an adviser to Palestinian leadership in several joint efforts with Israel and the U.S. to create a plan toward Palestinian statehood throughout the 2000s, said he has never felt further from a two-state solution.

He sees the recent strikes in the West Bank, as well as the exchange of strikes with Hezbollah in Lebanon, as part of Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s attempt to prompt a [regional war](#) to further appease his far-right coalition and to maintain power.

“Is the endgame for Netanyahu ‘I’m just continuing to fight on as many fronts as we can create to keep everyone off-balance and prolong my stay in power’?” Elgindy said, “while satisfying his extremist flank who would love nothing more than to see evacuations in the West Bank.”

Elgindy, a senior fellow and director at the Middle East Institute, compared the scale of the attacks to strikes carried out by Israel’s military during the Second Intifada in 2002. Those strikes, however, followed a series of suicide bombings by Palestinian militants, which killed dozens of Israeli civilians. Today, in an environment in which the Israeli government has accused UNRWA, the main aid provider for Palestinians in Gaza, [of being a front for terrorists](#), Elgindy worried such loose definitions would lead to further loss of life in the West Bank in what Israel deems counter-terror efforts. (The Israeli government alleged 12 UNRWA aid workers were involved in the October 7 attacks, though an [independent review](#) found Israel did not provide evidence to back its claim.)

Each year when Asi would return to Nablus, she would observe living conditions worsening amid the tightening grip of Israeli forces. Although her relatives are carrying on with their lives in the West Bank, she has heard of more young people expressing interest in immigrating to Europe or Kuwait. Military raids, which in the past were usually carried out by night, have been increasing in frequency at all hours, limiting the freedom of movement. [Settler violence](#), often [facilitated by Israeli forces](#), is [also worsening](#).

“Even the elders of the family who have seen it all — lived through ’67, lived through the intifadas, Oslo — they’re like, ‘This is the worst it’s ever been,’” Asi said.

“People who pride themselves on being resilient and not being afraid as part of their Palestinian identity, they are genuinely afraid,” she continued.

“To leave one’s house, especially if you have a son, is to have a real material fear of death. ... If something happens, there’s not going to be an investigation, there’s not going to be a tribunal: It’s going to just be another statistic.”

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