

After Gaza ceasefire, Israel turns its firepower on the West Bank

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Two-year-old Laila Al-Khatib is the youngest victim of Israel's military campaign in Jenin, while road closures suffocate the entire territory.

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Bassam Assous holds the body of his granddaughter, Laila Al-Khatib, after she was killed in her home by Israeli forces, Jan. 26, 2025. (Wahaj Bani Moufleh/Activestills)

Bassam Assous was eating dinner at home with his family when the gunfire started. It was around 8 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 25, and unbeknownst to them, Israeli soldiers had entered their village of Muthalath Al-Shuhada, located near Jenin in the occupied West Bank. “The windows and shutters were closed — we had no idea what was going on outside until we heard shooting very close by,” Assous told +972 Magazine.

Assous and his wife, Ghada, quickly moved away from the windows, while their two daughters, Shaimaa and Teema, hid in a bedroom with Teema’s 2-year-old daughter, Laila.

Suddenly, Assous heard his daughters screaming. “I rushed to the bedroom with my wife; Shaimaa was holding Laila tightly, while Teema was screaming next to them,” he recounted. “I took hold of Laila, and my hands quickly became covered in blood. It was coming from her head — she had been hit with a bullet.”

Carrying his granddaughter, bleeding and unconscious, Assous ran outside to the street only to find that it was full of Israeli soldiers and armored vehicles. “My wife screamed, ‘Why did you kill the girl? What did she do to you?’” he continued. “One of the soldiers, standing some distance away, responded, ‘Sorry.’

“I shouted back, ‘Why did you shoot her?’” Assous went on. “The soldiers pointed their weapons at me and told me not to come closer. My wife kept screaming, and one of the soldiers pointed to a spot 100 meters away and told her, ‘Go over there and wait for an ambulance.’”



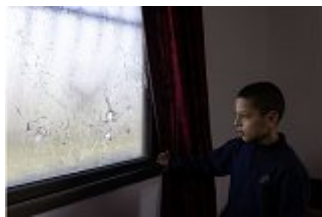
Bassam Assous shows a video of his granddaughter Laila on his phone, Jan. 28, 2025. (Oren Ziv)

When the ambulance arrived, Ghada got in with Laila. Shaimaa, who had sustained shrapnel wounds from the shooting in her jaw and side, and Teema, who had shrapnel wounds in her right hand, also needed treatment. “I told the soldiers I wanted to go with my daughters, but they said, ‘No, you will come with us,’” Assous added.

“The soldiers took me to my uncle’s house, where they had already detained four of his sons while my uncle and the rest of the family sat nearby,” he recounted. “I had no idea what was happening with my wife and daughters — we weren’t allowed to use our phones or even speak. When I insisted on calling, a soldier threatened to handcuff me. I remained detained like this until around 11:30 p.m. when the soldiers withdrew from the area. They didn’t arrest anyone or confiscate anything.

“After the soldiers left, neighbors came to check on us,” Assous went on. “That’s when I learned that Leila had passed away, as they began offering their condolences. I was in shock, but I quickly realized I had to appear strong for my daughter Teema, who broke down in tears and couldn’t comprehend the loss of her child. I took her to a nearby medical center, where she was given sedatives.”

Assous explained that Teema — who is a master’s student at An-Najah University in Nablus, specializing in environmental and water engineering — had already lost her husband, Mohammad Al-Khatib, two years ago in a workplace accident. “She had been struggling with the trauma of losing her husband, so I brought her and her daughter to live with us at home,” he explained. “She used to say, ‘I just want to raise my daughter and take care of her.’ Now, she keeps asking me, ‘Why did they kill my daughter? What did this little child do to deserve this?’”



Rabia, a cousin of Laila Al-Khatib, looks at the holes left by Israeli army bullets in the window of his family’s home, which was also hit during Israel’s operation in Jenin, Jan. 28, 2025. (Oren Ziv)

In response to +972’s inquiry, a spokesperson for the Israeli army said it “regrets any harm caused to uninvolved civilians,” and claimed it had received intelligence about terrorists barricading themselves inside a building in the village. According to the spokesperson, soldiers warned everyone inside “multiple times” to exit before opening fire. Assous denied hearing any such warning.

‘A state of terror’ in Jenin refugee camp

Laila’s killing did not occur in isolation. Since the morning of Jan. 21, only two days after the Gaza ceasefire came into effect, the Israeli army has been engaged in a major military campaign in the northern West Bank. The army says the operation, named “Iron Wall,” is intended to “preserve the IDF’s freedom of action” and [suppress armed resistance](#) in the occupied territory, and follows on the heels of a [seven-week campaign](#) by the [Palestinian Authority](#) (PA) against armed groups in [Jenin](#) refugee camp.

The Israeli military’s activity is also focused on Jenin and its environs, as well as [Tulkarem](#). So far, the operation has killed 16 Palestinians in Jenin and three in Tulkarem, while causing widespread

destruction of civilian infrastructure in both cities, and forcibly displacing thousands of Palestinians from their homes.

“At approximately 11 a.m. last Tuesday, a special force of the occupation army stormed the camp,” Ahmed Hawashin, a researcher at the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) and resident of Jenin refugee camp, told +972. “The soldiers — I suspect they were a sniper squad — positioned themselves in buildings overlooking the camp, and began shooting indiscriminately while missiles were fired from the air. PA vehicles, which had been present in the camp for 45 days, began to withdraw.

“Fear spread among all citizens as news circulated about the military operation in Jenin,” Hawashin continued. “My family fled outside the camp, and came under fire despite being civilians. I fled to a friend’s home in the camp’s Joret A-Dahab neighborhood.

“More military vehicles arrived and imposed a siege on the camp as forces began incursions,” he recounted. “Throughout the night, the sounds of gunfire and explosions did not stop. Twice, while I was sitting with a group of ambulance volunteers in front of my friend’s house, a drone dropped grenades on us. One of the young men was wounded by shrapnel — we were in a state of terror.”



Israeli forces seen near the government hospital in Jenin, blocking the main entrance to the refugee camp, Jan. 28, 2025. (Oren Ziv)

The following morning, an Israeli drone broadcast a message from the army ordering all of the camp’s residents to evacuate. As hordes of families began streaming out, Hawashin decided that it would be too dangerous to stay there any longer. “The situation on the ground and what was circulating in the media about this invasion frightened us — we didn’t know what they were going to do.”

According to Hawashin, a group of around 100 people from the Jorat A-Dahab neighborhood gathered to leave together — and were accompanied by a military drone until they reached the western entrance of the camp. At that point, soldiers ordered them via loudspeaker to divide into groups of five and proceed for inspection. “There was a camera taking pictures, and the soldiers decided who to stop based on the camera data,” he recounted. “We then continued on our way into the city.”

In the city of Jenin itself, where Israeli forces have besieged hospitals, “life is also at a standstill. Some clashes take place [between the Israeli army and Palestinian resistance groups], and military vehicles pass through the streets. Shops are closed, and most citizens do not leave their homes, fearing for their lives.”

Conditions in the camp are rapidly deteriorating. Schools have been shut since the start of the PA’s operation in early December, while the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has been [unable](#) to provide any services for over a month. Electricity has also been completely cut off from the camp.

“The camp has also become a health hazard,” Hawashin added. “Since the beginning of the PA’s

campaign, waste has not been collected, leaving piles of garbage accumulating on the sides of the streets. Streets and water infrastructure are still destroyed from previous Israeli invasions, so people have been relying on water tanks and rooftop containers — but many of these have been damaged by gunfire during the PA’s campaign and the current Israeli operation, rendering them unusable.”



Palestinian children cross destroyed roads and sewage near the rear entrance to Jenin refugee camp, Jan. 28, 2025. (Oren Ziv)

‘I never faced such a long wait at the checkpoint’

Alongside attacks on the Jenin refugee camp and surrounding areas, the Israeli military has closed main roads throughout the West Bank — by checkpoints, iron gates, and earth mounds — as a form of collective punishment, only opening some roads during specific times of the day. These closures are forcing residents to wait for long hours in traffic jams, take alternative routes through fields and dirt roads, or avoid traveling altogether. At checkpoints, soldiers have employed additional repressive practices such as arbitrarily confiscating people’s car keys for hours on end.

Mohammad Hureini, an English literature student at Birzeit University near Ramallah and an activist with [Youth of Sumud](#), was supposed to sit an exam last week — only for it to be postponed after Israel launched its military operation in the West Bank, which prevented many of the students from reaching the university.

The following day, Hureini, who had already been staying near the university, decided to drive back to his village of [A-Tuwani in the South Hebron Hills](#) — a journey that, prior to October 7, would usually take around two hours. After the war in Gaza started and Israel expanded restrictions on Palestinian movement across the West Bank, however, Hureini would spend four or five hours driving home. This time, with the additional closures, the journey took 13 hours.

“From Nablus, I headed to ‘Atara checkpoint, north of Ramallah, but it was closed and dozens of cars were stuck there,” he said. “I turned around to go to Jaba’ checkpoint, southwest of Ramallah, but as I got closer there were severe traffic jams: soldiers had closed the checkpoint to virtually all traffic and were searching vehicles one after another.”

For hours, Hureini sat in traffic as hundreds — if not thousands — of cars lined up for inspection. “It felt like one vehicle passed every half hour,” he recounted. “After three hours, I saw people abandoning their vehicles and calling taxis to pick them up from the other side of the checkpoint after they crossed by foot. I had never experienced such a long wait at this checkpoint before.”

Palestinians wait at a checkpoint south of the West Bank city of Nablus, Jan. 6, 2025. (Nasser Ishtayeh/Flash90)

Around six hours later, it was finally Hureini’s turn to undergo inspection. “There were two soldiers at the checkpoint,” he explained. “One signaled for me to stop, so I turned off the engine. Both soldiers were on their phones, not paying any attention to me or all the vehicles queuing behind me.

As I waited, it became clear to me that they were doing this to humiliate people, break their morale, and disrupt our lives — nothing else.

“Ten minutes later, the soldier asked for my ID and began searching the vehicle, asking me: ‘Where are you from? Where are you going? What do you do?’ After five minutes of this, he told me to go ahead.”

Hureini’s ordeal wasn’t over. “After that, I drove along the [bypass road](#) — which, of course, has no checkpoints because settlers use it — until I reached the [Container checkpoint](#), separating the northern and southern parts of the West Bank. There were three lanes of traffic leading to the checkpoint. Again, for the first time, I saw what looked like thousands of vehicles at a standstill. I learned that the soldiers had closed the checkpoint without giving a reason and were not allowing anyone to pass.

“I waited for half an hour without moving as more cars kept arriving behind me,” he continued. “One of the drivers told me about a dirt road that could be used to bypass the checkpoint. He started driving and I followed him. Dozens of vehicles soon joined behind us. The road was dangerous — it was full of rocks and holes. I drove cautiously along it for 45 minutes, worried that my car would break down. That distance could have been covered in five minutes if not for the checkpoint.”

And still, there was more. “I reached Bethlehem at 7:30 p.m. only to find the main gate to the city closed. I took an alternative route through Beit Jala, where soldiers had set up a checkpoint and were searching vehicles. After learning of an alternate road that bypassed the checkpoint, I followed it until I reached the main road again and continued driving to my village.

“After setting off from Birzeit University near Ramallah at 8 a.m., I arrived home at 9 p.m., exhausted and with a headache. I hadn’t eaten anything all day, so I had some dinner and went straight to bed. The situation since the Israeli army launched its new operation has become unbearable.”

Palestinians line up for inspection at the Israeli military checkpoint of Awarta, east of Nablus, October 20, 2022. (Anne Paq/Activestills)

In response to +972’s request for comment regarding the extensive new road closures, the Israeli army referred us to a briefing by the army’s international spokesperson in which he stated: “Checkpoints are a tool we use in the fight against terror, enabling civilian movement while providing a layer of screening to prevent terrorists from escaping and undermining the operation.”

‘The occupation doesn’t need any excuse to destroy us’

To make sense of Israel’s new military operation and collective punishment measures, Palestinians in the West Bank are drawing a direct connection to the Gaza ceasefire.

“The Israeli government has a lack of morale after leaving Gaza — despite committing genocide, killing tens of thousands of people, and destroying the Gaza Strip,” Omar Assaf, a resident of Deir Ammar refugee camp near Ramallah who [runs an initiative](#) to rebuild popular Palestinian leadership across Palestine and the diaspora, told +972. “To compensate, it launched a military campaign targeting Jenin refugee camp and closing off the rest of the Palestinian cities and villages in search of a victory image in this war.

“The West Bank has always been a major front for the occupation, but there has always been Palestinian resistance against its ambitions,” Assaf continued. “In recent years, armed groups have

emerged in the northern West Bank to oppose the occupation, settler attacks, and the expansion of settlements on Palestinian land. In response, there was a development in the relationship between the PA and the occupation in confronting these groups, evolving from security coordination to outright cooperation.

“The PA succeeded in putting an end to [the Lions’ Den](#) in Nablus by [recruiting](#) some of its fighters into the PA’s security forces,” he said. “The [Israeli] occupation had to deal with armed groups in Jenin refugee camp [by force], and so far it is failing to do so.”

The PA’s seven-week incursion into the camp, prior to Israel’s latest operation, was “an unprecedented move in the history of the Palestinian cause,” Assaf asserted. And while the PA claimed that it was cracking down on armed resistance in order to protect the camp from the fate of the Gaza Strip, he sees this as “a shameful statement,” adding: “The occupation doesn’t need excuses to destroy us, occupy our land, and build settlements; it does so because this is its primary project.”

The PA, Assaf concluded, should do one of two things: “It can return to the Palestinian people, stand by them against the occupation policies, unify the internal Palestinian front, and end the division. Or, if it cannot do so, it should hold elections to allow the Palestinian people to choose leadership that represents them and leads them toward achieving their aspirations. If the PA continues in its current approach, it will increase tensions among the people and weaken the internal front in the face of the occupation.”

Basel Adra

P.S.

- +972 Magazine. January 28, 2025:
<https://www.972mag.com/jenin-israel-campaign-road-closures/>
- Basel Adraa is an activist, journalist, and photographer from the village of a-Tuwani in the South Hebron Hills.
- Basel Adra’s articles in +972 Magazine:
<https://www.972mag.com/writer/basil-al-adraa/>
- Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war – the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel and the massive retaliatory Israeli attacks on Gaza. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed unleashed by these events has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Hamas’ murderous assault in southern Israel has devastated and shocked the country to its core. Israel’s retaliatory bombing of Gaza is wreaking destruction on the already besieged strip and killing a ballooning number of civilians. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to escalate their attacks on Palestinians.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 13 years covering: Israeli society’s growing racism and militarism, the entrenched occupation, and an increasingly normalized

siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment - but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is the leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists and activists can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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