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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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Aymun Moosavi

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Obstacle to the occupation: The West Bank frontline

As Israel's struggle to maintain control over the West Bank intensifies, a rising, unified resistance force poses its greatest 'internal' challenge yet, threatening to unravel the occupation's long-term strategic vision



Photo Credit: The Cradle

After twelve months of failed deterrence, Israel's image has been battered and bruised. Desperate to project strength, the occupation state has resorted to various aggressive measures, including threats of a ground invasion into Lebanon and the assassination of Hezbollah's Secretary General, [Hassan Nasrallah](#).

To the same end, aggression against the Palestinian resistance in Gaza has continued in parallel; While the occupation officially marked the end of the largest military incursion on the occupied enclave since the Second Intifada in early September, Israeli attention remains fixed on the West Bank, with [renewed strikes on Tulkarem](#).

Last night, an Israeli airstrike on a popular café in Tulkarem refugee camp caused the deaths of dozens of civilians, including women and children, and a few resistance fighters and commanders – among them, Quds Brigades' Tulkarem commander Ghaith Radwan. The attack marks the largest single-strike massacre in the occupied West Bank since 2002. Although Israeli officials claimed that the operation was intended to assassinate high-ranking Qassam Brigades leader [Zahi al-Aoufi](#), the high civilian toll casts doubt on this justification. In response, the Palestinian resistance has called for [mass mobilization](#) across the West Bank, and Tulkarem's fighters have [vowed retaliation](#), signaling that Israel's 10-day assault in August did little to weaken the resistance. The occupation's ongoing military failures indicate a deeper issue: Israel's inability to fully suppress the resistance in the West Bank, despite its attempts to do so.

Intensifying the occupation of the West Bank

However, the occupation entity did not *turn* its attention to the West Bank in these renewed strikes – it has always been there. For months, it has incrementally intensified its covert operations in the territory, using the war on Gaza as a cover to do so.

Extremist finance minister Bezalel Smotrich called to increase the creation of [new settlements](#) in the West Bank to “thwart the establishment of a Palestinian state,” just weeks after the [ICJ ruled](#) that settlement expansion in the territory was illegal under international law. This took place alongside a variety of intimidation tactics, including an increase in arbitrary arrests with the support of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and raids of Al Aqsa Mosque.

Yet, this intensity is being met with unprecedented force by the hands of the [West Bank resistance](#), whose strength has risen to new heights. A new generation of fighters has been at the heart of this development.

The movement formed to counter the most recent military incursion into the West Bank, dubbed ‘Horror of the Camps,’ has demonstrated both the new and advanced abilities of the resistance and the occupation's inability to achieve its strategic goals in the territory.

Gaza vs the West Bank: Different tactics, different threats

The Israeli occupation's focus on the West Bank has never been about military dominance alone – it is about [control over a territory](#) crucial to Israel's state-building vision. The West Bank, annexed by Israel after the 1967 war, holds immense strategic importance due to its size, resources, and religious significance.

In contrast to Gaza's densely populated and confined geography, the West Bank's vast landmass and proximity to Israeli settlements make it both a more complex and more critical

front for Israel. This has led to a different kind of occupation strategy in the West Bank when compared to Gaza.

Gaza and the West Bank present Israel with two distinct sets of challenges, and this has shaped the nature of its occupation in each region. Gaza, a small and densely populated area, has been subjected to repeated aerial bombardments, blockades, and other aggressive military tactics since Israel's withdrawal in 2005.

The focus in Gaza has been to impose widespread devastation with minimal risk to Israeli settlers, who are absent from the territory. Israel's tactics there include heavy bombardment and population shifts within Gaza to further tighten control.

The West Bank, on the other hand, is far more geographically and strategically integrated into Israel's broader plans. Palestinian villages and illegal Israeli settlements exist side by side, creating a complex patchwork of communities and increasing the risks associated with any aggressive military action.

As a result, the occupation state has opted for more covert forms of occupation in the West Bank. These include constructing settlements that fragment Palestinian communities, maintaining surveillance through checkpoints, enforcing movement restrictions via the [permit system](#), and [using the PA to suppress resistance movements](#). Israeli settler violence has also been tacitly allowed to continue and escalate, terrorizing Palestinian communities without fear of reprisal.

Despite the covert nature of the occupation, the West Bank resistance has continued to evolve. Unlike Gaza, where resistance groups have had more freedom to organize and launch coordinated operations, the West Bank's resistance movements have traditionally relied on [smaller, localized actions](#) like point-blank shootings, stabbings, and explosive attacks.

The ongoing Israeli presence in the region prevents large-scale operations, but the resistance has adapted to this reality by forming nimble, decentralized groups capable of carrying out quick, targeted strikes.

The rise of a new resistance generation

The recent evolution of the resistance in the West Bank has been driven by a new generation of fighters, many of whom came of age in the shadow of Israel's ongoing occupation. These fighters have brought a fresh approach to the resistance, focusing on unifying previously fragmented factions under a common goal: armed resistance for liberation.

During the 2021 '[Sayf al-Quds](#)' battle, youth-led groups like the [Lions' Den and the Jenin Brigades](#) emerged as the face of this new movement. Although many of their members have ties to traditional political parties like Hamas, Fatah, and the Popular Front for the Liberation

of Palestine (PFLP), they have chosen to set aside ideological differences to fight under a collective banner.

This new approach has been evident in recent operations, such as the [Jordan Valley shooting](#) in response to the Fajr Massacre in Gaza. As the late resistance leader and Tulkarem Brigade commander Abu Shujaa [remarked](#) before his assassination:

My message to the people of Gaza is to keep going, we are by your side, and we see you as mentors and we ask God to reward you. You are a people of patience, of persistence. This had long been known about the people of Gaza but the battle of al-Aqsa Flood proved to the entire world that the people of Gaza are capable of ending ‘Israel.’

The strategic importance of the West Bank

Israel’s anxiety over the West Bank’s growing resistance is also linked to its proximity to Jordan, “[one of the most important Arab fronts](#),” according to Palestinian resistance leaders.

[Jordan](#), which shares a long border with the West Bank, is home to the largest population of Palestinian refugees and has become a critical site for Palestinian solidarity protests. This was demonstrated most clearly during the Allenby Bridge Crossing operation, carried out by Jordanian driver and retired soldier [Maher al-Jazi](#).

The operation, which took place near the West Bank-Jordan border, heightened Tel Aviv’s fears that Jordanian popular support for the Palestinian resistance could pose a significant threat to its control over the West Bank.

Israel’s continued focus on the West Bank during its war on Gaza reflects the high stakes involved. More raids and military operations in the West Bank are likely to follow, as Israel knows that losing control of the territory would represent a significant blow to its long-standing strategic goals.

The struggle to break or bolster the resistance

To understand Israel’s greatest vulnerability, one need only look to where it exerts the most force—the West Bank. Alongside Gaza and Lebanon, the intensifying crackdown in the West Bank reveals one of Israel’s deepest fears: losing control of this strategically vital territory.

For the occupation state, the battle in the West Bank is not just another front in the conflict with Hamas—it’s a fight for survival. If Israel loses its grip on the West Bank, it risks unraveling its broader state-building project, as well as exposing its settlements and borders to new threats.

Despite its best efforts, Israel has been unable to suppress the growing strength of the West Bank resistance, which has evolved into a formidable and unified force.

This resistance is both a critical obstacle to Israel's long-standing mission to fully integrate the West Bank into its territory and a long-term ambition for West Asia's Axis of Resistance to bolster the local factions [with arms and supplies](#).

The occupied West Bank's continued rise, against all odds, only deepens Israel's existential anxieties.

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