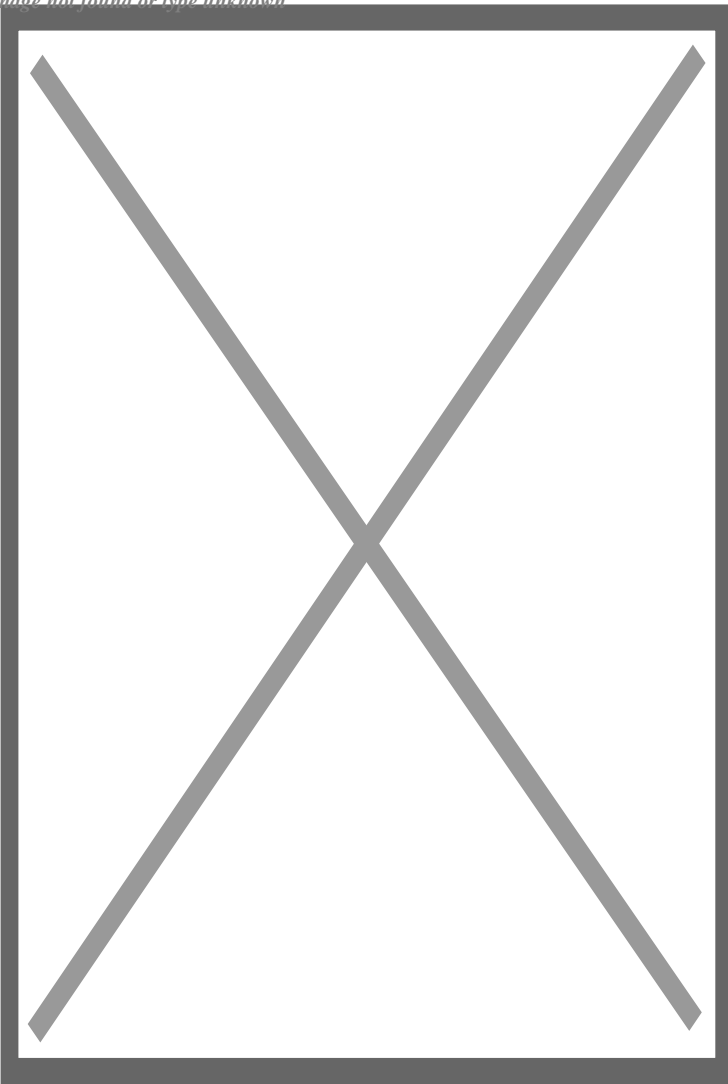


Israel presses on with genocidal assault on occupied West Bank for third day

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Ramallah, August 30 (RHC)-- Israel's largest military assault in two decades in the occupied West Bank has entered its third day with the army, accompanied by bulldozers, leaving a trail of destruction after

firing live ammunition and tear gas.

In the early hours of Friday, witnesses said three people were killed after Israeli forces attacked a car in the village of Zababdeh, south of Jenin.

Israel's military said one of its aircraft had "attacked a terrorist squad" there following an "encounter with security forces". Footage of the strike's aftermath shows a car engulfed in flames.

The Jenin Battalion of al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, said earlier that its fighters engaged in "fierce clashes" with Israeli soldiers in Jenin.

Among those killed, according to the Israeli army, was Wassam Hazem, the head of Hamas in Jenin. There was no immediate confirmation from the Palestinian group. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said Israeli forces prevented ambulances from reaching the scene of the attack, according to Palestinian news agency Wafa.

Israeli forces withdrew late on Thursday night from the city of Tulkarem and its two refugee camps after a 48-hour operation that killed four people and inflicted widespread destruction on civilian property and infrastructure.

Reporting from the Nur Shams refugee camp, Al Jazeera's Nida Ibrahim said Palestinian Civil Defence teams were trying to fix some of the damage from the Israeli raid, with destroyed roads making any movement complicated.

"If Palestinians fix one water line here, one electricity line there, the Israeli forces might be back very soon to ruin them again," she said, adding that, "Palestinians say Israel wants to make sure their lives, particularly in the refugee camps, get more complicated, giving them no option but to leave."

Israeli forces also withdrew from the Far'a refugee camp south of Tubas, where four people were also killed and civilian property and infrastructure destroyed.

While Jenin, Tulakrem and Tubas – all towns in the north of the West Bank – have witnessed the worst violence, Israeli forces have targeted other places, too. These include Nablus and the nearby Balata refugee camp, Anabta town east of Tulkarem, Husan village west of Bethlehem, and areas in the Hebron governorate.

The Israeli military made at least five arrests near Hebron and Ramallah, Wafa reported on Friday. Palestinian health officials and rights groups say at least 20 people, including children, have been killed since the Israeli incursion started on Wednesday. The Israeli army says it killed 12 Palestinian fighters.

The Israeli military claims it is targeting members of armed groups and fire exchanges between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters have taken place in several locations.

However, residents say Israeli troops are deliberately attacking refugee camps while also destroying roads and infrastructure. Some fear the long-term strategy is to push Palestinians out of their own houses.

"The Israelis are creating an environment that pushes people out destroying infrastructure almost completely, and cutting electricity and water – they want to leave people with nothing so that they would ultimately have no option but to leave on their own," activist Hussein al-Sheikh Ali told Al Jazeera in Tulkarem.

But Al Jazeera's Ibrahim also said: "People talk about defiance a lot. They say they know Israeli forces want to make their life more difficult ... and that's exactly why they're here to stay."

Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Israel Katz called on Wednesday for the "temporary evacuation" of Palestinians from the West Bank to fight armed groups there – a statement that activists warn could pave

the way for the territory to follow a similar fate to Gaza in terms of enormous destruction and displacement.

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