

Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Israel launches largest military assault in West Bank in years

The attack using armed drones and ground troops is the latest flare-up in a year of spiralling violence



Smoke rises following Israel's military offensive in Jenin early on Monday © AP

James Shotter in Bethlehem AN HOUR AGO

Israeli forces killed at least seven Palestinians and wounded dozens more as the Jewish state deployed armed drones and ground troops in one of the largest operations in the occupied West Bank for two decades.

The assault on a Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin overnight was the latest flare-up in a year of spiralling violence that has fuelled fears that the [Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#) is on the brink of a broader escalation.

Israeli officials said the raid, which involved a brigade-sized force, was launched to target a “joint operational command centre” of the Jenin Brigade militant group as part of an “extensive counter-terrorism effort”. That suggests a force of up to 2,000 soldiers. However, Israel denied it was planning a broader operation in the West Bank as a whole.

A spokesman for Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas described the attack as a “new war crime”.

Jamal Hweel, a political analyst who lives in Jenin, said the raid was “the biggest since 2002” when Israeli forces launched an assault on the refugee camp during a Palestinian uprising known as the second intifada.

Monday's raid was the second time in as many weeks that Israel has launched drone strikes in the West Bank, and underscored the growing firepower its military is using to target Palestinian militants. Israel had not previously deployed armed drones in the West Bank since 2006.

The Palestinian health ministry said that, in addition to the fatalities on Monday, at least 40 people were wounded. Hweel said electricity in the camp had been cut, and that the internet was not working.

The refugee camp in Jenin, a city in the West Bank's north-west, is densely populated with about 14,000 people, and has become a key militant stronghold. News agencies reported that multiple drones were seen flying overhead as sounds of gunfire and explosions could be heard.

This year is on course to be the bloodiest for more than a decade in the West Bank, where Israeli forces have been conducting near-nightly raids since a spate of Palestinian attacks on Israelis that began last spring.

According to UN data, which does not include the most recent violence, Israeli forces have killed 114 Palestinians in the West Bank so far this year, while Palestinians have killed 16 Israelis in the territory.

Palestinians want the West Bank to be the heart of a future state, but Israel has occupied the territory since 1967, and prime minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#)'s far-right government has advanced plans to increase settlements across the territory since it took office in December.

Most of the international community considers the settlements to be illegal.

Netanyahu's government includes religious Zionist settlers who want Israel to annex the West Bank and who have been urging the military to take a more aggressive approach in the territory.

As well as the Israeli raids in the West Bank there has been an increase in violence between Palestinians and Jewish settlers.

Two weeks ago, hundreds of settlers torched Palestinian cars and houses in the West Bank as part of a series of vigilante attacks after Palestinian gunmen killed four Israelis and injured four more in an attack near a settlement.

That was the deadliest against Israelis since a shooting in a settlement in East Jerusalem in January, and came a day after Israeli forces killed seven Palestinians,

including a 15-year-old, and wounded more than 90 during a raid on Jenin.

The Israeli offensive triggered a multi-hour gun battle, during which the Jewish state deployed helicopter gunships over the West Bank for the first time since the second intifada.

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2023. All rights reserved.
