



Observers Express Alarm at Increasing Violence in the West Bank Stemming from Provocative Illegal Settler Stormings of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Israeli Military Raids

Since March of this year, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have conducted an alarming number of raids in the West Bank which have resulted in the deaths of more than 100 Palestinians, many of them civilians and children. Israel has presented their violent raids as preventative measures against Palestinian extremist attacks known as “Breaking the Wave,” but data shows that a high volume of civilians have been killed as well. Most concerning is the unprecedented 44 Palestinian children that have died in the violence. A 12-year-old boy died on Monday of this week from gunshot wounds received in a raid at the end of last month that killed four other Palestinians and injured 50. The raid was intended to bring to justice the co-conspirators of Raed Khazem, an extremist responsible for a shooting in Tel Aviv in April. IDF troops appeared to simply open fire on a house owned by Khazem’s father and were also “firing in all directions and shooting tear gas cannisters,” as revealed by eyewitnesses. Such action is yet another example of the destructive “collective punishment” that Israel has often utilized to the detriment of Palestinian civilians.

At the forefront of controversy in regard to the raids is the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, one of the holiest sites for Muslims. Like the raids on the West Bank, these incursions have also been taking place at a disturbing rate since the spring of this year. Israeli soldiers are regularly called to the compound to either arrest “rioters” or facilitate safe passage to Jews who wish to pray and worship at the site. Back in April, for example, Israeli soldiers violently dispersed crowds at the site because protestors were throwing rocks and other objects towards the Western Wall. 40+ Palestinians were injured by the soldiers’ actions. In late September, soldiers arrived on-site to crack down on a crowd that had gathered to protest the entry of Jews to the mosque.

That the Al-Aqsa Mosque is a space for Palestinians is a long-standing tradition. In fact, most Jews consider it morally wrong to worship at the mosque. Still, ultra-nationalist Israeli leaders have increasingly been encouraging their followers to provocatively conduct their religious practices at the mosque and have even advocated for the demolition of the mosque so it may be replaced by the “Third Temple.” As it is, Israeli forces greatly restrict the number of Palestinians allowed to enter the mosque for “security reasons.” The improper and reprehensible conduct of these far-right groups is largely responsible for the violence that has been taking place at increasing levels.

Moving forward, there is serious concern for escalation of the tense situation both at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and in general across the West Bank. In 2021, a similar conflict at Al-Aqsa was the catalyst for an 11-day Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, Israel is illegally building a large apartment complex intended for Israeli citizens in the center of Hebron, a Palestinian city. Protests over its construction were shot down in court. Additionally, tensions are mounting as the November 1st Israeli elections approach. Ultimately, peace activists lament that military raids and illegal settler stormings play a destructive role in only serving to fuel animosity and exacerbate tensions.