Israeli Forces Raid and Shut Down Al Jazeera's Office in the Occupied West Bank

This past weekend, armed Israeli troops stormed Al Jazeera's office in Ramallah, a Palestinian city in the occupied West Bank. The soldiers raided the bureau with a military order to shut down its operations, telling local Al Jazeera staff that they had ten minutes to collect their belongings and leave. During the raid, the Israeli military seized cameras and sealed the building. Notably, the move is completely arbitrary and can be renewed indefinitely at the Israeli government's request. This all comes merely four months after Netanyahu's government shut down Al Jazeera from operating within Israel as well. The raid is just the latest effort in the Israeli crackdown on the media network, which provides around-the-clock coverage of the Israeli war crimes being committed in Gaza in addition to human rights abuses taking place in the occupied West Bank. The news network is also currently providing live reports and updates on the Israeli attacks being carried out in Lebanon.

Netanyahu and other Israeli officials have long made baseless allegations that the media outlet has an anti-Israel bias, when in fact, it has simply drawn their ire due to its extensive coverage and documentation of Israeli human rights violations and war crimes. Analysts have pointed to how the closure is an affront to the principles of press freedom and objective journalism, and that the repressive action is blatantly intended to prevent the world from seeing the reality of what is unfolding both in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. As was also the case after the recent Israeli suppression back in May, many American and international organizations have denounced Israel's latest actions against Al Jazeera, including Human Rights Watch, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and Reporters Without Borders. The Israeli Foreign Press Association rebuked the government's move as well, calling the West Bank raid and shut down a threat to press freedom and a shift away from democratic values.

Despite the global criticism regarding the destructive Gaza War, Netanyahu has been unwilling to agree to a ceasefire and hostage deal, sparking increasingly large protests from citizens who see that the Israeli prime minister is undoubtedly putting his political and personal considerations above all others. Netanyahu's actions against Al Jazeera only further fuel dissent regarding his undemocratic stand. Some might wonder why, after shutting down Al Jazeera's operations within Israel, Netanyahu's government is now going after their bureau in the occupied West Bank? Well, while the war rages on in Gaza, violations have concurrently only skyrocketed in the West Bank, fueled by Israeli settler violence against Palestinians. In direct defiance of international law, the number of illegal Israeli settlers continues to rise, forcibly displacing entire Palestinian families and communities. The uptick in violence has even prompted the U.S. and U.K. governments to react, as both have, beginning back in February of this year, imposed sanctions on certain individuals and organizations that are targeting Palestinian communities. Regrettably, these have had little effect due to the Israeli government's too often seen protection, state-sponsoring, and incitement of settler violence.

Al Jazeera is one of the few media outlets providing comprehensive round-the-clock coverage of Gaza and the escalating violence in the occupied West Bank. Many viewers trust Al Jazeera to show frontline and unfettered insight into the mass suffering caused as a result of Israeli human rights abuses and war crimes. In the West Bank, Al Jazeera has covered stories from the assassination of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh at the hands of Israeli forces while covering one of their violent raids in Jenin up to the most recent heinous murder of Ayşenur Ezgi Eygi – an activist killed while protesting against unlawful Israeli settlements. The news network has documented how the

increasing violence as a result of Israeli raids and settlements has only gotten worse since the onset of the Gaza War. Within Gaza itself, Al Jazeera journalists continue to provide live updates of the war's mass destruction, including the alarming killing of civilians and the unprecedented high level of murdered journalists and humanitarian aid workers.

Even after the recent move, Al Jazeera vowed to continue working in Gaza and the West Bank, outlining the importance of maintaining global focus on what is taking place there. Israel's actions in shutting down a media outlet are clearly in violation of the core democratic value of press freedom, as Israeli officials are actively seeking to suppress news coverage which sheds light on their human rights abuses. Thus, the decision should raise alarm bells regarding the extent to which they are willing to go in order to hinder awareness of them and try to avoid any potential accountability. Without a free and fair media, Israel cannot claim to be a democracy, and belongs on a list alongside repressive regimes that also silence impartial coverage and the truth.