



# ISSUE BRIEF: OPERATION SUMMER CAMPS ON THE WEST BANK FRONT OF THE WIDENING REGIONAL WAR

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*Issue Brief #27 | October 1, 2024*

One year on from the October 7 Hamas massacre, Israel is at [war in Lebanon](#) following the [killing](#) of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and under [heavy rocket fire](#) from Iran. Israeli civilians are hiding in bomb shelters countrywide as [hundreds](#) of Iranian ballistic missiles target Israel, and a [terror shooting](#) in Tel Aviv-Jaffa that killed several civilians. Meanwhile, Israeli hostages [remain](#) in captivity in Gaza, Gazan civilians face [humanitarian catastrophe](#), and additional fronts have [opened](#) in the West Bank and [across the region](#). Against the backdrop of escalation on the [northern border](#) and with [Iran](#), the Israeli military is undertaking the largest counterterrorism operation in the West Bank since the Second Intifada, [dubbed](#) Operation Summer Camps. While its rationale is to counter the post-October 7 [surge](#) of Palestinian terrorism, the campaign has prompted concerns about the “[Gazafication](#)” of the West Bank and a widening regional war.

## What is Operation Summer Camps?

On August 28, the IDF [launched](#) Operation Summer Camps, a large-scale [counterterrorism operation](#) in the West Bank involving ground forces, armored vehicles, and bulldozers, as well as drones, fighter jets, and helicopters that Israel often uses in Gaza but rarely in the West Bank. Foreign Minister Israel Katz [announced](#) the ground-and-air operation as a “war in every sense.” It is the [largest](#) operation Israel has conducted in the West Bank since 2002, concentrated in the northern Palestinian cities of Jenin, Nablus, Tubas, and Tulkarm, and the IDF [expects](#) it to continue for “the foreseeable future.”

As part of this operation, the IDF has carried out extensive [arrests](#), detaining thousands, [confiscating](#) large quantities of weaponry such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), raw materials, and an estimated millions of dollars. According to [UN data](#), Israeli forces killed at least 60 Palestinians thus far in Operation Summer Camps, on top of the [hundreds of West Bank Palestinians](#) the IDF previously killed since October 7. The casualties include leaders of Hamas in [Jenin](#), Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in [Tulkarm](#), and other top [terrorists](#) – as well as Palestinian civilians.

Operation Summer Camps began with a major nine-day incursion involving hundreds of Israeli troops concentrated in Jenin, which left the city in [ruin](#) and killed [at least 36 Palestinians](#). According to armed groups, most of those killed were militants. The IDF previously targeted Jenin with a significant [operation](#) in July 2023. These deadly campaigns in the West Bank have prompted concerns from [Palestinians](#), US government [officials](#), and other [stakeholders](#) that the IDF is “[Gazafying](#)” the West Bank and risking wider regional war.

## How do Israeli officials describe the threats coming from the West Bank and the goals of Operation Summer Camps?

Palestinian extremism has been on the rise since October 7, for reasons outlined in this piece on “[Stemming the Rising Tide of Palestinian Extremism in the West Bank](#).” In the year before Operation Summer Camps, [1,245 attacks](#) emanated from the northern West Bank, killing [24 Israelis](#). Israeli security officials reportedly issued a “[stern warning](#)” to the Netanyahu cabinet over this deteriorating situation in the West Bank, including the potential resurgence of suicide

bombings. Responding to this threat, Operation Summer Camps is aimed at countering Iranian efforts “to destabilize Jordan and establish an eastern terror front against Israel, following the Gaza and Lebanon models, by funding and arming terrorists and smuggling advanced weapons into Jordan and then into Judea and Samaria [the West Bank],” [according](#) to Foreign Minister Katz.

Per Israeli intelligence estimates, [about fifteen battalions](#) from Hamas, PIJ, and other Palestinian militant groups – motivated by the ongoing war in Gaza and supported by Iran – are currently operating in the West Bank. These battalions are manufacturing IEDs, building underground tunnels, and attempting to produce rockets. Israeli authorities indicate that the purpose of Operation Summer Camps is to dismantle this Iran-sponsored terrorist infrastructure in the northern West Bank, seize weapons, apprehend terrorists, and secure the border with Jordan, in order to not just “[mow the grass, but to mow the roots.](#)”

### **What impact is Operation Summer Camps having on the West Bank?**

Operation Summer Camps has resulted in the [destruction](#) of critical West Bank infrastructure, including roads, pavement, sewage facilities, and water and electricity networks. [IDF raids](#) have trapped thousands of Palestinians in their homes for days and blocked their access to hospitals. Palestinians detained during the Operation have faced [worsening abuses](#) and [unlivable conditions](#) in Israeli prisons, with far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir boasting that prisons under his authority are no longer “[summer camps.](#)”

Prior to Operation Summer Camps, the situation in the West Bank was [already deteriorating](#) because of the entrenchment of Israeli occupation via settlement expansion, ongoing annexation, settler violence, the crippling of the West Bank Palestinian economy by the Israeli government, and the gross failures of the Palestinian Authority (PA). These factors, combined with the war in Gaza, have [boosted](#) the recruitment efforts of Palestinian militant groups, especially among disaffected Palestinian youth. With movement further restricted and businesses closed due to Operation Summer Camps, more Palestinians in the West Bank have lost their incomes, [increasing](#) poverty and instability.

### **How have Palestinian militants responded? What is the role of the PA?**

Responding to Operation Summer Camps, Palestinian militant groups, including the Al-Qassam, Al-Quds, and Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, [launched](#) an armed resistance campaign, [targeting](#) Israeli forces with guns and explosives – dubbing their response “[Horror of the Camps.](#)” An IDF soldier was [killed](#) and three other soldiers were wounded during these clashes.

Security cooperation between Israel and the PA to jointly counter West Bank terrorism continues, but the [punitive economic measures](#) taken by Israel against the PA have weakened its capacity – leading the IDF to warn of another “[intifada.](#)” According to the [State Department](#), the PA is key to “stability in the West Bank” and “Israel’s own security interests.” A [revitalized PA](#) will also need to play a leading role in achieving independent Palestinian statehood and effective Palestinian governance in the West Bank. As such, per the former IDF head of security coordination with the PA, the IDF [must](#) “help the PA to survive in the West Bank.”

### **Recommendations regarding Israel’s military operations and countering the threat of Palestinian terrorism in the West Bank:**

Israel has a right to defend itself against Palestinian terrorism in the West Bank, but as Vice President Kamala Harris has [stated](#) in the Gaza context, “how it does so matters.” Aside from military operations, Israel will need to address the factors exacerbating West Bank instability – for

some of which it bears responsibility. As for the the US government, it will need to play a key role in implementing the following policy recommendations to help stabilize the West Bank:

- **Strengthen PA law enforcement via capacity building and reforms:** Reforming the PA will boost its credibility and enable it to enforce the rule of law in the West Bank. The Administration and Congress should [push the PA](#) to combat corruption, ensure transparency, and build accountability by implementing a series of reforms detailed [here](#). These reforms would help stabilize the West Bank by strengthening the hand of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces against Hamas and increasing its law enforcement capacity, while also preparing the PA for independent statehood and self-governance in the long term.
- **Promote Israel-Jordan security cooperation:** The US government should urge Israel to enhance mutually beneficial security cooperation with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which is also threatened by Iran-backed arms smuggling and can play a key role in countering the threats from the West Bank. In order to ensure the viability of enhanced security coordination between Jordan and Israel, the US should push the Netanyahu government to cease its activity in the West Bank that hampers this cooperation, including stoking fears of a mass relocation of West Bank Palestinians to Jordan. The Administration and Congress should also urge Israel to stop fomenting instability in Jordan through [attacks on UNRWA](#) and Temple Mount [provocations](#) that threaten Jordanian custodianship over the holy site. Israeli government [pressure](#) on the US to cut UNRWA funding puts [financial strain](#) on Jordan, which relies on UNRWA to operate refugee camps and provide vital medical and educational services to more than 2 million Palestinian refugees in the Kingdom.
- **Increase funding to the United States Security Coordinator in Jerusalem:** In line with the 2023 [USSC Emergency Supplemental Act](#), the US government should provide the Security Coordinator with \$10 million to bolster its West Bank stabilization efforts, which includes training and support for Palestinian Authority Security forces as well as coordination with Jordanian forces.
- **Sanction Palestinian militants and other extremists in the West Bank:** President Biden's [EO 14115](#) declares a "[national emergency](#)" to address the deteriorating situation in the West Bank, including the rise of [Palestinian extremism](#) and settler violence. Pursuant to the EO, the Biden Administration has issued sanctions against the Palestinian militant group [Lions Den](#) in Nablus, as well as [Israelis](#) and [entities](#) that contribute to West Bank instability. To maximize the EO's effectiveness, all relevant West Bank actors and entities must be sanctioned.
- **Ensure IDF adherence to US and international law, and changes to IDF rules of engagement:** Israel has legitimate security needs in the West Bank, but as the [UN Human Rights Office](#) and others have documented, there are times when IDF actions may have crossed the line into "extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings," and the "destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure." The IDF has denied using excessive force, insisting that it "[does not target civilians](#)" and that the West Bank, like Gaza, poses the challenge of militants hidden among the civilian population and explosives buried [underneath roads](#). Despite the challenging terrain, Israeli forces should conduct more narrow, targeted, and precise counterterrorism operations in the West Bank, in line with relevant US laws – including the [Leahy law](#) and international humanitarian law. The IDF must also meet US government [demands](#) to change its rules of engagement.

For more detail on these policy recommendations, see "[Stemming the Rising Tide of Palestinian Extremism in the West Bank](#)."