



Israel Targets Terrorist Infrastructure in Jenin

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On July 3, Israel launched a large, 48 hour-long counter-terrorist operation in the West Bank city of Jenin following at least 50 terrorist attacks targeting Israeli civilians originating from the city in recent months. Unlike previous Israeli actions aimed at establishing deterrence against terrorist organizations, Operation Home and Garden—which, despite its size and scope, resulted in the death of only 12 terrorists and no civilians—sought to create favorable conditions for future operations in Jenin against the Iranian-backed terrorist groups Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas. These groups’ ability to ensconce themselves in and fortify Jenin has been a result of a weakened Palestinian Authority (PA) and Tehran’s larger efforts to surround and weaken Israel.

The Biden administration should acknowledge Israel’s need to counter terrorism and prevent a takeover of the West Bank by Hamas and PIJ especially at the expense of the PA, support Israel’s right to self-defense and freedom of action, and recognize Iran’s increasingly prominent role in fomenting terrorism in the West Bank. In addition, the administration should express support for Israel’s self-defense at the United Nations Security Council.

What Happened?

- On the morning of July 3, Israel initiated the 48-hour-long Operation Home and Garden to degrade infrastructure of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in the West Bank city of Jenin—the [largest](#) such action in the West Bank since the Second Intifada in the early 2000s.
 - » Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesperson Brig. Gen. Daniel Hagari [announced](#) the conclusion of the incursion on July 5, though Prime Minister Netanyahu [specified](#) on July 4 that “our extensive operation in Jenin is not a one-off” and “we will eradicate terrorism wherever we see it.”
 - » Per [reports](#), 12 Palestinians and one IDF soldier were killed. According to IDF spokesperson Col. Richard Hecht, “no non-combatants were killed during the counterterrorism activity in the Jenin camp.” PIJ [claimed](#) that eight of those killed were its members.
 - » The IDF [said](#) its targets included weapons and explosive manufacturing sites, and *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) that the IDF found weapons and explosives stored under a mosque. ABC News [reported](#) “the IDF says it detained over 100 suspected Palestinian militants, arresting over 30.”

- Soon after Israeli troops left Jenin, terrorists in the Gaza Strip [fired five rockets](#) toward the southern Israeli city of Sderot, [damaging](#) a house. The IDF [responded](#) with airstrikes against Hamas weapons manufacturing facilities in Gaza.
 - » Reuters [reported](#) that two rockets, one of which the IDF said was an anti-tank missile, were fired towards Israel from Lebanon on July 6. Israel [retaliated](#) with artillery fire towards the launch site.
- The White House [conveyed support](#) for “Israel’s security and right to defend its people against Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other terrorist groups.”

Why Is It Important?

- While other recent Israeli operations against terrorist groups have focused on reestablishing deterrence and eliminating terrorist leadership following increased rocket fire and other attacks, Israel’s latest military action was focused on securing its freedom of action in Jenin, an area increasingly controlled, and rendered inaccessible by, the growing capabilities of Hamas and PIJ—both U.S.-designated [terrorist](#) organizations.
 - » Operation Home and Garden sought to prevent the West Bank from becoming [another](#) Iran-backed front and create conditions for future operations against these groups. Israel seeks to halt the erosion of its freedom of action to counter terrorist threats in PA-controlled territory that it gained following Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, during which IDF troops [acted to degrade](#) terrorist infrastructure in the West Bank that fueled the attacks of the Second Intifada.
 - » Given the operation’s focus on securing freedom of action and Netanyahu’s comments that it was not a one-off, there is a strong potential of further IDF action against terrorist groups in Jenin.
- Recent [Iran-backed](#) projectile and terrorist attacks in April from the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon prompted Israel to take action to deter and eliminate their ability to launch further attacks.
 - » Israel’s Operation Shield and Arrow in May against PIJ, but not Hamas, in Gaza sought to [rebuild deterrence](#) after the April attacks, while still avoiding escalation with Hamas.
 - » Similarly, Israel [sought to avoid](#) combat against Hamas during Operation Black Belt against PIJ in Gaza in November 2019.
- However, in addition to these previous rocket attacks and as part of a broader Iran-backed multifront campaign, both Hamas and PIJ seek to expand their ability to threaten Israel from the West Bank.
 - » On June 26, *The Jerusalem Post* [reported](#) that a Palestinian Authority (PA) official said “Iran is already here, in the West Bank... The Iranians want their Palestinian agents to extend their control from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank.” A separate Palestinian security source said, “Islamic Jihad is using Iranian money to buy weapons and loyalty in the West Bank.”
 - » Hamas, on behalf of Iran, has been actively [funding](#), recruiting, and [initiating](#) terrorist attacks in the West Bank.

- Seemingly in line with this strategy, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh [urged](#) West Bank Palestinians “to stand by Jenin and defend its people in order to thwart the enemy’s plan.”
- In a recent interview, PIJ leader Ziad Nakhleh [asserted](#) that his group benefits from “security-military assistance” from Iran, and that PIJ has established “fighting battalions” in the West Bank.
- Jenin has become not only the epicenter of this rise in West Bank-based terrorism, but also an increasingly difficult area for Israeli security forces to operate in order to disrupt terrorist plots.
 - » [According to](#) Israel’s ambassador to the United States Michael Herzog, “Over the past two years, Jenin has become a major hub of terrorism and an Iranian stronghold close to Israeli population centers. Most of the terror attacks against Israelis originated from Jenin.”
 - » *The Washington Post* recently [reported](#) that “At least 50 attacks on Israeli citizens in recent months were launched from Jenin, according to the IDF, and 19 people participating in those assaults fled to the [Jenin] camp afterward.”
 - » *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) that “The IDF has recorded around 300 shooting attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers in the West Bank [in 2022], compared to just 91 [in 2021].”
 - » Recent IDF [action](#) in Jenin to arrest wanted terrorists led to intense firefights and eight wounded IDF soldiers, highlighting the extent to which Israel’s freedom of action in the city had been compromised.
- Unlike previous deterrence-establishing operations that used airstrikes against terrorist leadership and weaponry, Operation Home and Garden deployed infantry and heavy machinery, in addition to air support, to dismantle infrastructure—such as roadside bombs—that prevented security operations in Jenin.
 - » The operation involved more than 1,000 Israeli troops and more than ten airstrikes, including drone-fired missiles, against terrorist infrastructure, including a facility that “served as an advanced observation and reconnaissance center, a place where armed terrorists would gather before and after terrorist activities,” [according](#) to the IDF.
 - » The IDF [employed D9 bulldozers](#) to uncover potential roadside bombs that threaten its troops’ safety and operability in the area. Furthermore, the IDF’s focus on dismantling explosives stores and production sites similarly underscores its efforts to dismantle Hamas’ and PIJ’s infrastructure that would have denied access to the Jenin area for future IDF operations.
- Operation Home and Garden once again highlighted the IDF’s commitment to, and skill in, complying with the Law of Armed Conflict requirement to take precautions to mitigate risk to civilians. This commitment is neither appreciated by international organizations and media, which once again accused the IDF of crimes, nor shared by Israel’s enemies, who illegally and cruelly use civilian shields.
 - » UN Secretary General António Guterres [charged](#) Israel with using “excessive force” despite the IDF’s claim that the incursion did not cause any non-combatant casualties. Similarly, referencing Israel’s actions in Jenin, U.S. Rep. Cori Bush [wrote](#) on Twitter that “[the United States] must stop funding these war crimes.”

- » Some media coverage of the IDF's actions in Jenin was similarly skewed. A BBC host, for example, [suggested](#) (before later apologizing) during an interview with former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett that "Israeli forces are happy to kill children."
- » No such criticism was made of Hamas or PIJ, even though, [according to](#) the IDF, one of their joint operations centers targeted during the incursion was near a school and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) facilities, endangering the children and civilians nearby.
- The continued multifront nature of the terrorist challenge facing Israel was illustrated by Gaza-based terrorists [firing](#) five rockets towards the southern Israeli city Sderot shortly after the operation, and by Lebanon-based terrorists [firing two projectiles](#) towards Israel on July 6.
 - » Tehran and its proxies seek to gauge and erode Israeli deterrence, strain its attention and resources by threatening it from multiple fronts, and divert it from addressing Tehran's [remarkable](#) nuclear advances.
- The growing footprint of Iran-backed terrorism in West Bank cities suggests that the PA, which exercises civil and security control over several West Bank cities, including Jenin, either cannot or will not adequately contain terrorist operations within its jurisdiction.
 - » An Israeli diplomatic source [told](#) *The Jerusalem Post* that Israel "hoped the Palestinian Authority would take responsibility" in Jenin, but it did not, rendering the IDF's actions necessary.
 - » The possibility of a succession crisis after the 87-year-old PA President Mahmoud Abbas dies likely increases Jerusalem's sense of urgency to degrade threats emanating from the West Bank. Groups such as Hamas and PIJ (with backing from Tehran) might exploit a succession crisis to wrest further control of Palestinian areas, as Hamas did in Gaza in 2007 following a civil war with Fatah, the predominant faction in the PA.
 - Palestinian security officials have not taken action against these terrorist groups, fearing that they might seize power in the West Bank and exact retribution on the PA security services, as they did in Gaza in 2007.

What Should the United States Do Next?

- Any forthcoming statements by the White House or State Department should acknowledge Israel's need to prevent Hamas and/or other terrorist groups from taking over the West Bank, and express support for Israel's right to defend itself against terrorism, including preemptively if necessary.
- In addition, to ensure that the American people accurately understand the security situation, any such statements should acknowledge Tehran's growing role in supporting terrorism in the West Bank.
- The Biden administration also should [declare](#) its public support for Israel at the United Nations Security Council, acknowledging Israel's right to self-defense and urging the international community to demonstrate restraint in projecting unfounded accusations against Israel's actions to combat terror.