

Chronology of the West Bank Invasion

(March 28 - April 23, 2002)

The editorial of the last issue of *JQF* drew attention to the way Jerusalem has become increasingly isolated from the rest of Palestine during the course of the al-Aqsa Intifada, as demonstrated by the general absence of fighting within Jerusalem, as opposed to places like Gaza and Jenin, and the separation of Jerusalem imposed by Israel from the rest of the population of Palestine.

On March 29th, the state of Israel launched "Operation Defensive Shield," an unprecedented assault on Palestinian cities, villages, and refugee camps throughout the West Bank. During the course of the offensive, all journalists were prohibited entry and curfews were imposed on civilian areas, while food, water, and electricity became scarce. Ramallah, Nablus, Bethlehem, Jenin, and their surrounding areas became total war zones, as the amount of destruction and number of casualties increased daily.

Meanwhile, Jerusalem seemed stunned into an awkward silence. The curfews and total closure of most of the West Bank made this town even quieter than usual. Walking through Salah al-Din street, one could feel the tension, highlighted by the contrast between the sound of Intifada songs from the local shops, and the sight of the ever present police jeeps, baring

oversized Israeli flags as they pass by. Jerusalem's condition as an occupied city seemed to be constantly reinforced. Demonstrations became more frequent and usually ended up at Damascus Gate, which was surrounded by Israeli border police, who stood frozen, their machine guns ready and staring at the crowds.

In this edition of *JQF*, the "Jerusalem Chronology" section has been replaced by a chronology of the events throughout the West Bank during the course of this invasion, as reported in the international media. A chronology of events in Jerusalem, continuing from the last issue will be available on the JQF website at www.jqf@jerusalem.org.

March 28

Israel declares it would "exercise its right to self defense" but stops short of formally abandoning U.S.-backed truce efforts following a Palestinian suicide bombing in a hotel banquet hall. Palestinian government offices evacuate throughout the West Bank. Israeli troops tighten blockades of Palestinian towns. In Ramallah, foreign staffers are asked to leave the city as a precaution and worried Palestinian parents take their children home early from school.

Earlier in the week, key Israeli Cabinet ministers discussed various options in the event cease-fire talks collapsed, including a large-scale military operation. *AP*

March 29

Israeli troops, backed by more than 200 tanks, invade Ramallah. World leaders express alarm at the deteriorating situation in the Middle East, with Russia and the European Union criticizing Israel's measures to isolate Arafat. *Washington Post*

April 1

The *Washington Post* reports Israeli forces entering into Palestinian homes in Ramallah, searching and arresting civilians. There are also reports of looting and destruction of civil infrastructure. Five Palestinian security personnel are executed by the IDF, while dozens are wounded and arrested.

April 2

Israel invades Bethlehem. Witnesses report helicopter gunships fire into the square, near the Church of Nativity. A 65-year-old Italian priest, Jacques Amateis, is killed during the fighting. Also, an 80-year-old Palestinian man is shot dead outside his house. A woman and her son are critically wounded.

The U.N. Security Council calls on Israel to leave Ramallah and other West Bank towns, but the White House appears to back Israel's line that a cease-fire must come first. Israel refuses to let envoys from the United Nations, United States, Russia, and the European Union visit Arafat in Ramallah. Israeli tanks and helicopter gunships bomb the headquarters of Palestinian security chief Jibril Rajoub, near Ramallah, setting buildings ablaze. The IDF also enters Tulkarem and the surrounding villages, imposing a strict curfew.

Israeli forces expel a CBS News television crew from Ramallah and impose a general ban on journalists in the occupied territories. *AP, Washington Post*

April 3

Israeli troops open fire on a crowd of 150 international peace activists who are marching through the streets of Beit Jala near Bethlehem. Seven people are injured, one critically. *Newsweek International*

April 4

Israeli tanks push deeper into the West Bank's biggest city, Nablus. Scores of tanks and armored vehicles enter the city and encircle three nearby refugee camps. In Bethlehem, Palestinians shelter in the Church of the Nativity, one of Christianity's holiest sites, and are besieged by soldiers outside. Witnesses in Jenin report Israeli tanks shell a nearby refugee camp. *Reuters*

April 5

Israeli tanks and armored vehicles roll into Hebron. Heavy fighting reported in other parts of the West Bank, including Jenin. A European Union mission to press for a Middle East cease-fire fails after Israel bars two senior EU envoys from meeting Arafat. U.S. Middle East envoy Anthony Zinni meets Yasser Arafat under the guns of Israeli tanks, while Israel keeps up its West Bank offensive despite President Bush's call for a withdrawal. *Reuters*

April 8

Israel declares that its offensive in the West Bank will continue despite U.S. demands that a troop withdrawal begin immediately, as helicopter gunships pound the Jenin refugee camp and a fire breaks out during fighting near Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity.

More than 30 Palestinians are killed as Israeli troops push further into Jenin and continue their onslaught in Nablus, bringing warnings from Europe that the EU would weigh the possibility of sanctions against Israel if the bloodshed continued. *AP, The Guardian (UK)*

April 9

International aid workers and a leading Israeli civil rights group issue warnings of a looming crisis for people in the isolated Jenin refugee camp, a densely populated one-square-mile warren of 10,000 inhabitants. Food, water, electricity and ambulances had been blocked from the area for five days. The fierce fighting in Jenin had thus far left 9 Israeli soldiers and 100 Palestinian fighters dead. *AP*

Representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross issue a demand that Israeli forces allow aid convoys access to the area. *AP, New York Times*

April 10

A Palestinian suicide bomber kills at least eight Israelis in an attack on a crowded bus Wednesday, as the Israeli invasion enters its 13th day. Continuing accusations of pillaging by Israeli occupation troops in Ramallah. *AP, AFP*

April 15

Palestinian medics begin retrieving bodies from the Jenin refugee camp, while Israeli troops exchange fire with armed Palestinians holed up in Bethlehem's besieged Church of the Nativity.

The United Nations top human rights body condemns Israel for "mass killings" of Palestinians and demands it end its military offensive in the occupied territories.

AP, Reuters

April 16

Israeli tanks roll into Jerusalem suburbs of Abu Dis, Izzariyyeh, and Sawahra As-Sharkiyyeh, declaring a curfew and confining tens of thousands of residents to their homes. *AP*

April 16

Israel arrest Marwan Barghout, a leader of Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction, in Ramallah. *AP*

April 16

EU Development Aid Commissioner Poul Nielson slams the Israeli government for denying humanitarian organizations access to areas caught up in fighting between Palestinian gunmen and Israeli forces.

The Jerusalem Post

April 17

Yasser Arafat ends more than two hours of talks with Secretary of State Colin Powell on Wednesday by demanding that the Bush administration and the international community act together to break his isolation.

Israeli troops continue their operations in Palestinian villages inside Jerusalem's expanded city limits, removing residents from their homes and making arrests. *AP*

April 19

The Israeli troops withdraw from Nablus, leaving much of the city without water or electricity. *The Los Angeles Times*

April 21

Israeli forces pull out of all the areas in Ramallah, except for Arafat's compound. *AP*

April 23

Ariel Sharon tells the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Tuesday that Israel had been left with no choice but to accept the United Nations fact-finding mission to the Jenin refugee camp, and that he feared the results it would produce, Israel Radio reported. *AP*