

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) -- Israeli settlers have assaulted Mahmoud Barham, the mayor of Beita in the occupied West Bank, and a municipal official, according to local media.

Wafa news agency reported that the two were inspecting projects on Mount Qamas, located east of the town near Nablus, when they were attacked by settlers. The settlers reportedly destroyed and smashed the officials' municipality-owned vehicle, after physically assaulting the two men and causing them to sustain bruises.

Vicious pleasures of this world and salvation are like two enemies or two roads running in opposite directions or towards opposite poles, one to the North and the other to the South. Whoever likes to gain the pleasures and pomps of this world will hate austerity in life which is necessary to gain salvation. Reverse will be the attitude of a man desirous of achieving Eternal Bliss.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

# Dozens Killed in Expanding Israeli Invasion of Gaza City

GAZA CITY (Dispatches) -- Gaza's civil defense agency said Israeli forces killed dozens of people across the Palestinian territory on Wednesday, as the military pressed its assault on Gaza City from where hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee.

Israel has launched a major air and ground invasion of Gaza City. The United Nations estimated at the end of August that around one million people lived in Gaza City and its surroundings, where it has declared a famine.

The Israeli military says roughly 550,000 people have since fled the city and moved southward, while Gaza's civil defense agency -- a rescue force operating under Hamas authority -- puts the number at around 450,000.

Thaer Saqr, 39, told AFP on Wednesday he had left the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood of Gaza City the day before to head southwards with his wife, children and sister.

"The tanks on the coastal road... opened fire on us, and my sister was killed," he said.

Saqr said he returned to Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital and "will



Many Palestinians say there is nowhere safe to go amid Israel's barbaric invasion of Gaza's only urban center.

not leave, even if they kill us all."

"I appeal to the world: help us. I say to Israel: you want us to evacuate, but how can we when we have no shekels, no transportation, and no place?"

The civil defense agency said that "hundreds of families" had been sleeping on the ground for days after fleeing from northern Gaza, unable to secure temporary shelter.

The civil defense said Israeli forces killed 40 people in attacks across the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, including 22 killed by three

airstrikes on a warehouse sheltering displaced people near the Firas market in Gaza City.

The agency's spokesman, Mahmud Bassal, said the dead included six women and nine children.

Footage following the attack showed a scene of devastation, with Palestinians combing through large piles of rubble and warped metal as two men carried away a body wrapped in tattered blankets.

In the aftermath, sobbing women knelt over their loved ones, hug-

ging their lifeless bodies wrapped in white shrouds.

At least six bodies were laid out on the ground, including two the size of children.

Muhammad Hajjaj, who lost his relatives, told AFP that "heavy bombing" hit the building while people were asleep. "We came and found children and women torn apart. It was a pitiful sight."

Israel launched its U.S.-backed ground invasion on Gaza City earlier in September in a bid to occupy the urban hub.

Mahmud al-Dreimly, 44, said he had gone with his family a day earlier to live in a tent in Gaza City's Al-Rimal neighborhood.

Dreimly said he saw tanks in the Tel al-Hawa and Al-Sabra neighborhoods, as well as on the outskirts of Al-Rimal.

The launch of the ground onslaught came as a UN probe found Israel of committing "genocide" in the Gaza Strip.

Over nearly two years, Israeli military operations have killed at least 65,419 Palestinians, mostly civilians, according to the health ministry in Gaza, figures the UN considers reliable.

## Jolani Says He Is Afraid of Israel Amid Nearing Deal

NEW YORK (Dispatches) -- Self-appointed president Abu Muhammad al-Jolani says Syria is "scared of Israel," signaling that his regime poses no threat to Tel Aviv.

His remarks were made during a Middle East Institute event in New York, coinciding with the ongoing UN General Assembly session that al-Jolani is attending.

"We are not the ones creating problems for Israel. We are scared of Israel, not the other way around," the former Al-Qaeda leader said.

He also warned of "multiple risks" of partitioning Syria stemming from Israel repeatedly violating Syrian airspace with incursions into its territory.

"Jordan is under pressure, and any discussion of partitioning Syria will hurt Iraq, will hurt Turkey. That will take us all back to square one," he added.

Syria and Israel are close to striking a "de-escalation" agreement in which Israel will stop its attacks while Syria agrees not to move any machinery or heavy equipment near the border, a senior U.S. envoy said.

According to a U.S. official quoted by the Times of Israel, the agreement is "99 percent complete."

Al-Jolani has previously downplayed the talks, describing them as negotiations toward a security arrangement rather than a full peace deal.

On September 17, he said the negotiations with Israel could soon produce a security pact.

Reports have also surfaced that al-Jolani might meet Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu during the General Assembly session.

Since the fall of the former Syr-

ian government last year, Israel has repeatedly bombarded Syria establishing a widespread military presence across the south that encircles the capital, Damascus.

During clashes in July between Jolani's forces and Druze fighters, Israel targeted key sites linked to Damascus—including the presidential palace and Defense Ministry buildings—claiming these strikes were in support of the Druze minority.

Meanwhile, thousands of Druze civilians were massacred by al-Jolani's forces that same month.

Despite the strong rhetoric from Israeli officials, al-Jolani and other Syrian leaders have consistently emphasized their lack of interest in confrontation with Tel Aviv.

In fact, Syria has intensified its crackdown on Palestinian resistance factions that were previously sheltered by former President Bashar al-Assad's government.

On August 20, Jolani's foreign minister Asaad al-Shaibani met with Israeli strategic affairs minister Ron Dermer in Paris—the first officially announced meeting between the two sides.

According to Haaretz, the meeting focused on efforts to prevent Hezbollah or Iran from establishing a foothold in southern Syria.

Al-Jolani himself was once deputy to Daesh leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi before becoming head of the Nusra Front, the official Al-Qaeda branch in Syria.

The Nusra Front was later rebranded as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which took control of Syria in December 2024.

It is well documented that Israel coordinated with the Nusra Front during the early years of the U.S.-backed war on Syria that began in 2011.

## UK Sets Conditions for Recognizing Palestine as State

LONDON (Dispatches) -- The UK is conditioning its recognition of Palestine as a state on an "overhaul" of the Palestinian education system and an end to the Palestinian Authority's stipends to the families of prisoners, The Telegraph reported.

According to sources who spoke with the British outlet, London and Paris are drafting a series of "financial and political" demands from the Palestinian Authority.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is insisting on an end to what Israel calls the "pay to slay" policy, the report said.

PA President Mahmoud Abbas is also "under pressure to drive through reforms to the Palestinian school curriculum in an effort to placate Is-

raeli concerns over anti-Semitism."

The third demand is reportedly political reforms and elections, as well as ensuring Hamas does not have a role in the future of Palestinian politics.

France and Belgium announced their recognition of Palestine at the ongoing UN General Assembly session in New York this week, a day after the UK said it formally recognized a Palestinian state.

Starmer is said to be coordinating with France to push for what Western officials describe as "tangible, verifiable, measurable commitments" before recognition is fully implemented.

While the move has been described by some as a step toward peace, rights groups and analysts say the

recognition is largely symbolic and fails to address the UK's enduring support for Israel's military campaign in Gaza and broader occupation policies.

Since the start of Israel's full-scale war on Gaza, which has killed over 65,400 Palestinians and displaced nearly 2 million, the UK has continued arms exports to Israel. Only 30 of 250 active arms licenses have been suspended. British-made components are used in F-35 fighter jets and surveillance technology deployed in both Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

Critics also point to Britain's historical role in the war. The 1917 Balfour Declaration, issued without consulting the Palestinian majority, laid the groundwork for Zionist set-

tlement under British mandate rule. Policies during that period facilitated large-scale land transfers and paramilitary buildup, contributing to the 1948 Nakba, in which more than 750,000 Palestinians were displaced.

Today, over five million Palestinian refugees remain stateless, while Israel—backed by military and diplomatic support from allies including the UK—continues to expand settlements and occupy Palestinian land.

Though over 140 countries now recognize Palestinian statehood, analysts warn that the UK's move, without halting arms sales or supporting international legal accountability, does little to alter realities on the ground.

## Turkey Rethinks F-16 Purchase From U.S., Eyes Engines

ANKARA (Dispatches) -- Turkey may seek to amend a multibillion-dollar U.S. arms deal, requesting jet engines instead of F-16 fighter jets and missiles, Middle East Eye reported.

Last year, Ankara scaled back its initial plan to acquire 79 F-16 modernization kits, opting instead for 40 F-16 Vipers and associated ammunition, reducing the deal's value from \$23 billion to \$7 billion. Now, some senior Turkish officials reportedly favor further changes, scrapping the F-16 purchase and parts of the ammunition package entirely.

According to Middle East Eye, Turkey intends to prioritize investment in its domestically produced fifth-generation fighter jet, the Kaan, and seek jet engines compatible with the aircraft. The move is also seen as a preparation for a possible return to the U.S.-led F-35 program, from which Ankara was excluded in 2019 over its purchase of Russian S-400 air defense systems.

The issue was expected to arise during President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Washington this week. It remained unclear whether Ankara would formally present the offer during meetings with U.S. President Donald Trump.

Turkey's defense officials remain divided over how best to replace the country's aging F-16 fleet, with some urging an immediate purchase of the 40 Vipers to bolster air capabilities. Others advocate modernizing existing jets with local technologies and focusing on the Kaan, whose first deliveries are slated for late 2028 but could be delayed until 2030.

A source told Middle East Eye that "instead of spending billions on F-16s, some in Ankara argue the funds could be redirected to purchase F-16 engines, compatible with the Kaan." The Kaan will initially use General Electric's F110 engines, also used in F-16s, though Turkey plans to develop an indigenous engine for later models.

Concerns also exist over U.S. restrictions on F-16s, which may prevent Turkey from integrating its domestically produced payloads. Turkey has developed a range of indigenous weapons, from cruise missiles to guided munitions.

Defense Minister Yasar Guler confirmed a \$1.4 billion down payment on the F-16 deal in November, but some officials continue to prioritize rejoining the F-35 program, which could rapidly enhance Turkey's air power. Six F-35 jets built for Turkey remain in U.S. storage, ready for transfer if Ankara is readmitted.

However, reports say the Pentagon is unlikely to reopen F-35 talks until the F-16 agreement is finalized and may reject selling engines instead of jets. Turkey's potential F-35 return holds strategic significance amid regional rivalries, as Greece plans to receive F-35s by 2028 and Israel, along with Greece, lobbies Washington to block arms sales to Turkey to maintain regional military balance.

## Report: Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 Sparks Regional Inequality

ABHA, Saudi Arabia (Dispatches) -- As Saudi Arabia pushes forward with its ambitious Vision 2030 plan to diversify its economy and reduce dependence on oil, disparities between the capital Riyadh and other regions like Aseer province highlight the challenges ahead.

Abdulrahman, a café worker in Abha, often escapes the city to the nearby Soudah mountain range, known for its dramatic views and ancient villages. However, the natural beauty has recently been marred by steel fences marking the site of Soudah Peaks, a multibillion-dollar luxury tourism project aimed at attracting 2 million visitors annually. The development symbolizes Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's hope to bring investment and jobs to historically neglected rural areas.

Despite such efforts, Aseer, with the highest unemployment rate in the kingdom, illustrates the uneven impact of Saudi Arabia's reforms. Since launching Vision 2030 in 2016, much government spending has favored Riyadh and the futuristic Neom megaproject in the northwest. Riyadh has flourished as a hub for foreign investment and high-paying jobs, leaving many outside the capital feeling left behind.

"There's less buzz, less energy, and a sense of less opportunity," said

Sanam Vakil, Middle East director at Chatham House. "Vision 2030 must bring everyone along on this journey to be successful."

The economic divide is clear: a 2023 government survey found average monthly disposable income in Riyadh is more than double that in Najran, east of Aseer. Unemployment among Saudis in Riyadh is also half the national average.

Even in major cities like Jeddah, residents complain about centralization of key institutions in Riyadh and underinvestment in local infrastructure. Young Saudis from smaller towns increasingly migrate to Riyadh seeking better opportunities, intensifying housing pressures and raising rental costs by 30-40 percent.

Officials acknowledge these disparities but argue that Riyadh's growth is natural and that basic services remain available nationwide. Economy Minister Faisal Alibrahim described uneven growth as "transitional," emphasizing the need to understand its causes.

Meanwhile, social reforms under Vision 2030 have boosted female labor participation from 20 percent a decade ago to 36 percent in early 2025 and helped reduce unemployment. However, subsidy cuts and increased taxes have strained many households, especially outside the capital.