

Hands off Bethlehem and Gaza



Christ in the Gaza rubble: the Nativity in Bethlehem's Lutheran church

At this time of year we think about Bethlehem. In Christmas cards it looks like an English village. But Bethlehem is a West Bank Palestinian town under military occupation. A nine-metre-high concrete wall runs through it. Israeli settlement towns and checkpoints surround the birthplace of a major religion.

Jerusalem's Old City is also part of the West Bank. It houses many Christian communities, including both Greek and Armenian Orthodox. But Christian institutions are increasingly under threat as Israeli settlers are trying to force them out. There is a similar threat to the Al Aqsa mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites.

Palestinians in East Jerusalem and all over the West Bank are likewise being expelled house by house, either through legal proceedings or through arson and violence. Farmers are driven from their crops by armed Israeli civilians with military support. Israeli finance minister Smotrich says 'the time has

come' for Israel to declare full ownership of the West Bank, in blatant defiance of international law.

Gaza

The grim purpose of genocide in Gaza is becoming clear. The 'Generals Plan', devised by retired general Giora Eiland, is to allow a week's evacuation and then treat the entire area of Northern Gaza as a killing zone, blocking all essential supplies.

December saw nine attacks in two weeks on schools sheltering displaced people. Only two out of 40 UN convoys of food were allowed through. Military units compete to shoot the most Palestinians and bodies are left unburied in the open. Across Gaza over 160 children have been killed by soldiers since November.

Israel's objective is to clear the Northern half of Gaza and resettle it with Jewish-only 'settler' communities. How will the leaders of Britain, Germany and the USA defend this?