

Video shows that Israeli security forces were responsible for the murder of Kurdish demonstrators

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Four Kurdish demonstrators, including an 18-year-old young woman, were killed and up to 12 others severely wounded by Israeli security forces during a picket of the Israeli Embassy in Berlin on February 17. The group of predominantly young Kurds was protesting the abduction of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan who had been arrested two days earlier. Immediately following the shooting a number of contradictory reports emerged.

The Israeli ambassador spoke of the embassy being besieged by a mob of up to 200 demonstrators, some armed with iron bars and axes, who violently broke down the doors and forcibly entered the building. According to the ambassador, two Israeli security officers shot in self-defence, inside the embassy, in order to protect staff and property. He said one “warning shot” was directed at protesters outside the building. An internal inquiry organised by the embassy cleared its entire staff of any untoward action. The Israeli government officially supported this position. Two days after the incident both of the officials involved in the shooting were flown back to Israel.

The Israeli version of events was partially undermined by a police report released at the beginning of May which declared that in fact the demonstrators had been let into the building by an Israeli security official who then proceeded to shoot in self defence at the crowd, with some of the shots landing outside the building. Seven police officers testified that up to 30 shots had been fired outside the building and the police had recovered many empty cartridges. The implication at that time was that the police themselves feared they could become victims in the shoot-out. At the same time, the police version emphasised that some of the

demonstrators were armed with metal bars and axes and confirmed that the Israeli officials had reacted to a situation of emergency.

Last Thursday night, however, the newsmagazine *Kontraste*, broadcast on one of Germany's main television channels, played a police video that quite clearly shows that the Israeli security forces were responsible for a massacre.

The video shows a tightly-knit group of about 20 Kurds standing on the steps of the embassy, waiting with their backs to the door. Two of the group are seen holding branches from a tree. There is no sign of axes, metal bars or any other weapons. Suddenly there is the sound of pistol shots, with up to 11 rounds fired. The origin of the shots is not visible but a number of the Kurds tumble down the stairs, having been shot in the back. The *Kontraste* magazine concludes that during this brief exchange three of the Kurds, including 18-year-old Sema Alp, died on the spot in the hail of gunfire. In all accounts of the incident by police and the Israelis up until now, Sema Alp had been shot inside the building.

As the shots ring out the video shows a number of the Kurds fleeing in panic down the stairs, leaving dead and wounded behind them. As they run into the gardens of the embassy they are met with tear gas thrown by police who had limited themselves, up to that point, to observing and filming the Kurdish protesters.

Why a police video has been released to the media at this point is not clear. A few days before the showing of the video, the tape of a telephone conversation between the President of the Police in Berlin, Hagen Saberschinsky and the Berlin Interior Secretary Böse directly after the arrest of Öcalan was also made

publicly available. In the course of the conversation Saberschinsky makes a dismissive comment in reply to Böse's request for extra security for the Israeli Embassy. Saberschinsky was due to testify last Friday at a Berlin Senate inquiry into the events.

The indications are that the release of the tape-recorded telephone call and the police video are part of a conflict inside the state apparatus itself. Irrespective of such differences, the video shown on Thursday makes quite clear that Israeli security forces were responsible for the cold-blooded murder of Kurdish protesters and that the massacre was covered up by the dissembling and misleading reports subsequently given by the Berlin police.



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