Israel steps up repression in occupied Palestinian territories

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On Friday, Israeli forces fired on Palestinian protesters at a checkpoint near Ramallah in the West Bank, killing one young man and injuring four more. Further clashes broke out at the funeral procession in north Jerusalem the following day that resulted in 12 injuries.

In Jerusalem, angry clashes broke out between Muslim worshippers and Israeli security forces outside the al-Aqsa mosque for the third time over the last week. Police fired tear gas on hundreds of Palestinians who were throwing rocks after Friday prayers. The clashes were reportedly sparked by fears that ultra-nationalist Israelis were intending to enter the Muslim-controlled areas at the site known to Muslims as the Haram al-Shareef and to Jews as Temple Mount.

Israeli armed forces fired tear gas, stink bombs and grenades to disperse a rally in Hebron, injuring more than 70 people. Thousands were demonstrating to mark the eighteenth anniversary of the deadly shooting of 29 Palestinians by arch-nationalist Baruch Goldstein on February 25, 1994, and to demand the reopening of Hebron's main street, Shuhada Street, closed by the security forces after the massacre in 1994. Troops closed off the city centre on the pretext of protecting the 400 settlers residing there, throttling the commercial centre and affecting the livelihoods of thousands.

Palestinians face increasing Israeli encroachment on their land and resources, making economic life all but impossible without international aid, which has largely dried up.

A recent Israeli Supreme Court ruling gave Israeli companies the green light to continue quarrying and mining activities in Area C of the West Bank, the nearly two thirds of the West Bank assigned to Israel's temporary control under the 1993 Oslo Accords pending a final peace agreement.

There are currently eight operational Israeli quarries producing 12 million tonnes of material annually—worth about US$900 million—mostly for the Israeli construction industry. The court argued that the laws of occupation change when the occupation is long-term, a doctrine that has no legal validity. It paves the way for legalising the seizure of other resources.

Israel has taken control of almost all of the Jordan Valley's water resources for the use of 9,400 settlers. Their per capita consumption is more than six times that of the 56,000 Palestinian residents. The 330,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank consume for agricultural and domestic use almost one third the quantity of water accessible to 2.5 million Palestinians.

According to a report published last September by the Palestinian Ministry of National Economy and the Applied Research Institute in Jerusalem, the total cost imposed on the Palestinian economy by the Israeli occupation came to US$6.9 billion in 2010, an amount equal to approximately 85 percent of the total Palestinian GDP. The Palestinians' inability to access their own natural resources causes them to lose revenue and pay more for raw materials, amounting to US$4.5 billion annually, 56 percent of Palestinian GDP.

Israel has continued to expand the settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. About 500,000 Israelis now live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

According to a report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs six months ago, the Israeli authorities have forced Palestinian residents to leave their homes "in order to meet their basic needs".

UN investigators reported that in 10 of the 13

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communities they visited in the West Bank where Israel retains full control, Area C, families had had to leave their homes because the Israeli authorities have made it impossible for Palestinians to obtain a construction permit. Palestinians were forced to leave their communities because of violence by settlers, demolition of their homes, and difficulties in accessing basic services and resources.

The UN agency reported 342 demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures, including 125 residential structures for the first six months of 2011, nearly five times the number during the same period in 2010, and a fivefold increase in the number of displaced people over the same period.

The government has also sought to legalise some settlement outposts, set up by ultra-nationalists and illegal under Israeli law, by annexing them to existing settlements and thereby avoiding the need to either bulldoze them or officially establish a new one.

Israeli settlers from West Bank outposts have taken control of land in Area B, designated under the Oslo Accords as under joint Palestinian civilian and Israeli military control. They have implemented a vicious campaign of intimidation and violence that has included blocking roads, throwing stones at cars and houses, attacking Palestinian villages and land, torching fields, uprooting trees, and damaging property. According to B'Tselem, the human rights group, Israeli civilians killed 50 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from September 2000, the beginning of the second intifada, to the end of June 2011.

Settlers have taken control of resources such as land for their own businesses and tourism, and water, with no action by the police. Under the slogan "price tag," they have carried out attacks on Palestinian civilians that have included desecration of cemeteries and mosques and firebombing homes.

Alongside its land and resource grab in the West Bank, Israel bombed targets in Gaza on Friday and Saturday, injuring two people, after several homemade Kassem rockets were fired on Israel causing neither damage nor injuries. Some officers in Israel's Southern Command have called for a large-scale operation against Gaza's "terror infrastructure". A senior officer said, "There is no need to wait for a provocation to launch an offensive against terrorist infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. The ongoing attacks—by rockets and along the border—are cumulatively more than enough to justify immediate action."

According to the *Jerusalem Post*, last month the Israel Defence Force's General Staff ordered the Southern Command to speed up preparations for a possible large-scale operation against Gaza within months.

There is a growing danger that the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will launch a provocation against the Palestinian people or Iran as a diversion from growing social unrest. Last summer saw the largest-ever demonstrations calling for an end to social inequality. The government has done nothing to address demonstrators' grievances.

The Histadrut, Israel's trade union movement, has been forced by the strength of feeling among its members to call strikes by railway, port and municipal workers, in order to make pretence of opposition to the employers. In each case, the Histadrut isolated and sold out the struggles.

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