

Israel steps up repression against Palestinians

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Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sanctioned a widespread crackdown on the Palestinians. It follows last Tuesday's killing of four rabbis and a policeman and the wounding of eight others in a synagogue in West Jerusalem by two Palestinians from East Jerusalem, who were shot and killed by the police.

The attack came after months of worsening oppression of the Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Israel. Over the last month, Israel has imposed severe restrictions on access to the al-Aqsa mosque, even on some occasions banning Palestinian worshippers from entering the mosque, in deference to the wishes of Jewish zealots who, along with ultra-right wing politicians of the Jewish Home Party in Netanyahu's ruling coalition, have called for an end to rules banning Jews from praying at the site. Last week, a Palestinian bus driver was found hanged in his bus after being beaten and killed by settlers, an incident which the police said was a suicide.

Netanyahu is making an appeal to the most rabid nationalist and religious elements in Israeli society, aimed at stoking tensions between Israeli Jews and Palestinians in Palestinian-dominated East Jerusalem, which Israel illegally annexed after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, as well as in the Occupied Territories and within Israel itself.

The purpose of the crackdown is three-fold.

Like the 50-day war on Gaza last summer, it is aimed at terrorising the entire Palestinian population, particularly those in East Jerusalem, breaking the 66-year history of Palestinian resistance to the occupation, and forcing them to leave for Jordan or elsewhere.

Secondly, it serves to cut across the opposition of the Israeli working class to the mounting poverty, social inequality and constant wars that characterise Israeli society today. The anger at austerity and hostility to Netanyahu's aggressive and militaristic policies towards the Palestinians find no genuine means of expression in the rightward moving "left" or "centrist" parties, all of whom support Netanyahu's war and pro-big business agenda.

Thirdly, he is seeking support from these elements to

shore up his shaky coalition, which is riven with dissent over his economic policy amid widespread talk of an early election less than two years after the last.

Israel has reinstated the barbaric and illegal practice of demolishing Palestinian homes as collective punishment. At 4 a.m. on Wednesday morning, security forces demolished the five-story building in Silwan, East Jerusalem, that was home to dozens of families, including that of Abdul Rahman al-Shaloudy, who drove his car into pedestrians last month, killing a baby and a young woman, before being shot by the police. The families were woken at 1 a.m. and given 5 minutes to leave.

According to the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem, around 675 Palestinian homes were demolished during the second intifada between 2000 and 2005. After 2005, Israel largely abandoned the practice, following a report that it was ineffective as a deterrent and only served to inflame hostility. Netanyahu, speaking about the demolition, said, "This is a significant and important step, and there will be more home demolitions. There will be many more steps."

Other measures against East Jerusalem's Palestinian population include:

- The deployment of armed security forces at the entrance to the city's Palestinian neighbourhoods to stop and question people, under conditions where police presence is already higher than at any time since the second intifada.

- Raids by security forces on the homes of suspected "terrorists."

- The assignment of two additional Border Police companies to the capital, on top of a heightened police presence over the last month.

- Routine large-scale police raids in East Jerusalem's "troublesome" neighbourhoods, with the power to arrest those resisting or even protesting their entry.

- Increased patrols around mosques, synagogues and other holy sites.

Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon has rescinded plans to relax roadblocks in the occupied West Bank, while the

number of security forces will be increased.

This year, security forces have carried out an average of 98 search and arrest operations a week in the West Bank, up from 75 a week last year, according to the United Nations. The human rights organisation Addameer reports that around 6,500 Palestinians were being held in Israeli prisons as of October 1. Of these, 182 were children and 500 were administrative detainees held on “secret evidence” without charge or trial.

The authorities have arrested four Palestinians, three of whom were Hamas members, who they say confessed under interrogation to planning to assassinate Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman with an anti-tank rocket while he drove to his Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank. The Shin Bet security agency said that the alleged plot had been hatched during the July-August war in Gaza.

Public Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitch is demanding that those who carry out attacks and are killed by the security forces should not be allowed a burial in the capital. He called earlier for the lifting of restrictions on Jewish Israelis carrying weapons for “self-defence.”

This has given the green light to ultra-nationalist settlers to descend on Palestinian neighbourhoods in Jerusalem and tyrannise the inhabitants. *Haaretz* reported that “several right-wing protesters gathered near the scene of the attack [on the synagogue in West Jerusalem], calling ‘Death to Arabs’ and ‘Revenge.’”

The settlers are allowed to rob, attack the homes and property of the Palestinians, and kill with impunity. Human rights group Yesh Din reported that settler violence was a daily occurrence, yet few complaints of “harm caused to Palestinians and their property” resulted in the issuing of indictments—a mere 7.4 percent of 970 cases—and since 2013, only two indictments.

A group of settlers attacked and stabbed 22-year-old Fadi Jalal Radwan on Tuesday night in Kufr Aqab, while 16-year old Ibrahim Mahmoud was in an intensive care unit after being shot by a settler in a village east of Ramallah. Six Palestinians were hospitalised after being fired on by Israeli security forces, who intervened in clashes sparked by settlers’ attacks on a village school south of Nablus.

Scores of youth have been arrested in the Palestinian villages of northern Israel following widespread demonstrations, including on university campuses, in the wake of the fatal shooting by the police of 22-year-old Kheir Hamdan without warning in Kufr Kana. Netanyahu gave his full support to the police, saying that those who

called for the destruction of the state of Israel should be stripped of their citizenship.

A “Jewish nation-state” bill was agreed by the cabinet on Sunday and will go before parliament shortly. It seeks to anchor Israel’s definition as an explicitly Jewish state in the country’s Basic Laws, thereby undermining the rights of non-Jews, specifically the Palestinians, to whom it would not be obligated to extend national rights.

It will demote Arabic from its already weakened status as an official language, call on the judiciary to utilize Jewish law “as a source of inspiration,” and enshrine the national anthem and Jewish holy days in the Basic Laws.

This follows a new law that raises the threshold vote in Israel’s system of proportional representation for election to parliament, in what is widely viewed as an attempt to exclude all three small parties representing Israeli Palestinians, who constitute 20 percent of the population.

All this has sparked an angry response from young Palestinians in the West Bank, who went out onto the streets on Friday in protest. About 350 Palestinians demonstrated in Hebron, hurling rocks and Molotov cocktails at police who were trying to break up the protests. Elsewhere, Israeli soldiers used rubber bullets to disperse a demonstration of 100 people in Nablus, hospitalising at least three Palestinians, and injuring another in Kalandiya, north of Jerusalem, where several dozen Palestinians were demonstrating.



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