

Israel's Netanyahu government widens use of anti-democratic detention orders

Jean Shaoul
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Israel's internal security agency Shin Bet has arrested several right-wing Jewish extremists linked to recent attacks on both Palestinians in the West Bank and churches and mosques in Israel.

They were placed under administrative detention where they may be subjected to harsh interrogation techniques.

An administrative detention order is a flagrant abuse of the most basic democratic rights. It enables the state to order someone's arrest without informing the detainee of the reason for the arrest or providing any evidence of wrongdoing, and to detain them for unspecified periods. Israel routinely uses such orders against Palestinians to keep them locked up without trial, with an estimated 391 Palestinians in jail under such orders in May.

Now, the same methods utilised in suppressing and brutalising the Palestinians are coming home. They are to be used against Israelis, under the pretext of combating militant Jewish nationalists associated with the settler movement that successive governments have done so much to promote.

The move follows the widespread outrage in Israel and internationally over last week's torching of a Palestinian family in the West Bank village of Duma. An 18-month old toddler was burnt to death and other family members were left in critical condition, leading to violent clashes with the security forces in which a young Palestinian was killed.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said with the utmost hypocrisy and cynicism, "Terror is terror, and we must fight it in every place," during a public visit to the hospital where the survivors of the attack were being treated.

Just the day before, a right-wing fanatic stabbed six people taking part in a gay pride march in occupied East Jerusalem. One of them, 16-year-old Shira Banki, died from her wounds.

Within Israel, thousands of demonstrators took to the

streets of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in protest against the rising violence committed by ultra-nationalists against the Palestinians, saying, "Enough is enough."

Over the weekend, the government's security cabinet authorised the security forces' use of "all means at their disposal" and the use of administrative detention for Jewish suspects. Netanyahu ordered the security forces to crack down on Jewish terrorist attacks and announced that he would push through new legislation giving the Shin Bet additional powers.

The following day, Israel announced it would use harsh interrogation methods to tackle violent Jewish extremism. Interior Security Minister Gilad Erdan told Israel Radio that suspected Jewish extremists—like Palestinian suspects—could be shaken violently in custody.

One of those placed in administrative detention for six months is Mordechai Mayer, an 18-year-old resident of the Ma'aleh Adumim settlement, who is suspected of being involved in a number of recent acts of violence and terrorist attacks. He was previously questioned over last year's arson attack on the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem, and was arrested more recently on suspicion of being involved in the torching of the Church of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fish near Lake Galilee. He was then released without charges but was banned from entering Jerusalem, the West Bank, Safed (near Lake Galilee) or Yad Binyamin, a religious seminary.

Aviatar Slonim was arrested on suspicion of belonging to an extremist group that sought to harm Arabs and replace the Israeli government with a Jewish kingdom. Previously arrested on suspicion of setting fire to a Palestinian home last November, he too was released without being charged, but banned from entering Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Meir Ettinger, grandson of the extremist Rabbi Meir Kahane, was arrested on suspicion of being part of a Jewish underground group based in the West Bank.

According to the Shin Bet, he started planning a series of attacks against Palestinians in order to incite unrest among them and bring down the Israeli government. The State Prosecutor had earlier refused to authorise an administrative detention for Ettinger, instead banning him from Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Another extremist, Moshe Orbach, has been charged with incitement to violence and terrorism for authoring a manual, "Kingdom of Evil." The manual sets out the ideological basis for escalating the attacks against religious sites and Arabs, and details how to attack mosques, churches and Palestinian homes, as well as how to beat Arabs into unconsciousness. It also offers practical advice on how to avoid surveillance and questioning by the security forces.

These forces are well known to the Shin Bet, which said that this shadowy Messianic group had been operating since 2013 and "holds to an extremist ideology that aspires to change the regime and bring about the redemption via various stages of action."

According to an article in *Ha'aretz* headlined, "Settler terror group seeks to overthrow Israeli government," the security authorities believe that the extreme right-wing fanatics responsible for the arson attack in Duma are affiliated to the same group that has torched mosques, churches and Palestinian homes over the past year.

According to the Shin Bet, there are several dozen people at its core involved in operations that target the West Bank and Israel itself. The aim of these religious thugs is no longer simply to stop the government and security forces evacuating outposts and settlements, but to destabilise the country via a systematic campaign of violence, overthrow the government and establish a new regime based on Jewish law.

The emergence and growth of these fascistic gangs flows inexorably from the racism whipped up by the government and the entire spectrum of official politics. They are the product of decades of reactionary social policies that have gutted educational and essential public services, and above all, Israel's constant warmongering against both the Palestinians and neighbouring states in the region.

The Israeli authorities have for years turned a blind eye to settler violence against the Palestinians. While some of the attacks are reported in the media, many take place on an almost daily basis and go unreported, alongside a broader culture of state violence and discrimination against the Palestinians, authorised by the government itself.

The army, intelligence services, police and legal system have repeatedly demonstrated their complicity in these acts. They have refused to hold anyone accountable, except in the handful of the most horrific attacks that provoke international revulsion and censure.

This is because the settlers constitute a militant and vocal faction whose social interests are intimately bound up with Israeli rule of the captured territories and the perpetuation of the country's military machine. These layers have been reinforced by a wave of immigrants, first from the US and later Russia, who were attracted to Israel on the basis of the explicitly anti-socialist and chauvinist perspective which it has projected ever more openly since the 1967 war.

Over the past three decades, social and political tensions within Israel have grown due to the widening gap between rich and poor. With the majority of people alienated from official politics, the state has increased its reliance on right-wing settlers and extreme nationalist religious zealots. No party today can form a government without their support. Such forces serve as a useful means of intimidating the Palestinians and whipping up right-wing nationalism as a means of deflecting Israel's immense internal tensions.

In an apparent change of heart, the Netanyahu government is now authorising administrative detention orders and harsh interrogation methods, and introducing new sweeping powers for the Shin Bet, ostensibly against these right-wing fanatics and Jewish extremists.

However, the government will increasingly target workers and youth who oppose the social, economic and militarist policies carried out by the Israeli political establishment on behalf of the financial oligarchs who control the wealth of Israel and Palestine.



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