

Israeli police threaten Palestinians with gas attacks “until you die”

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Videos have emerged showing Israeli border police threatening Palestinians in the Aida refugee camp with gassing “until you die.” The threat was made in response to youths demonstrating against the occupation and throwing stones at the separation wall.

Speaking in Arabic through a loud speaker, a police officer read out the message as an Israeli jeep firing tear gas proceeded down the street. “People of Aida refugee camp, we are the occupation forces. You throw stones, and we will hit you with gas until you all die. The children, the youth, the old people—you will all die. We won’t leave any of you alive,” he said.

Coming after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tried to blame the Nazis’ mass extermination of the Jewish people in gas chambers on the Palestinian national leadership, these threats underscore the lawlessness and savagery of the Israeli state’s repression of the Palestinian people. Netanyahu is making use of the crisis to introduce measures aimed at terrorising and suppressing the Palestinians, stripping them of their democratic rights and driving them out of their homes.

The border police officer was heard to say, “We have arrested one of you. He is with us now. We took him from his home, and we will slaughter and kill him while you watch if you keep throwing stones.”

This was a reference to a 25-year-old male arrested on Thursday and later released.

The Badil Resource Centre for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights condemned the officer’s announcement, calling it “a clear and grave threat to collectively punish the population of Aida camp by way of lethal force.” Such extrajudicial executions would breach the Geneva Convention.

According to the Palestinian Authority Health Ministry, Israeli security forces and settlers have killed

at least 73 Palestinians—including unarmed protesters, bystanders, children and alleged attackers—in the occupied territories of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, which Israel illegally annexed after the 1967 war, and within Israel itself since October 1 when clashes began. This includes 15 children, and five Palestinians who died, possibly due to inhaling tear gas, delayed medical treatment due to checkpoints, and medical neglect by prison authorities.

According to the United Nations, Israeli forces have injured more than 1,200 Palestinians, including at least 256 children, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since October 20. This compares with nine Israelis who have died in stabbing or shooting incidents since October 1.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) are operating a shoot to kill policy in a bid to suppress all opposition to its brutal occupation. In the last few days, Israeli soldiers shot dead a Palestinian in the village of Beit Einun near Hebron who they claimed had tried to attack them, although no one was injured. On Friday, Israeli forces killed three Palestinians in one day, including an eight-month-old baby who suffocated from tear gas inhalation.

Last Tuesday, Amnesty International reported that it had evidence of at least four other recent instances “in which Palestinians were deliberately shot dead by Israeli forces when they posed no imminent threat to life, in what appear to have been extrajudicial executions.”

Three of the killings were in Hebron, and one was in occupied East Jerusalem.

Hebron, the West Bank’s largest city with 200,000 Palestinians, has become a particularly tense conflict zone. Israeli forces and settlers have killed at least 20 of its residents in demonstrations and attacks, and arrested nearly 240, according to Addameer, the Palestinian

prisoners' rights group.

In a bid to deter mass funeral processions, the Israeli authorities have refused to return the bodies of alleged attackers to their families—including 12 from Hebron. Home to around 850 Israeli religious settlers, Hebron has been subject to numerous provocations. In 1994, Baruch Goldstein, an American-born Israeli doctor, went on a shooting spree, killing 29 Muslim worshipers inside the shrine known to Jews as the Tomb of the Patriarchs and to Muslims as the Ibrahimi Mosque.

Under the 1997 Hebron protocol, about 20 percent of the city—the Old City and its commercial heart—was put under Israeli military control, forcing Hebron's majority Palestinian residents to pass through military checkpoints.

Palestinians face a raft of measures that Netanyahu is reportedly considering that strip away their most fundamental rights. He has ordered a review of the residency status of Palestinians in East Jerusalem who live on the Israeli side of the separation wall. As residents, but not Israeli citizens, the Palestinians in East Jerusalem are entitled to social services and welfare, and to travel anywhere within Israel. Without residency rights they would lose their access to care and social services and be unable to travel to work in Israel. It is a deliberate attempt to cleanse the city of Palestinians.

This follows the reintroduction of administrative detention—detention without charge or trial—for children and youths under the age of 18, a practice suspended since 2011. Three youths from East Jerusalem have been arrested and are to be held for three to six months on the orders of Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon, allegedly for throwing stones. While Israel holds hundreds of Palestinian adults in administrative detention, it has never previously used administrative detention for children from East Jerusalem.

Netanyahu has also floated the idea of establishing a special “court for security affairs” that would handle security, administrative detentions, revocation of residency and citizenship from “terrorists,” house demolitions and terror related offences. Such tribunals would establish a discriminatory legal system for Palestinians.

Israel has almost completed the encirclement of the al-Aqsa mosque compound that was the trigger for the demonstrations and protests that started on October 1.

Under an agreement brokered between Israel and Jordan, which is the ultimate custodian of the site, by US Secretary of State John Kerry, cameras will be installed in the compound to ensure that no Jewish prayer takes place at the mosque. This measure would serve to enshrine Israel's de facto control of the compound, however.

Israeli archaeologists say that various “archaeological activities” now almost surround the compound, isolating it from the Palestinian neighbourhoods and creating an “obstacle course” to cross in order to reach the mosque.

There is mounting concern among the major powers about Israel's handling of the al-Aqsa mosque and its brutal treatment of the Palestinians, which threatens to cut across their plans for wider wars in Iraq and Syria in alliance with the reactionary Sunni Gulf monarchs. Last week, UNESCO, the UN's cultural agency, passed a resolution that “strongly condemns Israeli aggressions and illegal measures against the freedom of worship and Muslims' access to their holy site, al-Aqsa Mosque” and “firmly deplores the continuous storming” of the mosque compound by “Israeli right-wing extremists and uniformed forces.”

Washington had to step in to block a proposal by France for the UN to place international peace observers on the mosque plaza. New Zealand is drafting a resolution calling on Israel to freeze settlement construction and home demolitions in the West Bank, and urging Palestinians to desist from taking steps against Israel at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, in an effort to restart peace talks.



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