

Israel's shoot-to-kill policy against Palestinians

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Israel's use of live ammunition and a shoot-to-kill policy has claimed at least 146 Palestinian lives and injured thousands more since the beginning of October.

Such ruthlessness and criminality are part of its broader strategy of engineering the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, breaking up the occupied West Bank into a number of different cantons, bringing them under its direct control, and reducing the number of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, in pursuit of its expansionist schemes.

Around 46 Palestinians have been killed during demonstrations and clashes with the security forces by a single shot to the head or chest, a clear indication of a shoot-to-kill policy. Others died from wounds inflicted by teargas canisters or rubber-coated steel bullets.

This does not include the killing of more than 90 alleged Palestinian assailants whom the security authorities held responsible for 21 lethal and other stabbing, stoning, shooting and car ramming attacks on Jewish Israelis. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, a further 1,887 Palestinians have been wounded by live ammunition and 3,105 by rubber-coated bullets, while around 10,000 have been treated for teargas inhalation.

A senior Israeli military official told the *Washington Post* that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians killed in recent clashes were shot at by M-16-type rifles or other weapons. M-16s are automatic high-velocity assault rifles that have 30-round magazines and a 600-metre target range.

Such a statement is tantamount to admitting that Israel has a policy of summary execution.

Just three of the Palestinians were killed by rifles loaded with .22-caliber bullets, known as “two-tvos”, which Israeli officials say are meant to be less lethal. A spokesperson for the Israel Defence Forces said that “two-tvos” were considered a useful tool for dispersing crowds. Such rounds were often fired at the legs of people

Israeli soldiers consider “instigators” of violent demonstrations or at attackers posing less than lethal threats.

In one demonstration at the Huwara military checkpoint south of Nablus, the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem counted 72 Palestinians injured—68 by live rounds and four by rubber-coated metal bullets.

According to the prisoners' rights group Addameer, Israeli military and police repeatedly used lethal force against Palestinians as a first resort, ignoring arrest procedures and failing to give warnings.

In the case of many of those killed in the context of alleged stabbing attempts, eyewitnesses and video footage show that suspects did not or no longer represented a threat at all—a breach of international law that limits the use of lethal force to cases where suspects pose a serious threat. In the absence of such a threat, such a killing amounts to extrajudicial execution and is a violation of the right to life under human rights law and a breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention that constitutes a war crime under the Rome Statute.

Israel has arrested more than 2,663 Palestinians since the beginning of October 2015, including more than 620 Palestinians, 177 of them children, from occupied East Jerusalem. As a result, there are now 6,800 political prisoners and detainees, including more than 470 children, 60 female prisoners and five members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. This number includes 660 administrative detainees who can be held indefinitely without trial, double the number at the beginning of October.

Addameer says that Israel has arrested dozens of Palestinians, claiming “incitement” via social media platforms, and is holding many of them under administrative detention. Israeli security forces are targeting Palestinian human rights defenders and journalists. Since the beginning of October, Israel has

issued five expulsion orders, deporting Palestinians from Jerusalem, a number that is expected to increase as part of Israel's broader policy of ridding the city of Palestinians.

The security forces have made increased use of collective punishment, illegal under international law, demolishing, sealing or rendering out of bounds 26 family homes of Palestinians accused of attempting attacks against Israelis, withholding the bodies of scores of Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces after alleged attacks, and harassing their families with arrests and repeated raids on their homes.

These punitive measures only served to raise tensions in the West Bank.

The current unrest was provoked last summer by right-wing Zionist elements, backed by the security forces, demanding access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex, clashing with Palestinians whose access to the mosque has been increasingly restricted. Underlying the Palestinian resistance, however, is the mounting violence by Zionist settlers and Israeli security forces against Palestinians and their property in the occupied West Bank and the steady expansion of Zionist settlements in the territory.

Lone Palestinian youths with no organisational affiliation have killed 21 Israelis, using stones, screwdrivers and knives, or their cars. But the huge disparity in the number of Palestinians killed for every Israeli, not to mention the thousands of Palestinians who have been wounded, has done nothing to blunt Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or the media's efforts to portray the unrest as the work of "terrorists" and hard-line Islamists, thereby justifying Israel's repression of the Palestinians as part of the global war on terror.

The security measures put in place by Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) that have kept the West Bank more or less stable over the last decade are unravelling. The PA itself, notorious for its corruption and cronyism and servility towards Israel and US and European imperialism, is widely discredited. Its mandate under the 1993 Oslo Accords was meant to expire in 1999.

President Mahmoud Abbas' term of office expired in 2009. There is no successor to the 81-year-old Abbas who has any popular support. His ruling clique in Fatah, the main party in the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, is made up of a handful of multimillionaire businessmen that have maintained their grip on the Palestinian institutions by brute force, despite the election of Hamas in 2006 and its failed attempt to organise a coup against Hamas in Gaza in 2007. Fatah is riven with factional

infighting and its congresses have been postponed on several occasions.

Abbas has cooperated fully with Israel's draconian crackdown. He has:

- * stopped the Tanzim, Fatah's military faction, from staging demonstrations and confrontations with Israel;

- * deployed Palestinian security personnel at flashpoints such as Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, the junction at the northern exit of Ramallah and the exit from Tul Karm in the West Bank to prevent confrontations with Israeli soldiers;

- * arrested Hamas military activists in Nablus and Hebron;

- * cut back on anti-Israel rhetoric on the PA's official media outlets, and largely refrained from mentioning Israel's designs on the al-Aqsa compound. *Ha'aretz* quoted an Israeli security source as saying that security coordination with the PA had improved and had been "exceptionally good" in recent weeks.

None of this has calmed the situation, sparking concerns that the PA could collapse later this year.

The Netanyahu government has Washington's support in its campaign against the Palestinians, with President Barack Obama endorsing the crackdown and condemning in "the strongest terms Palestinian violence," while reaffirming his "strong belief that Israel has not just the right, but the obligation to protect itself."

Washington is expected to increase annual US military aid to Israel to possibly as much as \$5 billion a year for the next 10 years. A key factor in this is the need, expressed in a report by the US Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute published in January 2015, for "US security and military support" to its key allies in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly Israel, over access to recent vast discoveries of regional oil and gas.



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