

Clampdown worsens in Israel following Tel Aviv shooting

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and the racist Zionist parties grouped around him are seeking to exploit anger and anxiety of Israelis in the face of the Palestinian attack in downtown Tel Aviv last week. They demand ever more oppressive measures against the Palestinians, and intensified state repression within Israel.

The two attackers, 22-year-old Mohammad Makhamrah and his cousin, 21-year-old Mohammad Ahmad Makhamrah, ordered drinks in the café in the upscale Sarone Market and then shot and killed four Israelis and injured six others.

Among the victims was 58-year-old sociologist Michael Feige at Ben Gurion University who had written and lectured extensively about Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the effects of war and terrorism on the Israeli psyche. His book, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*, won the Shapiro Prize for Best Book from the Association of Israel Studies in 2010. In his recent study of Rabin assassin Yigal Amir, he noted that "a large percentage of political murderers in Israel have come from the ethnic margins of Gush Emunim and of the ideological settler community."

The security forces shot the attackers, hospitalising one of them, before arresting them. The two men appeared to have been acting alone. No Palestinian group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Far-right Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman ordered a sweeping crackdown, sending military reinforcements to the West Bank, cancelling entry permits for more than 80,000 Palestinians planning to visit Israel or East Jerusalem, and ordering the suspension of the return of slain Palestinian bodies to their families. He is seeking to speed up the demolition of homes of alleged terrorists. He imposed a lockdown

on Yatta, a town near Hebron where the assailants live, house-to-house searches and the demolition of their family homes. Security forces even detained around 100 Yatta school students as they tried to leave the town to take their final exams.

Parliament signed off new counterterrorism legislation giving security services greater powers to detain and prosecute people in Israel, not the West Bank, making it possible for "passive members" of groups classified as terrorist organisations to be indicted. It allows for the defence minister to confiscate property believed to belong to outlawed groups without seeking judicial approval.

The government's fascistic supporters rejoiced that Tel Aviv, noted for its more secular and liberal attitude, had been the subject of an attack—the first lethal attack in Israel since March when an American citizen was killed in Jaffa. Since then the number and severity of attacks on Israelis has declined sharply. Nonetheless, the repression of the Palestinians by Israel's security forces has continued unabated alongside almost daily incidents of settler violence against the Palestinians, their lives, homes, farms and vehicles that go unpunished.

The Israeli state is seeking to create the conditions for a full-scale conflict with the Palestinians that could go as far as another war on the West Bank and Gaza.

On Tuesday, Al Jazeera reported that Israel's national water company has cut crucial water supplies to large areas of the West Bank, leaving tens of thousands without access to safe drinking water during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Ayman Rabi, executive director of the Palestinian Hydrology Group, told the news service that "in some areas people had not received water for more than 40 days."

Yesterday, the Israeli journal *Yedioth Ahronoth*

revealed a plan to build a “concrete wall tens of meters deep underground and above ground to counter the threat of Hamas attack tunnels.” It will stretch along the 60 miles of the southern border around the Gaza Strip, the third defence system of its kind Israel has built along the border. It cited a senior defence official stating baldly that “a confrontation with Hamas is inevitable, it must be the last one.”

Pent-up frustration among Palestinians exploded last summer over attempts by religious and nationalist bigots to change the status of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound to allow Jews to pray there, leading to a number of lone attacks on Israelis, 32 of them fatal, to which the Israeli security forces responded with extreme brutality. They have killed at least 207 Palestinians, injured thousands more, arrested thousands of people, included children, imposed lockdowns, and demolished the family homes of the alleged assailants, particularly in the Hebron area.

Arab parties have warned against the impact of such escalating repression. The head of the Joint Arab list bloc Ayman Odeh said, “My heart goes out to the families. An attack against innocent people is always reprehensible, there can be no justification for shooting civilians in the street.” But, he added, the far-right coalition government had contributed to a “deepening of hatred and violence.”

Arab list legislators Ahmed Tibi and Osama Saadi said, “We reject attacks on civilians in every way. Such an act does not advance Palestinian rights.” But they added that the “collective punishment” of Palestinians for the Tel Aviv attackers would not solve the problem: “Only ending the occupation will bring peace.”

Political disquiet is echoed more broadly. Tel Aviv’s Labour Mayor Ron Huldai, whose track record of shutting down the 2011 social protests over housing and taking measures to prevent further protests shows he is no liberal, blamed the Tel Aviv attack on Israel’s occupation of the West Bank. He told Israeli army radio, “We might be the only country in the world where another nation is under occupation without civil rights. ... You can’t hold people in a situation of occupation and hope they’ll reach the conclusion everything is alright.”

He called for a resumption of peace talks and said, “There has been an occupation for 49 years, which I was part of and I know the reality, and I know leaders

need courage to not just talk. We have to show our neighbours that we have true intentions to return to a reality of a smaller Jewish state with a clear Jewish majority.”

More telling than Huldai’s musings over how to defend Israel’s identity as a Jewish state, the father of Ido Ben Ari, one of the four victims, accused the government of exacerbating the situation. Speaking at his son’s funeral, he said, “Last night, after the attack, the prime minister and two of his ministers arrived and yet another security cabinet issued decrees—not to return corpses, to put up barriers, to destroy houses and to make lives harder.

“These solutions create suffering, hatred, despair and [lead] to more people joining the circle of terror,” he said. “What’s needed is a solution rather than saying all the time that there’s nobody to make peace with.”

While successive governments have fostered bigotry, anti-Palestinian sentiment, chauvinism and xenophobia, such attitudes are by no means universal in Israel, which is a deeply divided country in every way. In the 2015 general election, the Labour-dominated Zionist Unity coalition, Meretz and the Joint List—all of which seek some sort of accommodation with the Palestinians—gained more than 50 percent of Tel Aviv’s votes in contrast to Jerusalem, where they took just 15 percent of the vote.

It was noticeable that Tel Aviv’s police arrested the two assailants, rather than executing them on the spot as has happened in almost all the previous lone attacks on Israelis. On an earlier occasion, when a dozen plain-clothed police beat up a Palestinian Israeli near a Tel Aviv supermarket where he worked because he refused to show his identity card, his mainly Jewish co-workers defended their colleague against the police.

Even in the midst of the daily escalation of official reaction, the seeds of an opposed development are emerging—the forging of a unified struggle of Jewish and Arab workers on the basis of a socialist and internationalist programme.



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