

Israel's shoot-to-kill policy on Gaza border claims more lives

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7 April 2018

Israel's military forces killed seven Palestinian protestors along Gaza's border and injured around 200 more, five of them seriously, according to Gaza's health ministry. Israel Defense Forces (IDF) used live rounds and tear gas against protestors throwing stones and burning car tyres to create smoke to screen themselves from sniper fire.

About 10,000 Palestinians took part in the second "March of Return" protest yesterday, which they called "Jumat al-Kawshook" or "Friday of tyres."

Also, solidarity protests took place in several towns and cities in the West Bank, including Ramallah and Al-Bireh. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, 37 Palestinians were injured by live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas canisters.

Rallies in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza were called for Friday evening and Saturday in cities in the United States, Britain, France and elsewhere in Europe.

Israel's Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman had earlier warned that "open-fire rules for the Gaza border will remain unchanged" and that anyone approaching the border was endangering their life. He promised a "reaction of the harshest kind like last week."

Without providing a shred of evidence, Israel has accused Hamas, which governs Gaza, of using the protests as a cover for carrying out attacks on the border.

Friday's demonstration was called as the culmination of the second of six weeks of peaceful protests, demanding the right to return of Palestinian exiles to their ancestors' villages and towns in what is now Israel—a demand that Israeli officials reject because it would reduce Jewish citizens to a minority.

The Palestinians are also calling for the full implementation of the United Nations General

Assembly Resolution 194 of December 1948 stipulating that "the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date."

Of the 1.9 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, 1.3 million are refugees, according to Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics report in February 2018.

The March of Return will conclude on May 15, the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel, which the Palestinians commemorate as *Nakba* (Catastrophe Day). The US is set to open its embassy in Jerusalem on that day, as announced last year by President Donald Trump. The Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state.

Last Friday, Israeli troops and sharpshooters killed at least 16 people—a total that has now risen to 20 as others have succumbed to their injuries. At least 23 have been killed in the last week, including a Palestinian killed by an Israeli drone late Wednesday in the Gaza Strip, according to Gaza's health ministry.

Evidence of the IDF killing spree is provided by video footage showing that at least two of those murdered were unarmed as they walked slowly towards the border with Israel, while another man was shot in the back as he ran away from the border holding a car tyre.

Not a single Israeli was killed or even injured, and no Israeli property was damaged or at risk.

A further 1,400 Palestinians were injured, more than half by live ammunition and steel-tipped rubber bullets. It was the deadliest day of violence since Israel's 2014 war on Gaza, which killed 2,250 Palestinians, the majority of whom were civilians.

Ahmad Abu Artema, who conceived the idea of the March of Return, is not affiliated to Hamas, and rejects armed resistance, partly because it has failed. Instead,

he puts forward a plan for mass civil disobedience as promoted by Mahatma Gandhi against British rule in India. His plan won the backing of several Gaza-based Palestinian groups. He said, “It’s not necessary to resist the occupation with bullets. You can resist the occupation with *dabke* [traditional Palestinian music and dancing], or by just sitting there.”

Irrespective of the value of such a strategy, it confirms that Israel used live fire on a peaceful, unarmed protest.

Israel’s chief military spokesman, Brigadier General Ronen Manelis, warned on Monday that the IDF would step up its violence on the Gaza border. He added that the IDF had restricted its actions thus far to the border fence, but it was prepared to “act against these terror organizations in other places too,” that is, within Gaza.

B’Tselem, the human rights organization, condemned Israel’s use of live fire on the civilian protesters, calling it criminal and illegal. It said that live fire should only be used when troops face “tangible and immediate mortal danger, and only in the absence of any other alternative.” It has launched a “Sorry Commander, I cannot shoot,” campaign, urging Israeli soldiers to disobey orders to shoot unarmed protesters in Gaza, which it argues are “manifestly illegal.”

The group criticized the Israeli military for announcing, even before the March began, that soldiers would use live fire against protesters, even if they were hundreds of meters away from the border fence.

The New York-based Human Rights Watch stated that last week’s killings were unlawful and “calculated,” and noted that the border protests posed no immediate threat to Israeli soldiers.

Within Israel, there have been small demonstrations in Tel Aviv, Jaffa and near the border with Gaza protesting at Israel’s unprovoked murders.

The US, Israel’s chief benefactor, unable to stop the holding of an emergency session of the UN Security Council, blocked a draft statement condemning Israel’s use of force against protesters at the Gaza border. Not one of the major powers spoke out against this filthy manoeuvre.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, then called for an “independent and transparent investigation” and reaffirmed “the readiness” of the world body to

revitalise peace efforts.

This is a fraud and a diversion. Previous UN inquiries, including the report into the 2014 Israeli war on Gaza, provide detailed evidence of Israeli war crimes, but use irrelevant legal arguments to draw conclusions entirely at odds with their own evidence and absolve Israel of criminal responsibility for its actions. Last year, Guterres succumbed to US pressure, suppressing a UN report that found Israel practices apartheid against Palestinians.

Speaking for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government, Lieberman flatly refused the UN’s pathetic entreaties, saying that the government would not carry out any inquiry into the casualties. “From the standpoint of the [IDF] soldiers, they did what had to be done,” he said. “All of our troops deserve a commendation.”

While the UN issued a warning to Israel to use “extreme caution” in facing the second round of mass protests, it toed the Israeli line and called on organizers of the March not to put women and children in danger.

Israel has repeatedly accused Hamas and other militant groups of using women and children as human shields to excuse its own murder of innocent civilians.

Trump’s Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt went further in giving Israel a green light to do whatever it liked. He told the Palestinians to engage solely in peaceful protests and demanded that the protesters “should remain outside the 500-meter buffer zone; and should not approach the border fence in any way or any location.”

Turning reality on its head, he refused to condemn Israel’s murder spree, condemning instead “leaders and protestors who call for violence or who send protestors—including children—to the fence, knowing that they may be injured or killed.”

Greenblatt demanded the Security Council “send a clear message to the Palestinian leadership insisting that it put an end to these riots that only serve to sow violence and instability.”



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