

Israel to carry out more mass arrests of Palestinians in pursuit of ethnic cleansing

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On Sunday night, Israel's police force announced a programme of mass arrests of Israel's Palestinian citizens for participating in recent demonstrations opposing the bombing of Gaza and evictions in East Jerusalem, as well as against Israeli security forces' raids on the al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

Codenamed "Operation law and order," its purpose is to intimidate and penalise the Palestinians who took to the streets over the last two weeks. The police reported that they had already arrested around 1,550 Palestinians since May 9 and they intend to "prosecute" many more.

It comes just days after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced Israel's Palestinian citizens protesting decades of state-sponsored discrimination as "terrorists." He pledged that "Anyone who acts like a terrorist will be handled like one," adding, "Arab law-breakers are attacking Jews, burning synagogues and Jewish homes."

He naturally all but ignored the far greater violence perpetrated by the police and armed Jewish vigilantes to terrorise and force the Palestinians, who constitute 20 percent of Israel's population, from their homes.

Police Minister Amir Ohana went further. Expressing outrage when the police arrested Jews suspected of murdering a Palestinian in the city of Lod, he and other senior politicians forced the police to release them and called for Jewish Israelis to act as a "force multiplier" for the police.

The police said that thousands of security forces from "all units", including border guards and reserve brigades, would be deployed to carry out raids in the towns and cities with a large Palestinian population. They will search homes and carry out "investigations" with a view to pressing charges and imposing prison sentences. It is expected that more than 500 Palestinian homes will be raided in the coming days.

The provocative announcement made no mention of arresting the armed Jewish settlers that attacked Palestinians, their cars and homes, and whose shocking violence was captured in videos and pictures shared widely on social media. So far, 140 indictments have been brought against 230 people, all but a handful of whom are Palestinians, including minors, on charges of assaulting police officers, demonstrating, throwing stones and arson. Very few charges relate to the acts of violence against the Palestinians.

The methods long used to terrorise the Palestinians in the occupied territories are now to be used against Israel's own citizens. This flows inexorably from Israel's 2018 Jewish supremacist nation state law that sanctions apartheid and ethnic cleansing.

The Nation State law, which makes no mention of Israel's non-Jewish citizens, democracy or equality, enshrines Israel as "the national home of the Jewish people" throughout the world who have automatic right to immigration and citizenship and proclaims Jerusalem "complete and united" as Israel's capital. It lays the basis for the exclusion of Arabs from Jewish communities and demotes Arabic from its position as an official state language.

This crackdown on the Palestinians comes in the wake of a provocation by dozens of far-right Jewish settlers who, with the protection of Israel's special forces, entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem Sunday, hours after the police had beaten and assaulted worshippers praying in the Mosque, Islam's third-holiest site. The police also increased restrictions at the gates leading to Al-Aqsa, stopping worshippers under the age of 45 from entering the Mosque.

In the last few days, extremist groups have used social media to call on Jewish worshippers to enter the

compound, where under an agreement confirmed in 1967 with Jordan whose Waqf Ministry is the legal custodian of the site, only Muslims can pray.

These ultra-nationalist and religious groups who have visited the compound, known as the Temple Mount to Jews, in increasing numbers in recent years, are seeking to build the Third Jewish Temple and reinstate sacrifices on the grounds of Al-Aqsa Mosque, the site of the second Jewish Temple destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. This has made the Mosque a flashpoint in Israeli-Palestinian relations, as fears mount of an Israeli takeover of all or part of the site.

There were several attempts by Jewish extremist groups to blow up the Islamic sites in the al-Aqsa compound in the 1980s. In 1990, riots erupted after the Temple Mount Faithful announced they were going to lay the cornerstone for a new Temple in the grounds, prompting the police to ban the group from entering the compound. The ban has been lifted as the power of these groups within official Israel politics has grown and successive governments have encouraged their efforts to pray at the site. These layers have grown ever more aggressive with the election of six members of the Religious Zionism-Jewish Power bloc to the Knesset in last March's election.

Fears over al-Aqsa have grown in line with Israel's repeated statements of its intention to retain control of East Jerusalem in perpetuity. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Israel has expropriated more than one-third of East Jerusalem for the construction of settlements, despite the ban under international humanitarian law on transferring civilians to occupied territory. Israel has zoned only 13 percent of East Jerusalem—home to 380,000 Palestinians—for Palestinian construction, where Palestinians are officially allowed to obtain building permits that are in practice both expensive and difficult to obtain. As a result, much construction takes place illegally, providing the authorities with the pretext to demolish the buildings and evict the residents.

On Saturday, Israeli police attacked a joint Palestinian/Jewish protest against the potential evictions of several families in Sheikh Jarrah, an East Jerusalem neighbourhood, to make way for settlers' homes, dispersing them with torrents of foul-smelling skunk water. Their long-running case is shortly to be

decided by the Supreme Court. The next day, security forces killed a Palestinian driver who crashed his car into a police roadblock, injuring six officers, while three or four soldiers “guarded” each home, threatening to beat up the residents if they went outside. The police have prevented Palestinian—but not Jewish—non-residents from entering the neighbourhood, cutting it off from the surrounding area and turning it into a military zone.

Israel's military forces also rounded up 41 Palestinians in raids on Sunday/Monday morning across the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. The Palestinian Prisoner Society said around 500 Palestinians had been arrested in the West Bank since mid-April. Israeli forces have killed at least 31 Palestinians, including four under the age of 18, in the West Bank since May 10.

This has the full support of US imperialism. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking before he set off on Monday for Israel, the West Bank, Jordan and Egypt, reaffirmed the Biden administration's support for a two-state solution—as a longer-term goal—so Israelis and Palestinians can live “with equal measures of security, of peace and dignity.”

This was sheer hypocrisy, given that he had reiterated in an interview with *This Week*, the ABC news programme, Washington's “ironclad commitment to Israel's security” including “giving Israel the means to defend itself.”

The Biden administration would replenish Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system and see through its \$735 million arms sale to Israel, he pledged.

President Joe Biden insisted that Blinken would be talking to “other key partners in the region” on a range of issues, including the international effort to ensure some assistance reaches Gaza but without going through Hamas, which rules Gaza. This is in line with Israel Defense Forces chief Aviv Kochavi's insistence that humanitarian funds are funneled through the Palestinian Authority.



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