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Israeli troops murder Palestinian and Syrian protesters

By Chris Marsden

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Israeli troops killed 13 protesters, after opening fire on a peaceful and unarmed demonstration at the ceasefire line in the occupied Golan Heights.

After an attempt was made to cut a line of barbed wire in the Majdal Shams area, Israeli troops stopped firing warning shots and targeted protesters.

Syrian TV said 13 protesters were killed and 225 wounded.

According to AFP, its reporter saw “at least 20 people with injuries, some soaked in blood as they were evacuated from the scene”.

It noted, “On the Israeli side, Majdal Shams locals pleaded with soldiers to stop firing as troops used loudspeakers to warn demonstrators in Arabic that ‘anyone who comes close to the fence will be responsible for their own blood’”.

Fuad al-Sha’ar, an apple grower who lives in Majdal Shams, told Reuters, “This is like a turkey shoot”.

Dr. Ali Kanaan, the director of the Quneitra hospital, was reported by AP stating that five people had been killed and 94 wounded, with six in critical condition.

The *Irish Times* commented, “The event took on the trappings of a spectator event on Israeli television, which broadcast the scene live with running commentary from reporters on the ground. ‘Hopa!’ exclaimed a correspondent for Israel’s Channel 10 television. ‘A Palestinian youth just bolted from a trench. An Israeli sniper fired at him three times, but it looks like he missed’”.

Israel Radio reported that a large number of people were also hurt when an anti-tank mine was detonated at Quneitra, another protest site near the border.

Clashes also took place between hundreds of protesters who marched to the Qalandia checkpoint at Ramallah on the West Bank and at a Gaza march to the Erez border crossing. Troops fired tear gas and rubber bullets.

On the West Bank, a Palestinian medic said 14 Palestinians were wounded by rubber bullets. Israeli forces also deployed a ‘skunk mobile’, which sprays demonstrators with a foul-smelling liquid.

There were smaller demonstrations in Hebron and the village of Deir al-Hatab, where a march was attempted on the Israeli Elon Moreh settlement. Demonstrators gathered at a gas station near the village of Isawiyah in East Jerusalem, hurling rocks at security forces, and protesters near Mount Scopus hurled firebombs at the back of the Hadassah University Hospital.

There are numerous reports of injuries, though the numbers cited differ. Israel’s Channel 2 reported that over 50 people were wounded in clashes, while other sources cite over 100.

The protests were to mark the 44th anniversary of the Six-Day War, Naksa Day, when Israel captured the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

On May 15, Israel opened fire and killed at least 15 protesters who successfully breached the border with Syria and Lebanon—to mark the 1948 Palestinian exodus after the creation of Israel. This time, the Lebanese army banned any gatherings at its border with Israel.

The violence unleashed by the Israeli state and its treatment in the Israeli media suggest a regime that is increasingly desperate and unhinged, in the face of a wave of mass struggles now shaking the Arab world, from Tunisia and Egypt to Yemen and Bahrain. Indeed, there are growing signs of internal divisions over foreign policy, as top ex-Israeli intelligence officials publicly distance themselves from the policies of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Israeli government was unapologetic about suppressing both the most recent and the May 15 protests, claiming Syria was mounting the incursion in order to deflect attention from its own suppression of domestic anti-government protests. Israel’s chief military spokesman, brigadier-general Yoav Mordechai, described Israel’s response as “measured, focused and proper”.

Netanyahu told his cabinet, “Unfortunately, extremist forces around us are trying today to breach our borders and threaten our communities and our citizens. We will not let them do that”.

Israel's military preparations were extensive. Thousands of troops were mobilised at Israeli borders with Gaza Strip, Lebanon, and Syria and throughout the West Bank. Majdal Shams was classified as a military closed area, and a new fence and land mines were laid.

Responsibility for this latest Israeli outrage must also be laid at the door of the White House. Last month, President Barack Obama closed a week of discussion with Netanyahu by telling a May 22 meeting of the right-wing American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) that the "commitment of the United States to the security of Israel is ironclad", and that any final settlement with the Palestinians would have to take into account "the new demographic realities on the ground".

Netanyahu has interpreted this correctly as giving him *carte blanche* to do whatever he sees fit to crush all resistance to Israel's seizure of the Occupied Territories.

The Netanyahu government's actions are so inflammatory that the former head of Mossad, Meir Dagan, who retired in January, described them as "irresponsible and reckless" in the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*.

He stated that together with himself as head of Mossad, Yuval Diskin, the head of the Shin Bet internal security agency, and IDF head Gabi Ashkenazi, the three could prevent Netanyahu and Barak from making mistakes. Now, however, all three have been replaced by men chosen by the current government. "Now I am afraid that there is no one to stop Bibi [Netanyahu] and [Defence Minister Ehud] Barak", he said.

Dagan has warned publicly against barely concealed plans for Israel to attack Iran, warning that this would put Israel at the centre of a regional war.

His statements prompted Science and Technology Minister Daniel Herschkowitz to state that Dagan should stand trial, and Minister without Portfolio Yossi Peled to state that he had behaved irresponsibly and harmed Israel. "Israel needs to say that it will do everything to ensure its existence, and that's it", he said.

However, Kadima MK and former director of Shin Bet, Avi Dichter, said, "I'm glad he spoke out.... I don't think there are any operational comments here. He didn't discuss times or methods of attack".

Rami Igra, a former senior Mossad official, also told the *Jerusalem Post* that Dagan "has a right to say what he thinks, and his view is based on many years of experience in security".

Israel is still divided on the regime change in Syria, but Barak has stated, "Assad is approaching the moment in which he will lose his authority.... I don't think Israel should be alarmed by the possibility of Assad being replaced".

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman also condemned the Western powers for not acting in support of the opposition in Syria like it has in Libya. "These inconsistencies send a damaging

message to the people of the Middle East and further erode the path to peace, security and democracy for our region”, he said.

The Palestinian Authority, meanwhile, has accepted an invitation from the Sarkozy government to attend a Paris conference in July seeking to revive peace talks with Israel, after French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé met with Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas last week.

The PA said it accepted the invite only if both sides agree to halt unilateral actions, including Israel halting settlement building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Netanyahu has no intention of doing so. He told the press, “We very much appreciate our French friends, and I will respond to them after weighing the matter.... We will study the proposal and also discuss it with our American friends”.