

Israel implements collective punishment after the stabbing of teenager

By Jean Shaoul
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Following the stabbing of a 13-year-old Israeli girl in the West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba by a young Palestinian on Thursday, Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government moved swiftly to implement their now standard measures of collective punishment, in flagrant violation of international law.

At the same time, the government is using the attack to expand the settlements and incorporate Area C—which is under Israeli military control—into Israel and in the process drive Palestinians living there from their homes. These measures have in turn provoked further attacks by the Palestinians in the West Bank and Israel and ever more strident demands for further repressive measures against the Palestinians by Israel's right wing.

According to reports, 19-year-old Muhammad Tarayrah jumped the settlement's security fence, entered the home of the teenager who was alone sleeping and stabbed her repeatedly. The US State Department later reported that the girl was an American citizen.

The settlement's civilian defence guards, alerted by the security fence's alarm, rushed to the scene and killed Tarayrah and wounded another guard who had already entered the house. The security forces arrested Tarayrah's father and other family members.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cynically used the attack to call for world leaders to condemn the incident, saying, "The entire world needs to condemn this murder, just as it condemned the terrorist attacks in Orlando and Brussels."

He and Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman immediately issued a joint statement revoking the work permits of the attacker's extended family employed in the settlement. Israel set in motion the process for approving the demolition of the Tarayrah family home, and ordering the investigation of the entire family. A local government official said that all Palestinian workers had been stopped from working in Kiryat Arba.

As well as ordering the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to lock down the Palestinian town of Bani Na'im, home to Tarayrah and 21,000 Palestinians indefinitely, the Netanyahu government also imposed a lockdown on Hebron and the surrounding area, affecting 700,000 people, the largest such closure since the kidnapping and murder of three Jewish youths in the West Bank in 2014.

The IDF carried out detention raids in Bani Nai'im and Hebron, as clashes broke out between Palestinian youths and the IDF, who fired rubber-coated steel bullets and tear gas in response. Two additional battalions have now been sent to reinforce the army's stranglehold over the area, with the emphasis on securing the roads.

The government announced that it would deduct the money paid monthly by the Palestinian Authority (PA) to the assailants and their families from tax proceeds it collects on behalf of the Palestinians, which could amount to tens of millions shekels a month. This is despite the fact that the PA has worked closely with Israel to police the Palestinian population.

Netanyahu announced that the government would allocate further funds to fortify the settlements in the West Bank, in addition to the \$23 million previously announced. He also announced the reopening of a tender to build 42 housing units in Kiryat Arba, part of plans for new residential and industrial areas that have already been approved.

Moreover, the demolition of hundreds of buildings erected without permits by Palestinians in parts of the West Bank classified as Area C, starting with the area around Bani Nai'im, is to be accelerated.

Israel's Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan has also ordered the closure of a television station catering to Israel's Palestinian citizens.

Other ministers are calling for additional measures, including the declaration of a state of emergency, the introduction of legislation to enable the expulsion of the

assailants' families and the cutting off of Internet and cellular access in the Hebron area.

This stabbing of the young teenager, like so many incidents that have led to the recent deaths of more than 220 Palestinians, 33 Israelis, two US citizens and an Eritrean, as well as the wounding of hundreds, is a tragedy for both communities. But it is symptomatic of the intolerable conditions facing the Palestinians.

Tarayrah came from an impoverished town whose economy has been devastated by Israel's five-decades-long occupation of the West Bank and its restrictions on movement. With unemployment running at around 30 percent, many Palestinians returned to agriculture to eke out an existence under conditions where settlers attack their property, land and lives with impunity on an almost daily basis. This dovetails with Israel's broader plans to depopulate villages near the settlements by scaring the Palestinians into leaving their land and thereby make room for the expansion of the settlements.

Tarayrah dropped out of school and was reportedly grief-stricken by the death of his 18-year-old cousin Yousef Walid Tarayrah, who was killed by Israeli security forces last March after allegedly carrying out a car-ramming attack on Israeli soldiers, lightly wounding four. On his Facebook page he had apparently praised 18-year-old Majd al-Khudour, who was killed after ramming her car into a bus stop near Kiryat Arba a week ago (although witnesses claim that the incident was probably an accident).

The nearby settlement of Kiryat Arba is home to some of Israel's most fascistic forces. It was founded in 1968 by right-wing zealots, Moshe Levinger and Eliezer Waldman, on the eastern outskirts of Hebron. One of its most infamous residents was Baruch Goldstein, who in 1994 massacred 29 unarmed Palestinian worshippers and wounded 129 more, before being beaten to death by survivors of the massacre. He is buried opposite the town's park, named after Meir Kahane, who founded Kach, the now banned far-right political party, in a grave that became a site of pilgrimage for Jewish extremists.

Successive governments have for decades sponsored the growth of such fascistic elements as shock troops for their project of a Greater Israel that can only be achieved by the relentless repression and dispossession of the Palestinian people.

At the same time, the handful of Israeli families that control economic life in Israel demand ever more dictatorial forms of rule to enforce the social inequality that is the second highest within the Organisation for

Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). According to Israel's National Insurance Institute's 2015 report, more than 1.7 million were living in poverty in 2014, including about one in three children, a slight increase on 2013.

Tarayrah's desperate action—in effect, a suicide mission—expresses the dead end of both the Zionist and Palestinian perspective of a nation-state. Fatah, the dominant faction in the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)—whose perspective of a Palestinian state alongside Israel is embodied in the 1993 Oslo Accords—and the Palestinian Authority, has become integrated into the Washington-backed Israeli security apparatus. Hamas, Fatah's political opponent, is no less reactionary. Its aim of establishing an Islamic state in Palestine that would inevitably exclude non-Muslims provides no progressive way out of the present impasse.

At its heart, the tragedy unfolding today in Israel/Palestine represents the bitter legacy of a nationalist perspective, and the ideological confusion and political disorientation that prevents the working class from adopting an alternative to exploitation by their own ruling class and imperialism.

It is only through the unification of the Israeli and Palestinian working class along with their class brothers and sisters throughout the region, in a joint struggle to defend their common interests against capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression and establish the United Socialist States of the Middle East, that the ever-escalating violence can be halted.

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