

Israeli Officials Threaten Return to Illegal Intifada-Era Policy of Demolishing Suspects' Homes

By [Alex Kane](#)

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A bulldozer demolishes a Palestinian home in Jerusalem in February 2012. (Photo: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images)

The Israeli army's rampage across the West Bank is the largest operation since the second Palestinian uprising, and has brought to mind Intifada-era images of Israeli soldiers waging battle on the streets of Palestinian cities. The return to Intifada-era policies may soon get worse for Palestinians.

Since the reported abduction of three Israeli youths from the Gush Etzion settlement bloc on June 12th, Israel has stepped up raids and arrests during an operation that [human rights groups are calling "collective punishment."](#) Israeli officials are threatening to escalate that collective punishment by destroying the homes of the families of Palestinian militants.

Earlier this week, [the Jerusalem Post's Herb Keinon and Yonah Jeremy Bob reported](#) that unnamed sources told the paper that the once-abandoned policy of destroying the homes of alleged militants involved in attacks—and thus harming suspects' families—would return. An official told the paper that the policy "levels the playing field somewhat."

This was a hallmark of Israeli policy during the Second Intifada—a measure that, [as+972 Magazine's Michael Omer-Man points out, violates the Geneva Conventions](#), which only allows demolitions that are necessary for military operations. [According to Israeli rights group B'Tselem](#), Israeli soldiers demolished 664 Palestinian homes as punishment for crimes against soldiers or civilians from 2001-2005. Those destroyed homes were in addition to other homes destroyed across other areas—notably Jerusalem—for building without a permit (which is hard to come by for Palestinians).

Israel stopped using home demolitions for punitive purposes in 2005, though there was one case of the army doing so in 2009, [according to B'Tselem](#). But Israel is reportedly looking for a court to approve their desire to destroy the family homes of two Palestinians convicted of [killing police officer Baruch Mizrahi near Hebron in April](#). In a statement, B'Tselem criticized Israel's intention of harming family members, who are not guilty of any crime. The planned demolitions would impact 13 people, including 8 children.

"Years ago, the army concluded that punitive home demolitions are not an effective measure to deter attacks against Israelis, and there are even indications that they achieve the opposite effect," the [human rights group said](#). "It seems therefore that the motives are reaping revenge and politically capitalizing on the current public mood in Israel, in light of the abduction."

In a separate development, Israeli news outlets [reported last week](#) that the Attorney General had given permission to the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security service, to use abusive interrogation tactics on the detainees picked up during recent raids meant to strike a blow at Hamas and gather intelligence on the reported abduction.

In 1999, the Israeli High Court outlawed the torture regime the Shin Bet used for years, though human rights groups have said Israel has continued to torture some detainees. The court decision also allowed for abusive means—"moderate physical pressure" (MPP) in the court's words—to be used on "ticking time bombs," which refers to detainees who had information on imminent threats to Israel life. These [abusive means](#) have included the "shabach" position—tying a prisoner's arms and legs to chairs—beatings and sleep deprivation.

In response to the reports that Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein had authorized tactics that constitute ill-treatment of prisoners, the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, Adalah, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel released a statement [criticizing the decision](#):

MPP is a euphemistic term for practices that constitute torture or ill-treatment, which are strictly prohibited by international law. The sweeping designation of the new detainees as ticking bombs therefore means that MPP can be used during their interrogations by Israeli security authorities...

In light of these developments, the human rights organizations reassert that there is never an acceptable reason for the use of torture or ill-treatment, and that force-feeding and "enhanced interrogations" are nothing less than a guise for the use of torture.

Alex Kane is an assistant editor for Mondoweiss and the World editor for AlterNet. Follow him on Twitter @alexbkane.

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