

commando unit set up by cabinet decree. Such commandos report directly to the Army Chief of Staff, rather than functioning via the normal chain of command. They typically move in cars with West Bank and Gaza license plates, as do the Black Scorpions. Such units have previously been used to assassinate PLO cadres abroad; with the intifada, they are operating more in Palestine itself. As if to prove their existence, «unknown assailants» in November violently attacked the two Reuters correspondents who had written about the hit squads. Such methods are obviously part of the Israeli command's thinking: Chief of Staff Shomron was a member of the IDF/Mossad unit, the General Staff Headquarters' Reconnaissance Patrol, when he led the attack on Entebbe airport in 1976; chief of army operations, Major General Ehud Barak, commanded the 1973 raid on Beirut in which three PLO leaders were killed, and was also involved in the assassination of Abu Jihad (*Israel and Palestine*, October-November 1988).

The Israeli government has denied the existence of such units. Yet in early December, Rabin thanked the Shin Bet for «solving» over 600 attacks on Israeli targets and arresting over 600 Palestinians in the past two months.

The most substantive proof of the existence of death squads, in one form or another, is events themselves. From November through January, over ten Palestinians died in circumstances which point to the existence of hit teams or the army acting as such. Here we are not speaking about martyrs who fell when the army opened fire on demonstrations, but about local activists singled out for death or beating in ambushes, kidnappings, house raids, shooting from civilian cars, etc. In most cases, the assassins seemed to know who they were looking for; in several cases, eyewitnesses and/or members of the victim's family were arrested, beaten or otherwise harassed to silence them.

SHOOTING TO KILL

Such events make us view Rabin's recent measures more as a routinization of existing lawlessness by the occupation army and intelligence services,

Democratic Palestine, March 1989

rather than a new policy. The other indication of the murderous intent of Israeli policy is the rising casualty rates: From November 1st to 27th, 250 Palestinians were hospitalized in the Gaza Strip alone, according to UNRWA counts, the bulk of them after November 15th as the occupation army punished Palestinians for celebrating the Declaration of Independence. Palestinian doctors noted an increase in head injuries. December recorded one of the highest death tolls from shooting to date, including Black Friday in Nablus, December 16th, when nine people died and over 40 were injured as a result of the occupation troops firing on a peaceful funeral procession for a martyr. In mid-January, Palestinians were being martyred at a rate of two daily. According to Palestinian sources, half the deaths were from «rubber bullets» - actually a metal ball thinly coated with rubber, which came into use in late 1988.

THE ARMY'S DILEMMA

Aside from obvious failure to halt or even lessen the intifada, the new Israeli measures appear to be doubly doomed, since they were announced amidst plaintive cries from the army itself about the impossibility of suppressing the uprising by brute force, and the consequences of this for the military's integrity.

On January 13th, Major General Menachem Einan, the army's logistics chief, resigned. Though the army spokesman claimed his resignation was simply to take a civilian job, Einan told the Israeli daily *Maariv*: «I am very worried about the level of morality of Israel's soldiers in the territories. We are making them face provocations that inspire maliciousness all too quickly» (AP, January 12th). Einan traced his uneasiness about this question back to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

In February, the 56th Israeli soldier was sentenced to prison for refusing to serve in the occupied territories during the uprising. In addition, it is estimated that 500 soldiers have requested and received transfers out of the territories without disciplinary measures being taken.

Perhaps the most significant statement came from the army chief of

staff, Shomron, who on January 10th told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that «there is no such thing as eradicating the intifada because in its essence it expresses the struggle of nationalism... Elsewhere in the world, the ruling power relinquished occupied territory when civilian participation went beyond a certain degree, but our position is not the same since the confrontation is happening right here at home.» Shomron, of course, didn't draw the obvious conclusion of his own realization, but rather pledged that the army would continue in its duties to «enable the political echelons to operate from a position of strength, so that the violence cannot force the government to take decisions under pressure.»

Shamir was highly critical of Shomron's admissions, but he was subsequently confronted by even stronger expressions of doubt when he visited reserve paratroopers deployed in occupied Nablus, on January 18th. Below are examples of what he heard as reported by the Israeli paper *Hadashot*, January 20th:

«Here, in this place, a people is being born. Among us, in contrast, our unity is disintegrating. I think that a solution can be found only through diplomacy.»

«We're people who grew up on universal values, on human values. But in order to impose order in the casbah, we're obliged to behave violently and brutally against innocent people. I am conscious of the fact that I break the law of the army in order to force people to be frightened of me... I felt humiliated before the man I have to beat, because these aren't the values I was raised on. These aren't the values of dignity. I feel that he (the Palestinian) is getting stronger and I'm getting weaker. Whoever comes and says, then don't beat (people) simply doesn't understand the reality on the ground. An oppressive regime must oppress. That's what it is all about. That's why this situation is catastrophic.»

The rising discontent in the army is only one of several conflicting internal pressures on the Zionist government. On the one hand, the settler movement in the West Bank has staged a series of protests against the government and army failure to quell the intifada; ►