

Intifada Deaths

Ronald R. Stockton*

On 8 December 1989, the uprising against Israeli rule in the occupied territories completed its second full year. During those twenty-four months, 656 Palestinians died with the direct responsibility of the Israeli authorities: 601 from gunfire, and 55 from non-bullet causes (mainly beatings). An additional 82 died from tear gas. Forty-five Israelis, as well as 150 Palestinians suspected of collaboration with the authorities, also died.**

This article, which represents an update of an earlier report that covered the first eleven months of the intifada,[†] focuses upon 357 deaths that occurred during the fourteen months between 1 November 1988 and 31 December 1989. It includes only deaths where official responsibility is virtually certain, specifically 339 shooting deaths (320 by the military, 16 by settlers, and 3 by collaborators), 17 beating and other non-gunshot deaths by the Israeli security forces, and 1 death in detention with prob-

*Ronald R. Stockton is a professor of political science at the University of Michigan-Dearborn.
**This article uses data provided by the Database Project on Palestinian Human Rights (DPPHR), an American organization affiliated with the Palestinian Human Rights Information Center (PHRIC) in Jerusalem. DPPHR figures are widely accepted by scholars and are used by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and the Israeli group B'Tselem. Comparing DPPHR figures to those reported by the State Department in its *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for 1987, 1988, and 1989, the State Department arrives at a cumulative death toll of 692 from the outbreak of the intifada through 31 December 1989, while the DPPHR figure for the same period is 672. This DPPHR total does not include tear gas deaths, which are listed separately, which may account for some of the difference. (The only year for which the State Department specifically mentioned tear gas deaths was in 1988, when it lists "at least four [deaths] from tear gas used by the IDF in enclosed areas.")
†See "Intifada Deaths," JPS 18, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 101-108.

able official involvement. Tear gas deaths are treated separately. All deaths are credited to the day on which the fatal incident occurred.*

Issues of Controversy

During the fourteen months covered by this analysis, several issues of controversy either emerged or continued to be debated. Particularly significant was the debate within Israel and beyond over soaring casualty rates, especially those caused by rubber, plastic, and rubber-covered metal bullets. These bullets were alleged to be non-lethal under regulated circumstances, but in fact produced many deaths and numerous injuries. (Joel Brinkley reported as early as 18 January 1989 in the *New York Times* that plastic bullets had killed at least 40 persons.)

Israeli domestic debate peaked in January 1989, when Ehud Olmert of Likud joined leftist critics of the government in expressing concern about casualties. Defense Minister Rabin had earlier defended the bullets by stating that "our purpose is to increase the number [of wounded] among those who take part in violent activities but not to kill them."¹ Responding to criticism of liberalized rules of engagement (that allowed soldiers to fire at those throwing stones, building barricades, or lighting tires), Rabin stated that such policies were designed to "bring down the level of euphoria" following the Algiers conference, the proclamation of a Palestinian state, and the opening of a U.S.-PLO dialogue.²

A second issue was the continuing debate over whether or not Israeli "death squads" were operating in the territories. Allegations to this effect had reached the Western press in late 1988 and continued into 1989. In September 1989 there were reports that the military had created "wanted lists" of 700 hard-core activists. Several individuals on these lists were subsequently shot to death, fueling speculation that the deaths were deliberate. An analysis of "suspicious" deaths is included below.

Finally, there was the killing of over 150 alleged collaborators, most of whom died in the latter half of 1989. Some observers saw an ominous parallel with the 1936-39 Arab Revolt, which had deteriorated into class and factional warfare. To prevent such a situation, the underground leadership of the uprising issued a leaflet in August calling for an end to unau-

*Not included in these figures are 87 deaths which the DPPHR lists separately under the heading "deaths under suspicious circumstances." These include confrontations with settlers, mysterious beatings, clashes with collaborators, accidental encounters with explosive devices, or deaths where automobiles were forced off the road.

thorized executions.³ Yasir Arafat, speaking over the Mideast service of Radio Monte Carlo, explained that a special PLO committee had to approve "all decisions on the issue of dealing with collaborators" and that any decision "must come from the leadership unanimously."⁴

Pattern One: Frequency of Deaths

Since the beginning of the intifada the number of fatalities per month has varied considerably, from a high of 48 to a low of 12. Deaths peaked in February, March, and April of 1988, when the government tried to suppress the uprising and fatalities soared. This attempt at military victory was quickly abandoned and has not been revived. These three months were the only ones in 1988 in which the death toll exceeded 30; in 1989, there were six such months, five within the last nine months. Moreover, if one excludes the 138 deaths during February, March, and April of 1988, the remaining 22 months have a total of 506 deaths, for an average of 23 deaths per month. Using this figure as a base for comparison, the intifada shows an overall rise in fatalities after its first year (see Table 1), with eight months of that year matching or exceeding the base, including seven during the last ten months. This persistence of fatalities across time reflects the depth of confrontation between Israeli authority and those under occupation, and is a clear indicator of the stand-off that exists in the territories.

Table 1: Death Patterns, November 1988-1989

	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	Total
Number of Deaths	13	30	19	17	28	33	38	21	31	34	23	34	14	22	357
Number in 17-35															
Age Range	9	10	10	8	21	19	25	15	17	14	16	29	11	15	219
Number below 13	2	2	2	2	3	5	2	2	3	4	2	2	0	1	32
Average age of Victims	19.3	20.1	17.5	19.1	20.3	19.1	22.8	20.7	20.2	18.7	20.8	24.9	20.3	20.7	20.5
(drop 0-9)	20.7			20.7	20.9	19.8		21.4		19.6		26.1			
Days with Fatalities	12	15	15	11	15	18	22	14	19	20	12	18	9	12	212
Death/Fatal day	1.08	2.0	1.27	1.54	1.87	1.83	1.73	1.5	1.63	1.7	1.9	1.9	1.6	1.8	(49.8%)
Suspicious Deaths	1	4	2	3	3	7	3	4	11	5	6	10	3	11	73

Pattern Two: Age of the Victims

Year Two of the uprising saw a shift in the nature of confrontations and of government strategy. The large crowds so characteristic of Year One were replaced by smaller groups, often made up of young men with keffiyas masking their faces. (Rules of engagement allow soldiers in clashes to fire at those with faces covered.) The military conducted more raids on houses (often in pre-dawn hours, resulting in many fatalities) and the number of children and teenagers killed remained high, eliciting complaints from human rights monitoring groups both inside and outside the country.

One question that arises is whether the average age of the victims rose, which could reflect a more focused targeting of militants or an intentional avoidance of children (as encouraged by military policy). Looking at overall patterns, the average age does not appear to be rising (see Table 1). In fact, the fourteen-month average of 20.5 years is below the 23.1 years average of the first eleven months of the uprising, and the number of children being killed remains relatively high (32 fatalities during the period under study were of children under 13, and BTselem, an Israeli human rights group, reported that a quarter of all Palestinian fatalities were under 16).⁵ But if one takes 1989 alone, there is evidence of a slight upward movement in age. Of the fourteen months under review, the average age of fatalities in five of the last eight months of the year exceeds the 20.5 overall average.

Looked at in American military terms (with 17 being the age at which one can join the armed forces and 36 being the upper limit of liability under the old Selective Service Law), then 219 of 357 fatalities, or 61 percent, fall into that range. If the parameters are dropped to 15 years old and raised to 39 years old, the percentage increases to 72 percent. As was true in Year One, the majority of deaths occurs in those age ranges that typically bear the brunt of combat in any society at war. Thus, while "the children of the stones" constitutes a profound and meaningful metaphor, it does not entirely reflect the empirical reality of death.

Pattern Three: Days With Deaths

Two statistics are helpful in understanding the pattern of death across time, a Fatal-Days Ratio and a Deaths-Per-Fatal-Day Ratio. The first is computed by dividing the number of Fatal Days (a day on which someone

died) by the total number of days; the second is computed by dividing the number of fatalities by the number of Fatal Days. A change across time in the first would suggest increasing lethality; a rise in the second would suggest that deaths are bunched rather than sporadic.

In the 426 days under analysis, deaths occurred on 212, or 49.8 percent, of all days. These 212 Fatal Days showed deaths at a rate of 1.68 per day. Looked at across time, the Deaths-Per-Fatal-Day Ratio seems to show a mild increase. For example, of the eight months that exceed the 1.68 figure, four are in the last five months under analysis. Looking back to the first eight regular months of the uprising (again excluding the three "killing months" of February, March and April 1988) the overall ratio was 1.53. Those months reached the 1.68 level only twice, once being December 1987, when the intifada began.

Pattern Four: Location of Deaths

While the intifada began in the Gaza camps, it soon became territory-wide. This pattern persists, but there has been a considerable variation of concentration of deaths from month to month. For example, the percent of deaths occurring in camps ranged from a low of 7.6 percent to a high of 57.8 percent. The percent in Gaza camps ranged from no deaths in November 1988 to 61.9 percent of the total deaths in June 1989. Overall, the percentage of deaths in the camps is 29.9 percent, (much above the 16.8 percent in the first eleven months) and the percent in Gaza is 36.4 percent (slightly above the 29.7 percent in the first eleven months). The camp/non-camp pattern within the two regions is completely different. Nearly 55 percent of the Gaza deaths were in camps, while in the West Bank the figure was under 16 percent.

Deaths occurred in 132 different places, a fact that forced the continued mobilization of Israeli reserves and kept the number of troops in the territories at four times pre-intifada levels. A second spatial pattern—the reverse of the first—showed a concentration of deaths in certain areas of hard-core militancy. Specifically, almost half of all deaths occurred in sixteen locations.* On the West Bank, the most militant locations were Tulikarm camp, Nablus, and Hebron; in Gaza militancy was concentrated in four camps (Khan Yunis, Rafah, Jabalya, Nusayrat) and two towns (Khan Yunis and Shaykh Radwan).

*In declining order, those with fatalities above ten are Nablus, Khan Yunis camp, Rafa camp, Hebron, Khan Yunis town, Jabalya camp, Shaykh Radwan, and Nusayrat camp.

Certainly the demographics of the two regions play a part in these results. Forty-seven percent of West Bankers are refugees, with 11 percent of the total population in camps. This compares with 87 percent of Gazans who are refugees, with 45 percent in camps. Moreover, 61 percent of the occupied population is in the West Bank, and that region has a much more diverse economy than Gaza. But deaths diverge sufficiently from simple geographic or demographic patterns to discount those as sufficient explanations. Clearly other forces—cultural, political, strategic, or otherwise—are also significant factors.

Table 2: Location of Deaths, November 1988-December 1989

	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	Total
West Bank Deaths															
In camps	0	0	5	1	1	1	7	3	0	4	5	1	7	2	0
Out of camps	9	21	8	10	14	15	18	8	12	14	15	18	12	17	191
Gaza Deaths															
In camps	1	4	6	5	2	3	8	10	11	7	4	8	0	2	71
Out of camps	3	5	0	1	11	8	9	3	4	8	3	1	0	3	59
Percent in Camps	7.6	13.3	57.8	35.2	10.7	30.3	28.9	47.5	48.4	35.3	21.7	44.1	14.3	9.1	
Percent in Gaza	30.8	30.0	31.6	35.2	46.4	33.0	44.7	61.9	44.1	34.4	26.5	0.0	22.7		
Localities With One or More Deaths	13	20	17	14	22	23	25	14	24	28	12	28	9	14	

Pattern Five: Suspicious Deaths

In October 1988, stories in the international press reported allegations that army snipers were targeting certain individuals. Subsequent stories reported the existence of Israeli "wanted lists" and execution-type slayings. Throughout the year, the military also carried out various ambushes and house raids against activists. There is no way to determine with certainty if authorities order or encourage the deaths of certain individuals. Official denials are strong. However, it is possible to identify deaths that exhibit patterns sufficiently suspicious as to constitute *prima facie* evidence of intent. Four circumstances deserve examination: the deceased was on a wanted list, the deceased was shot at close range, the death occurred during a raid or ambush, and the deceased had multiple gunshot wounds to the head. Analysis of 552 shooting deaths (males only) by the military through December 1989 reveals 86 individuals whose deaths had one or more such characteristics (Table 1). Two patterns emerge in these

deaths: First, looked at in quarterly increments beginning in December 1987, the figures show a steady increase across time: 2, 5, 7, 12, 25, and 24 (plus 11 during December 1989). Second, the age characteristics of these victims reveals that 86 percent fall between the peak military ages of 17 years old and 35 years old. Only two are below 14 (both killed in the first month of the uprising) and only two are above 40. These results diverge sufficiently from the overall death profile to satisfy the probability rule used by social scientists to determine whether a relationship is statistically significant. The data suggest a pattern.

Pattern Six: Escalation and Inhibition

Another area of inquiry is whether death patterns might be associated with special days or events. As the months passed, a ritual quality appeared to emerge in the daily confrontations. The Unified National Command of the Uprising frequently called strike days or days of commemoration. These were times of calculated escalation when Palestinians were determined to make a point and Israelis were equally determined to prevent the point from being made. On the Israeli side, escalations often came from tension-charged events, such as the bus assault of July 1989 or the opening of U.S.-PLO talks. Events that either side considered an affront or an atrocity might also cause an escalation (examples would be the death in detention of a Palestinian nationalist or the discovery of the body of a missing IDF soldier). It is logical to assume that on days such as these, the atmosphere would be so charged that the probability of fatal violence would increase.

Conversely, there might be days when Israeli authorities would bend over backwards to prevent unnecessary casualties. The arrival of Prime Minister Shamir in Washington or the arrival in Jerusalem of 1,500 Jewish leaders from around the world for a solidarity rally might be occasions when the government would want to reduce bloody clashes. On such occasions, there could be a message to the military—formal or implied—to reduce casualties. (During the two weeks before Israel's 1988 election, both the PLO and the Labor party wanted to reduce violence to prevent a voter shift to the right. Only one Palestinian died during this time.)

During the period under study, fourteen events were classified as Escalating and five as Inhibiting.* On the 46 Escalating days, there were 72

observed deaths compared with an expected level of 39, a rate 85 percent above expectation. (By way of illustration, the three days after the opening of U.S.-PLO talks saw 11 deaths; Land Day saw 5 deaths; the two-day anniversary of the assassination of Khalil al-Wazir saw 6 deaths.) On the 31 Inhibiting days, there were 24 deaths, compared with an expected level of 26, a rate only marginally below the expected level. Looked at in terms of deaths per day, the rate during Escalation was 1.56, during Inhibition .77. These figures compare with a rate of .84 per day across the fourteen month period. Thus, Escalating Days have more deaths than expected, but Inhibiting Days do not have less.

The failure of the Inhibition hypothesis may lie in the cooperation needed to make it work. During the lead-up to the 1988 election, both sides wanted a de-escalation. The dynamic in the five cases examined is not the same, since the incentive is entirely on the Israeli side. Furthermore, it is not clear why there would be an Israeli advantage in reducing casualties. The intifada is so established that having a few more or a few less deaths on a given day would probably not make much of a difference, either in Washington or among Israel's friends.

Pattern Seven: Tear Gas Deaths

A total of 82 persons have died from tear gas since the intifada began. This does not include the number of miscarriages, which most Palestinians believe to be considerable (a June 1988 statement by the underground leadership said that "hundreds of women" had suffered tear gas-induced miscarriages).⁶ Tear gas deaths were excluded from the above analysis since technically tear gas is not considered lethal. Tear gas canisters typically carry instructions stating that the gas is not fatal if used in open spaces. On the other hand, using it in closed spaces (houses, mosques,

PLO (3 days—11 deaths); 1 January, Fatah Day (1 day—1 death); 30 March, Land Day (1 day—5 deaths); 16 April, Anniversary of assassination of Abu Jihad (2 days—6 deaths); 3 May, Israeli civilian stabbed to death (3 days—3 deaths); 6 May, Id al-Fitr (7 days—10 deaths); 4 June, Omar al-Qassem dies in detention, funeral two days later (3 days—3 deaths); 9 June, eighteen-month anniversary of intifada, commemorated by a strike (2 days—4 deaths); 28 June, Kidnapping of Shaykh Obayd (1 day—2 deaths); 6 July, Israeli bus forced off road with 16 deaths (3 days—5 deaths); 18 August, Gaza strike against identity cards (14 days—20 deaths); 15 November, Anniversary of Palestinian Declaration of Independence (2 days—0 deaths). Inhibiting Events: 20 March, 1,500 Jewish activists visit Jerusalem for Solidarity Conference (2 days—0 deaths); 29 March, week before Shamir visit to U.S. (7 days—8 deaths); 5 April, Shamir in U.S. (10 days—11 deaths); 2 August, Under Secretary Kelley visits Jerusalem (4 days—1 death); 15 November, Shamir in U.S. (8 days, 7 before meeting—4 deaths).

* Escalating Events: 8 December, Intifada Anniversary (2 days analyzed—1 death); 13 December, Arafat in Geneva (2 days analyzed—1 death); 16 December, U.S. agrees to open talks with the

shops) involves such reckless disregard for safety that it can be said to constitute an implicit intent to endanger life. This is the view of the various human rights groups that protested such use of the gas.⁷ Apparently these protests were successful, since the Israeli Defense Forces prohibited firing gas into houses on 5 September 1988. This change seems to have made a difference for of the 82 deaths, 62 occurred in the first year of the uprising and only 14 in the second.

The characteristics of those who die from tear gas confirm its lethal nature. Of the 82 fatalities, 56 died on the day of exposure and 14 more died the next day. Only ten took more than 48 hours to expire, many from heart attacks or other conditions brought on or aggravated by exposure. Almost all who died fall into one of four categories of vulnerability: by age they were over 60 or under 10; by sex they were female (with pregnancy an aggravating condition); by circumstance they were exposed in a closed place, often a home, a shop, or a mosque; finally, by physical condition, many had an illness or weakness that pre-dated the incident. Only eight fatalities did not fall into one of these categories and many fell into two or more.

Pattern Eight: Killings by Settlers

In the first two years of the intifada, settlers killed at least 34 Palestinians, 18 in the first year and 14 in the second. Analysis indicates that the victims were almost all adult males, only four being below sixteen years of age (one fifteen, two fourteen, and one thirteen). The average age of the victims was 24.3 years, higher than is typical and a level that suggests non-randomness.

Analysis of these incidents reveals that eleven involve settler initiative (raids or attacks), six show probable settler initiative (deaths while the victim was at home or guarding sheep), eight were settler reactions to car stonings (often in villages), and two occurred during confrontations. Eight were of unclear nature.

Conclusions

It seems clear that the intifada has become institutionalized and is not going away. This is the conclusion of the Israeli military, and it is likewise suggested by the data in this article. The months analyzed in this article saw a frustrating lack of movement on the diplomatic front. Various

plans and proposals for getting the sides together failed. It was also a frustrating time for Israeli officials. Their election proposals were internally divisive, their policies were subjected to scrutiny and criticism from abroad, their support in the United States softened. It may be that this frustration contributed to the high level of casualties and fatalities. If so, then the future is not promising.

One positive note that comes from the data is the apparent salutary impact that protests have on certain kinds of policies. The decline in tear gas deaths has already been discussed. One might also remember the temporary decline in deaths and casualties in January and February following protests over plastic and rubber bullets. And—coincidentally or not—the release of the State Department's Human Rights report (with its criticism of Israeli policy) was followed by eight days without a death.



1. Ian Black, *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 8 October 1988.
2. Joel Brinkley, *New York Times*, 23 January 1989.
3. "We repeat that all cadres of the hit teams and popular committees must use control so that we don't lose our discipline, because this would allow the enemy to use this phenomenon both in the field and in the media. That is why we have to take our time before we pass quick judgments." Joel Brinkley, *New York Times*, 11 September 1989.
4. *US News and World Report*, 25 December 1989.
5. *Detroit Free Press*, 19 January 1990.
6. Unified National Command of the Uprising, Message to the Extraordinary Arab Summit, Baghdad, 7 June 1988. Reprinted in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 18, no. 1 (Autumn, 1988).
7. Amnesty International "The Misuse of Tear Gas by Israeli Army Personnel in the Israeli Occupied Territories," 1 June 1988, reprinted in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 18, no. 1, Autumn, 1988. AI's 1989 Report (focusing on 1988) refers to the "deliberate misuse of tear gas by Israeli forces, who were reported to have used it in excessive concentrations or to have thrown canisters into houses, clinics, schools and mosques despite manufacturer's instructions not to use the gas in confined spaces as it was potentially lethal." *Amnesty International Report, 1989*, "Israel and the Occupied Territories," London, October, 1989. Reprinted in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 19, no. 2, Winter, 1989.