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# Israel and Human Rights

## How does Israel behave in the face of Arab uprising?

The so-called "intifada," the uprising of the Arab population in the territories administered by Israel has been going on for almost two years. In that time, over 500 Arabs and many Israelis have been killed and wounded. Another ever-increasing number of Arabs are being tortured and murdered by their own people—often because of alleged "cooperation" with Israel, but in many cases in order to settle personal scores. The U.S. State Department, in its Report on Human Rights, has been critical of some aspects of Israel's human rights posture.

### What are the facts?

■ Israel is a society based on law. Every measure taken by civilian or military authorities is scrutinized by the country's legal authorities. In dealing with the "intifada," Israel is faced with a difficult problem—the uprising of a civilian population. This is a problem very similar to that faced by the British in Northern Ireland, by the Filipinos in its southern islands and the Spanish in the Basque provinces. Responsible government has the obligation to maintain order and to preserve law and to do so with as little loss of life and with as little injury to the civilian population as possible.

■ Israel has done just that. The loss of over 500 Arab and Jewish lives is of course a tragedy—every human life is precious. But seen in context, the number of casualties is really very small and a reflection on the care and restraint of the Israeli military. Israeli soldiers are confronted daily with violent riots—massive stonings and fire bombings of persons and moving vehicles, attacks with iron bars, chains, knives, Molotov cocktails and other lethal weapons. Such violence is meant to kill. Israeli soldiers and civilians have lost their lives. Almost 1300 Israelis have been injured, some of them critically.

■ The task of the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) is made more difficult by the tactics of the Arabs in having their able-bodied adult men stay behind and having their children and their women confront the IDF. It is a no-win situation for the Israelis. They try to avoid death and injury at all cost. But death and injury are sometimes unavoidable in riot situations. Since Israel is an open society, reporters and television crews from all around the world have access to the happen-

ings, quite a few of which are staged for their benefit. Obviously, it is a public relations disaster for the Israelis to have the world see their troops confronting women and children. Those women and children, however, wish to inflict as much damage as they possibly can. They mean to kill.

■ The IDF, one of the finest armies in the world, is trained to defend the country's borders, and not for riot control. Therefore, almost inevitably, errors were made in the initial phases of the uprising. But from the very beginning, detailed instructions were given to the troops on how to react to any given provocation. The orders under which Israeli military personnel operate are specific and well known to every soldier. Those who break the rules are subject to military trial and punishment. The principles of restraint and gradual response are applied. Tear gas is used to control riots. Live bullets are fired only in life-threatening situations. But to some, every means of riot control used by the Israelis, including police batons or rubber or plastic bullets is objectionable.

■ Those residents of the territories who are suspected to have committed serious security offenses are dealt with in full accordance with international law and the humanitarian provisions of the Geneva Conventions. All residents have full access to the Israeli legal system—even to the Israeli Supreme Court. Prisons are unhappy places in every society. But Israeli prisons and detentions centers in which those arrested for security offenses are held, are fully comparable to and adhere to the standards of those in other advanced Western democracies. Certainly, not even the most rebellious Arab detainee in Israel would prefer to serve time in a Syrian, Jordanian, Iraqi or Saudi prison instead.

Within the context of massive human rights abuses throughout the Arab world, the focus on Israel seems to be entirely out of perspective. Other countries in the Middle East lack the most basic elements of human rights—freedom of speech, freedom of the press, free elections, equality for women, freedom of religion, freedom of association. Opponents, instead of facing television cameras, face execution. Those countries do not have to defend themselves against foes who are single-mindedly intent on their destruction. Yet, those nations do not draw the enormous degree of attention that Israel receives. Israel adheres to the highest moral and legal principles. It does so, surrounded though it is by implacable enemies, and consistent with its own security requirements and with its obligation to the international community to maintain law and order in the territories it administers.

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