

s.22(1)(a)(ii)

Title: Israel/PTs: Gaza Demonstrations: Further casualties expected on 'Day of the Old Tires'

MRN: s.22(1)(a)(ii) 06/04/2018 12:13:21 AM ZE2

To: Canberra

Cc: s.22(1)(a)(ii)

From: Tel Aviv

From File:

EDRMS

Files:

References: s.22(1)(a)(ii)

s.33(a)(iii), s.33(b), s.47E(d)

Response: Routine, Information Only**PROTECTED**

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Summary

Further mass demonstrations by Palestinians are planned along the Gaza-Israel border on 6 April. The protests are expected to be greater in intensity than those of last Friday, which saw around 30 000 Palestinians demonstrate and which left up to 20 Palestinians dead and over 1000 wounded. Israel's use of force during the March 30 demonstrations has been questioned by Arab and European states, with the UN Secretary General calling for an independent investigation. s.33(a)(iii), s.47E(d)

s.33(a)(iii), s.47E(d)

On Friday 6 April, a second wave of Palestinian "Return March" demonstrations is expected to take place in the Palestinian Territories. Protests will be concentrated in several locations along the Gaza-Israel border with smaller and sporadic demonstrations also expected to take place in Jerusalem and the West Bank. With large numbers expected along the Gaza-Israel border tomorrow, further escalation and casualties can be expected.

The Return March

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2. Dubbed the “March of Return” by organisers, in reference to the return of Palestinian refugees to lands lost in Israel, the demonstrations are being organised to raise awareness of the Israeli occupation and the plight of Palestinian refugees. Day one of the protests, March 30, also coincided with Land Day, a day Palestinians have marked since 1976 to commemorate land dispossession. The final day of protests is set to be May 15, the 70th anniversary of the 1948 Naqba (catastrophe), with demonstrations taking place each Friday in the lead up to the anniversary.

3. On March 30, mass protests took place at five locations along the Israel-Gaza border with an estimated 30 000 Palestinians participating s.47E(d) Around 1000
Palestinians also staged parallel protests in the main cities of the West Bank. At least 17 Palestinians died from Israeli counter-measures during the demonstrations with over 1000 injured in what was the worst loss of life in a single day since the 2014 Gaza conflict. Israel employed a range of crowd dispersal and anti-riot tactics when dealing with disturbances in the West Bank. s.33(a)(iii) s.22(1)(a)(ii)
s.22(1)(a)(ii)

4. Protests have continued throughout the week on a much smaller scale. On 3 April, a small group of Palestinians broke through the Gaza border fence. The IDF shot and killed one of the men. The IDF announced that planes had targeted an armed Palestinian approaching the border in the early hours of 5 April.

5. Demonstrations on Friday (6 April) in Gaza are likely to be greater in intensity than last week. The UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) anticipates that there is a high likelihood of clashes and further casualties. Palestinian protesters are intending to light tires [the day has been labelled the Friday of Old Tires] and use mirrors to blur the vision of the IDF soldiers. The rationale is that the thick black smoke and mirror reflections will prevent Israeli sniper fire at protesters. In the West Bank, the UNDSS expects further demonstrations in the main cities and at hot spots, including checkpoints and near settlements, and spontaneous gatherings in Jerusalem. s.22(1)(a)(ii)

The first casualty – the battle for the narrative

s.33(a)(iii)

s.33(a)(iii)

s.33(a)(iii), s.33(b), s.47E(d)

s.33(a)(iii), s.33(b), s.47E(d)

7. **Israeli officials have also strongly asserted Israel’s right to defend its sovereignty.** In doing so, they have clearly declared their red lines “whoever attacks Israel’s sovereignty will be attacked [Defence Minister Leiberman]” and the possibility of harsher deterrence ahead. From the Israeli perspective, threats to Israel’s sovereignty include attempts to enter the no-go or buffer zone (within 100 metres of the border fence on the Gaza side [NB: the UN reports the ‘at risk’ area is much greater: 300m – 1000m]) and attempts to damage the fence or other infrastructure near the border. The IDF has stated that while they endeavour to

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practice the utmost restraint those who enter the buffer zone are at risk of being shot. The IDF rules of engagement are to remain unchanged for this second wave of protests.

8. Palestinian rhetoric has emphasised the peaceful nature of the protests, Israel's excessive use of force in response, and the obligation of the international community to protect Palestinian rights and end the occupation. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declared Saturday 31 March a national day of mourning and sought action in the UN Security Council. s.33(a)(iii)

s.33(a)(iii)

s.33(a)(iii) Hamas messaging followed similar lines with emphasis being placed on the value they saw in Palestinian unity and reconciliation against the occupation. Hamas social media posts highlighted discussions between the Hamas leadership and regional leaders, including the Iranian Foreign Minister, Qatari Emir and the Arab League.

s.33(b), s.47E(d)

s.33(b), s.47E(d)

Views of the UN Human Rights Office

11. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories (UNCHR) has not yet issued a public statement [it will do so on 6 April] as to the legality of Israeli and Palestinian actions during the protests. s.33(b), s.47E(d)
s.33(b), s.47E(d)

International Reactions

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12. In the aftermath of the last Friday's demonstrations, regional states have taken the lead in condemning Israeli actions, including for what in their view was an excessive use of force. Turkish President Erdogan labelled Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu as a terrorist and described the events in Gaza as a massacre [analysts here see a cutting of Israel-Turkey diplomatic relations as increasingly likely]. Egypt, Jordan and the Arab League have also criticised Israel in statements.

13. European states, including the EU, UK, France and Germany have expressed serious concern and called for the proportionate use of force and respect for the right to protest s.22(1)(a)(ii). In their statements, they also linked the current developments to the broader need for a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. s.33(a)(iii), s.33(b), s.47E(d) s.33(a)(iii), s.33(b), s.47E(d)

14. In tweets, the US and Canada expressed sadness at the violence and urged parties to lower tension and show restraint. s.33(a)(iii), s.47E(d) s.33(a)(iii), s.47E(d)

15. In a statement, the UN Secretary-General expressed deep concern and called for an independent and transparent investigation in to the incidents. On 5 April, in a pre-emptive message, the UN Special Envoy to the Peace Process called on Israel to exercise maximum restraint and for Palestinians to avoid friction at the fence.

s.33(a)(iii), s.33(b), s.47E(d)

Comment

s.33(a)(iii), s.33(b), s.47E(d)

s.33(a)(iii), s.33(b), s.47E(d)

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s.33(a)(iii), s.33(b), s.47E(d)

s.33(a)(iii), s.47E(d)

20. We recommend a factual update to the travel advice but assess that the current level remains appropriate.

text ends

Sent by: s.22(1)(a)(ii)
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