



Violence in the Arab Sector – A Predetermined Fate?

Deputy Commissioner (Ret). Zohar Dvirⁱ

December 2021

Summary

During Operation Guardian of the Walls (May 2021) the Arab sector in Israel launched a wave of violence which was extremely wide and severe, especially in the mixed cities. It seems that its circumstances and characteristics require an updated assessment and regrouping. Even though it was a small group that led the violence, the damage to life and property and especially the delicate fabric of the Jewish and Arabs relations in Israel is significant and will likely have a long-term effect. Much like the 2000 riots, healing the wounds will take time¹.

At the outset it should be noted that the bulk of this article was written prior to Operation Guardian of the Walls which only highlighted the urgency to deal with the issue and the need for an appropriate regrouping and deployment, in the face of a scenario wherein war is raging on multiple fronts and simultaneously there are riots on the streets. **A civil war is a scenario that the State of Israel will not be able to contain, and we must do anything in our power to prevent it.**

Keywords: Israel, Gaza, Operation

¹ The younger generation that rioted in May 2021 during Operation Guardian of the Walls, did not experience the severe economic crises sustained by the Arab sector following the 2000 riots, when many of the Jewish population avoided the Arab towns and villages and chose to shop and frequent restaurants elsewhere. Therefore, the younger generation was more “unencumbered” to act violently against the symbols of government and Jewish citizens “as if there was no tomorrow”.

Background

The level of violence in the Arab sector has always been high². This comes from a variety of reasons, some of them cultural. Predominantly most of the violent offenses are perpetrated within the boundaries of the Arab sector by a small criminal minority that stains the law-abiding majority, and it is typified by violent brawls during which illegally held weapons are being used, continuous blood feuds and murder on grounds of preservation of family honor. When events that are perceived as having a nationalistic or religious motivation occur – as was in April May 2021 (e.g., Naqba, return marches, the riots on the Temple Mount because of Operation Guardian of the Walls) – the violence crosses the Arab sector and spills over to the Jewish population – riots, lynchings, destruction of property, homes, business and synagogues, defacing state symbols etc. – and in light of recent events requires immediate action.

The upward trend of the level of violence in the Arab sector and its vector towards the Jewish society, especially in the mixed cities, worries any citizen, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Druze. Even though there are significant cultural differences between the Arabs living in the large villages and cities in the north and those living in the south, especially the Bedouins, this article will attempt to find the common denominators among them in the context of the violence in that society.

Lack of Effective Penalties

Despite the large number of offenses that require a determined and tenacious treatment, the level of penalties is disproportionate to the offenses. In many cases where the police have well-established evidence and can clearly connect illegal weapons to the offenders/criminals there is no guarantee that the above will serve as irrefutable proof beyond a reasonable doubt that will lead to a conviction and an appropriate punishment that will serve as a deterrent. Thus, despite the tremendous effort in producing the evidence, a ridiculous punishment of a few months of community service is imposed on the criminal. On the other hand, imposing heavy penalties in and of itself doesn't deter criminals and doesn't assist in reducing the level of criminal activity since many criminals are released from prison unrehabilitated and in fact with more criminal attributes. Therefore, a system that mainly relies on the police and public

² The crime statistics show that the crimes and offenses in this sector exceed their proportionate percentage of the population (approx. 21%). For certain offenses even more than three times that percentage (e.g. shootings – 95% of total incidents; possession and use of illegal weapons – 80%; murder – 67%; violent brawls – 30%; protection – even though most of the incidents are not being reported; driving without a license (even teenagers and children); multiple driving violations and bullying on the roads that led to fatalities – even when the poor state of the infrastructure in Arab villages is neutralized from the equation and so forth.

prosecution must be effective and deterring, i.e., imposing heavy penalties a short time after the offense has been committed.

Traditional Societal Structure

The Arab society is tribal and traditional in nature and has an ambivalent relationship with modernization processes. Despite the sensitivity of the subject one cannot ignore it and one must diagnose and treat this appropriately and intelligently – “murder to protect the family’s honor” that claim the lives of girls and women, ongoing and seemingly perpetual “blood feuds”, another word for murder leading to reciprocal murder and so forth and violence in the family as a method of rearing are **phenomena that the Arab leadership and public figures at all levels must vehemently denounce and support a state that is trying to reduce and stop violence**. A society that complains of the level of violence in its midst cannot ignore murder, regardless of its motive. Enforcement alone will not provide a solution but only a coordinated and concerted effort of setting personal examples coupled with resource allocation.

Moreover, the driving culture, typified by criminal behavior on the roads especially among the younger generation, as well as driving without being licensed or driving without seatbelts at every age is problematic and manifests defiance to the rule of law. After all, this is not a matter of poor infrastructure or over policing, rather simply breaking the law.

The Arab leadership’s message is not clear enough. On the one hand there is a growing demand from society in the recent decade for an effective police presence, that after a total rejection of [the](#) same after the 2000 riots, but on the other hand there is no cooperation and complaints when there is enforcement. Education and personal examples are required. Public officials must be the first to send a clear message that they adopt and assist the state’s enforcement systems.

The harsh complaints against the police regarding murder cases, even though the clearing rates are similar for all sectors of society in Israel, require introspection as well. Frequently before the police arrive at the scene, it is disrupted by the inhabitants of the house where the murder has happened (e.g., washing the scene, moving the body, erasing photographs etc.) which may lead to loss of valuable central evidence which in turn reduces the chances of solving the case.

Providing a Routine Daily Service – Police Stations, Police Posts and Community Policing

Routine policing has a paramount importance in providing stability to daily life. When the police are absent, or its presence not felt there is no sense of governability and criminal gangs terrorize citizens and de facto take over governing themselves. Additionally, other public services such as social services,

healthcare and municipal services that oversee collecting taxes find it very hard if not impossible to function in such an environment.

In recent years, under the leadership of Commissioner Rony Alsheikh and Internal Security minister Gilead Ardan, several police stations were built in the Arab sector³. Indeed, there are those who argue that the deployment of the additional stations doesn't have a direct effect on the reduction of level of violence and crime, but it is obvious that there is a direct and indirect link between the frequency of police patrols in certain area within the patrol sector and the contiguous areas ("ripple effect"). The efficacy of the police activity has of course a decisive influence, however the **mere visibility** of police presence must not be discounted.

In the OECD the number of police officers is set in relation to the size of the population. The acceptable ratio is 4-5 officers for every 1,000 residents. As per 2018, there are only 2.9 officers for every 1,000 residents⁴. In light of the above and Israel's complex challenges **doubling** the number of police officers at the core of the operational police work and law enforcement (including investigators) is a must.

Further, a goal to aspire to is the deployment of additional small and medium stations in as wide a dispersal as possible (up to 200 police officers as per the **Dunbar Number**⁵). The above holds true subject to the correct police officers to population size ratio which in and of itself is dynamic and dependent on the growth rate of the population, its dispersal, and other issues unique to the subject sector.

Moreover, one must increase the number of **community police officers** at sensitive points while limiting their stay in the community (balancing between intimate acquaintance and possible conflicts of interests due to such acquaintance). As a rule, the role of the community officers is that of the "**good cop**". They must forge relationships based on trust with the local community, be involved with the community and be a point of contact for concerns and questions. Additionally, they have an important role in conflict

³ Between 2017-2020 13 police stations and police posts have been built. Kafr Kana station, Jisr a-Zarka post, Kafr Manda post, Kafr Qassem station, Aroer station, Tamra station, Majdal Krum station, Western Galilee station, Baka al-Gharbia station, Tuba-Zangaria post, Tira station, Rahat station and the new Um al-Fakhem station.

⁴ This statistic has been compared with that of OECD countries, especially Belgium who is the closest European country in terms of the above statistics and wherein there are 3.4 police officers for every 1,000 residents. It should be noted, the above ratio is not set in stone and changes from country to country based on its size, specific challenges, the structure of its security forces etc. Also, there is no uniform international standard for the optimal size of a country's police force in relation to the size of its population. Per the article "Issues in Personnel Comparison of Police Forces Around the World" (Dr. Yekaterina (Katya) Yazamski, Israeli Police Research and Policy Department), in 2018 there were 2.9 officers for every 1,000 residents. It should be noted that the above number refers to officers who are at the core of operational police work and law enforcement and excludes administrative personnel.

⁵ The British anthropologist Robin Dunbar, conducted wide research to determine the size of an effective group in terms of its social connections which is applicable to social media, customer clubs and society in general. The range cited by Dunbar is 100-230 people with an average of 150.

resolution between clans and others and by alerting parents regarding their children's criminal activity potential before said children cross the line. In the past decade tens of community police officers have been deployed into the Arab sector as well as other sectors with similar needs and have had significant success.

Integrating Arab Israelis into the Police and Other National Organizations (Fire Fighting, EMS)

Integrating Arab Israelis into organizations such as the Fire Fighters and Magen David Adom (EMS) is a crucial interest to both Jews and Arabs. On the backdrop of the Arab society's desire to integrate into Israeli civilian life and national decision process, including joining the government, they must be encouraged to join organizations such as the above. This will lead to a reduction of their sense of alienation, level of violence, and increase their sense of civilian partnership identity as well as national identity.

Integrating them into the police is even doubly crucial as this will overcome culture and language barriers, reduce over policing, and create a sense of equally sharing the load. With the formation of the Arab Sector Administration in the Israeli police, led by the first Arab Muslim Deputy Commissioner, Jamal Khakrush, a series of adjustments have been made in the process of enlisting Arab police officers. Since 2016 when only 70 Muslim successfully enlisted (2.6% of the serving officers) there has been a constant increase in the number of Arab police officers (542 Muslims enlisted and their percentage grew to 3.45% of total serving officers). In light of the recent events and the obvious sensitivity associated with it, the balancing point of their integration into the police force has to be examined as well as encouraging them to join and integrate into other civilian organizations.

Rapid Response in Emergency and Reinforcement During Day-to-Day Routine - Increasing the Number of Special Intervention Forces (Border Police, Riot Police - YASMAG)

In the recent events, particularly the riots in the mixed cities, the vandalism, looting, lynchings, and the Jewish-Arab friction that at times deteriorated into shootings, one could evidence firsthand how inadequate the number of police officers trained to handle wide scale public disorder is. Per reports, the response provided to citizens who felt their lives were threatened was limited. Other than the risk that said citizens would take the law into their hands (since per their assessment there was no one to come to the rescue) there is severe damage to the public's trust in the police. Further, frequently during emergency situations when police officers find themselves alone on the scene they overreact with unnecessary force and sometimes weapons to neutralize the danger they sense.

Moreover, a very likely scenario would be that Israel will find itself fighting on two fronts with thousands of missiles and rockets launched on the home front while there are widespread riots that require a response and resource allocation.

Therefore, there is a dire need to significantly triple the number of YASMAG troops, including Border Police reserve companies. These forces must be equipped with light and armored vehicles (from 4X4 cars to light armored wheeled APCs)⁶ and be able to rapidly reach any point in Israel. This force will act tenaciously and professionally to handle public disorder and riots and strive to minimize casualties within the ranks of the rioters. They will be equipped with non-lethal weapons and proficient in their use. They are also to be equipped with UAVs that will record the riots and provide the intervening force with a vantage point and crowd control equipment (tear gas, sirens, strobing blue lights etc.).

These forces will consist of regular troops for day-to-day routine and reserve companies for emergencies. Both are to train regularly to stay fit for action. During day-to-day routine these forces may operate to locate and confiscate illegal weapons, prevention of agricultural terrorism and protection extortion. They will have a riot intelligence unit based on Humint sources as well as social media monitoring and produce high quality intelligence allowing the police to prepare ahead of time to prevent or contain events before they develop into large-scale riots that may even cut major transportation arteries.

The mere existence of such forces, backing up regular “blue” police patrol (most often two police officers in a squad car), will provide the patrol officers with added confidence and security. That sense of security will expand and enable increased activity in sensitive regions (e.g., the Wadi Ara villages and towns) and reduce mistakes emanating from inability to act in the face of criminal events detected by technical equipment such as CCTV or calls to the police 100 call center.

These days there are more voices calling for the formation of a national guard or gendarmerie. It seems that there is no more time waste, and one must act immediately to reinforce the police and the Border Police. Simultaneously, one may charge the National Security Council to examine the ramifications of the formation of a national guard. **Until then one must choose the available police option and act now because time is running out!**

⁶ Such as the Karakal that started serving a decade ago, mostly for the Border police and the IDF’s David.

Summary

Whether the violence emanates from the establishment neglect of the Arab sector or from the wrongdoing of a criminal minority or culturally dependent and hard to eradicate social conventions we must, alongside an investment in infrastructure and improvement of government services, contend immediately and decisively with the police aspects discussed herein.

Indeed, this will be a lengthy process but there are steps that can and must be taken immediately.

For all our sakes, let's hope the desired outcome will arrive.

"If I managed to see a little farther it is because I stood on the shoulders of giants" (Sir Isaac Newton)

¹ The author wishes to thank Dr. Eitan Azani, Head of Research at ICT for his guidance in writing this article, Deputy Commissioner Jamal Khakrush, head of the Improvement of Police Services to the Arab Society Administration for the data as well as insights as a member of the Arab society, Deputy Commissioner (Ret.) Zvika Tessler (former head of Israeli Police Planning Division) for his enlightening comments, Chief Superintendent (Ret.) Baruch Goldman for his productive assistance and to Ms. Lorena Lvovski-Atiyas Deputy Head of Research at ICT.

The views in this article are solely the author's and do not necessarily reflect ICT's views.