

Israeli-Palestinian Political Fatalities during the Barak Government:

A Statistical Overview

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Brief Analysis

The following report analyzes political fatalities in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that occurred during the government of Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak (July 7, 1999–March 7, 2001). This report is an update of Washington Institute [Research Note no. 8. \(templateC04.php?CID=216\)](#). Like the research note, its primary source for data is the Israeli human rights group B'tselem, although other sources (including various media outlets) were also used. Consistent with the previous study, no deaths that resulted from inter-Israeli or inter-Palestinian violence are included in this report; for example, the deaths of Israeli Arabs, Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, and accused Palestinian collaborators with Israel are excluded. A main conclusion from the data is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict increasingly involves official security services, as distinct from civilians. [Note: This article was itself updated in [PeaceWatch no. 329 \(templateC05.php?CID=2020\)](#)].

High, But Not the Highest Compared with the previous Israeli governments of Prime Ministers Yitzhak Shamir (December 9, 1987-July 13, 1992), Yitzhak Rabin/Shimon Peres (July 14, 1992-June 17, 1996), and Binyamin Netanyahu (June 18, 1996-July 6, 1999), the Barak government experienced a high, but not the highest, average number of lethal incidents per month and average number of political fatalities per month for both Israelis and Palestinians. (Lethal incidents are those violent events that cause deaths, and therefore do not include Israeli-Palestinian violence that results only in injuries. One lethal incident can cause several fatalities; for example, the March 4, 1996 bombing in Tel Aviv was one lethal incident that caused thirteen Israeli fatalities.)

LETHAL INCIDENTS (Average per month)

	Israelis	Palestinians
Shamir	1.8	14.9
Rabin/Peres	2.8	7.2
Netanyahu	0.9	1.9
Barak	2.3	12.8

POLITICAL FATALITIES (average per month)

	Israelis	Palestinians
Shamir	2.7	18.6

Rabin/Peres	6.0	10.0
Netanyahu	1.9	3.4
Barak	3.4	17.4

The average number of lethal incidents per month involving Palestinian deaths was much higher under the Barak government (12.8) than that under Netanyahu (1.9) and Rabin/Peres (7.2), but was not as high as during Shamir's tenure (14.9). The average number of lethal incidents per month resulting in Israeli fatalities during the Barak government (2.3) was also much greater than that of the previous government (0.9), but was lower than the figure under Rabin/Peres (2.8).

The average number of Palestinian fatalities per month during the Barak government (17.4) was much higher than the low average witnessed under the Netanyahu government (3.4) as well as during the Rabin/Peres period (10.0), but does not exceed that of the Shamir government (18.6). The average number of Israeli fatalities per month during Barak's term (3.4) was substantially lower than the number under Rabin/Peres (6.0), but was almost double that of the Netanyahu government (1.9) and also higher than Shamir's (2.7).

The twenty months of Ehud Barak's government can be divided into two distinctive periods in terms of political fatalities. The first fifteen months were remarkably quiet with monthly averages of only 1.1 lethal incidents involving Palestinian fatalities and 0.1 lethal incidents involving Israeli fatalities. Similarly, this period before the Palestinian uprising witnessed averages of only 1.5 Palestinian fatalities and 0.2 Israeli fatalities per month. However, the last five months of Barak's tenure were extremely violent and these two sets of numbers increased dramatically. There were monthly averages of 46.4 lethal incidents involving Palestinian fatalities and 8.8 lethal incidents involving Israeli fatalities, and averages of 65.0 Palestinian fatalities and 13.0 Israeli fatalities per month.

Location of Political Fatalities During the Barak government, a substantially lower percentage of both Israeli and Palestinian fatalities occurred inside the Green Line (defined as Israel pre-1967 plus East Jerusalem). For Israelis, only 29.4 percent of fatalities during the Barak government occurred inside the Green Line, a figure just over half of the previous low during the Netanyahu government (54.3 percent), and substantially less than during the Shamir (55.5 percent) and Rabin/Peres (60.2 percent) governments. The proportion of Palestinian fatalities inside the Green Line also reached record lows during the Barak period (3.7 percent), one-third the level experienced under the previous government of Netanyahu (11.3 percent).

PALESTINIAN FATALITIES

	Shamir	Rabin/Peres	Netanyahu	Barak
Green Line	5.5%	7.9%	11.3%	3.7%
West Bank	60.6%	51.4%	50.8%	57.6%
Gaza	31.1%	38.0%	33.1%	38.0%
Military Custody	1.8%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Unknown	1.1%	1.9%	4.8%	0.6%

ISRAELI FATALITIES

	Shamir	Rabin/Peres	Netanyahu	Barak
Green Line	55.5%	60.2%	54.3%	29.4%
West Bank	26.0%	20.1%	34.3%	48.5%
Gaza	11.6%	16.9%	11.4%	22.1%
Unknown	6.8%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%

Corresponding to these record low percentages of fatalities inside the Green Line was a higher proportion of deaths in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the Barak era. The percentage of Israeli fatalities in both the West Bank (48.5 percent) and Gaza Strip (22.1 percent) was higher during Barak's government than the previous three governments. During the Barak period, the proportion of Palestinian fatalities in Gaza (38.0 percent) was exactly equal to the previous highest figure during the Rabin/Peres period. The percentage of Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank during Barak's term was higher (57.6 percent) than the Netanyahu (50.8 percent) and Rabin/Peres (51.4 percent) governments, but was lower than Shamir's (60.6 percent). During Barak's tenure, the proportion of Palestinian fatalities in Israeli military custody remained at the 0 percent figure from the Netanyahu period, down from a high of 1.8 percent during the Shamir government.

Involvement in or Claim of Responsibility for Political Fatalities The Israeli military was involved in nearly all of the Palestinian political fatalities during the Barak government (95.4 percent), a much higher percentage than under Netanyahu (66.2 percent). Conversely, Israeli civilians and the Israeli police were least likely to be involved in Palestinian fatalities during Barak's government as compared to the other three governments.

PALESTINIAN FATALITIES

	Shamir	Rabin/Peres	Netanyahu	Barak
Military	84.5%	76.2%	79.0%	95.4%
Police	6.9%	11.5%	8.1%	2.9%
Civilian	6.5%	11.7%	11.3%	1.7%
Unknown	2.1%	0.6%	1.6%	0.0%

ISRAELI FATALITIES

	Shamir	Rabin/Peres	Netanyahu	Barak
No Claim	65.1%	29.9%	37.1%	60.3%
Palestinian Security	N/A	0.7%	21.4%	19.1%
Hamas	7.5%	45.4%	34.3%	8.8%

Islamic Jihad	20.5%	20.8%	0.0%	5.9%
Other	6.8%	3.2%	7.1%	5.9%

The data on responsibility for Israeli political fatalities should be interpreted with care, because a large percentage of fatalities during each government falls into the category of "No claim/Unknown." Some analysts suggest that in fact many of those fatalities were perpetrated by groups; for instance Hamas may have been responsible for a number of unclaimed fatalities during the Shamir period. Also, some fatalities were the responsibility of individuals loosely affiliated with established groups that did not claim responsibility for their action.

Given these caveats, one should use caution when interpreting the data that show that Palestinian security forces were involved in approximately the same proportion of Israeli fatalities during the Barak government (19.1 percent) than the Netanyahu period (21.4 percent). During the Barak period, Hamas and Islamic Jihad together claimed or were assigned responsibility for the lowest percentage of Israeli fatalities since 1987; the two together claimed or were assigned responsibility for only 14.7 percent of all Israeli political fatalities compared to 34.3 percent during Netanyahu, 66.2 percent under Rabin/Peres, and 28.0 percent during Shamir's government.

Fatality Type During the Barak government, the trend away from civilian fatalities and towards military fatalities continued for both Palestinians and Israelis. The proportion of Palestinian civilian deaths, although still high, was at a historical low during the Barak term (87.9 percent), and the percentage of fatalities of Palestinian Security Forces members continued to climb to 12.1 percent. Similarly, the proportion of Israeli civilian fatalities was at a record low during the Barak government (57.4 percent) with the percentage of Israeli military deaths increasing to 42.6 percent.

PALESTINIAN FATALITIES

	Shamir	Rabin/Peres	Netanyahu	Barak
Civilian	100%	97.5%	88.7%	87.9%
Palestinian Security	N/A	1.7%	11.3%	12.1%
Unknown	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%

ISRAELI FATALITIES

	Shamir	Rabin/Peres	Netanyahu	Barak
Civilian	70.2%	66.2%	64.3%	57.4%
Military	22.6%	33.1%	35.7%	42.6%
Unknown	6.8%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%

Conclusion The rate of political fatalities during the Barak government was high but not the highest seen since 1987. During Barak's term, a smaller percentage of both Israeli and Palestinian fatalities took place inside Green Line Israel than in the past; a contributing factor may have been stricter restrictions on travel across the Green Line for both Palestinians and Israelis in place since last fall. The Israeli military was involved in a higher proportion of Palestinian political fatalities during the Barak period than in the past, although no Palestinian died while in custody. Hamas and Islamic Jihad together claimed or were assigned responsibility for a much lower proportion of Israeli

political fatalities than under the previous three Israeli governments. Finally, political fatalities among civilians- although still high for both Israelis and Palestinians-continued to decline, reflecting an Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is increasingly a military-to-military clash between official security services.

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