

‘Guns are everywhere’ in Israel, occupied territories as violence spikes

By William Booth and Sufian Taha / February 4, 2023

JERUSALEM — In earlier rounds of lethal violence here, lone Palestinian assailants often relied on kitchen cleavers, or cars as battering rams.

Now they are using guns.

Two recent attacks against Jewish Israelis were carried out with handguns. First, a 21-year-old man killed seven people outside a synagogue; the next day, a 13-year-old boy wounded two people just beyond the walls of the Old City. Neither assailant appeared to be affiliated with a Palestinian armed group.

[...]

Meir Elran, a retired brigadier general and senior researcher at the **Institute for National Security Studies** in Israel, co-authored a report last year that found “tens of thousands of weapons” in Israeli Palestinian communities are stolen from IDF bases or smuggled from the West Bank, where guns have long been in circulation among militant groups, and where more young men have been joining loosely-knit armed gangs.

A parallel surge in illegal guns is occurring in Israel’s Arab communities, where “anarchy has emerged ... and the governmental vacuum has been filled by criminal elements that have gradually taken over broad areas of life,” the researchers found.

The anarchy creates its own cycle of criminal violence within Palestinian communities that is different from political violence, but can be just as deadly.

In an interview, **Elran** said Israeli security forces focus more on guns in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as those are most likely to be diverted for use in terrorist attacks.

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