

Israeli Police Brace for Possible Wide-scale, Violent Protests Inspired by Scenes in U.S.

In closed meetings, commanders are concerned that protesters will act more aggressively, influenced by police brutality protests in the United States following the killing of George Floyd.



Israeli protesters demonstrate in Jerusalem, June 9, 2020. Police commanders voiced concern over the possible influence of Black Lives Matter protests on Israeli demonstrators. Credit: Emil Salman

Police have decided to beef up their forces at demonstrations in the near future out of a fear of increased violence by protesters – inspired by the protests in the United States.

The police's senior commanders, including acting police commissioner Moti Cohen, recently held situation assessments in which district commanders were instructed to prepare for an escalation in the protests, including scenarios of wide-scale blocking of roads, attacks on police facilities and protesters initiating confrontations with the police.

Recently, police have seen a rise in the scale of the protest, especially because of the economic crisis resulting from the coronavirus outbreak, but because of other issues, too. The demonstrations, which police call “events involving public order,” have attracted great attention lately from the police's highest levels.

In a number of closed meetings held recently within the police, including one called by Cohen, senior commanders have raised the fear that protesters will act more aggressively at demonstrations all over the country, under the influence of the protests in the United States after the police killing of George Floyd. As a result, police plan on deploying larger numbers of forces in the field during demonstrations, and in particular riot police units.

Police have also identified a rise in violence against symbols that represent the police. For example, anti-police slogans were spray-painted on a patrol car on Wednesday in Kiryat Ata, and two weeks ago two young men threw rocks at a patrol car that arrived to handle an incident on the street where Solomon Teka was shot and killed in Kiryat Bialik, an incident that sparked days of violent protests by Ethiopian Israelis.



A protester is dragged away by police officers during a “demonstration of fury” protest, Jerusalem, June 15, 2020. Credit: Ohad Zwigenberg

In addition, a number of police officers have been attacked over the past few weeks, some in Arab communities. But a senior law enforcement official said police are inclined to attribute these incidents to the tension between organized crime groups in the Arab community and not to any influence of the protests in the United States.

On Monday, the Knesset Interior and Environment Committee held a session in which police officials responded to claims of violence against journalists during protests after Haaretz photographer Tomer Appelbaum was attacked during a demonstration in Tel Aviv. The head of the police’s operations department, Commander Yishai Shalem, told the committee that police intend to equip all the officers of the Special Patrol Unit, the special operations and riot police unit with body cameras by the end of the year, but there is still opposition to this inside the police – and no date has been set yet to implement the decision.

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The Israel Police said, “During the recent period protests have increased because of the political and economic situation, mostly because of the spread of the coronavirus and the implications of the national fight against it. Specific public disturbances that are unrelated to what is happening overseas, as well as any

attempt to damage national symbols, are dealt with by the police every day of the year with professionalism and determination according to the [police's] legal responsibility."



Demonstrators attend a protest against police brutality and the death in Minneapolis police custody of George Floyd, at the Place de la Republique square in Paris, France, June 13, 2020. Credit: BENOIT TESSIER/ REUTERS

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