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Sent: Monday, September 5, 2011 8:18 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Israel vows "tolerance" for Palestinian protests (Reuters)

From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Monday, September 05, 2011 07:26 PM
To: NEWS-Mahogany
Cc: SES-O
Subject: Israel vows "tolerance" for Palestinian protests (Reuters)

TEL AVIV (Reuters) - A senior officer said on Monday that Israeli soldiers would show "much more tolerance" towards Palestinian demonstrations than in the past thanks to riot-control training and new equipment designed to reduce injuries and deaths.

Israel is wary of large-scale protests by Palestinians as their leaders sidestep stalled peace talks by appealing for United Nations statehood recognition this month.

A similar deadlock in 2000 triggered a Palestinian revolt that Israel fuelled with military crackdowns, resulting in a heavy death toll among unarmed protesters.

Last May and June, pro-Palestinian marchers throwing stones swarmed Israel's fortified boundary fences from Lebanon and Syria in two separate protests.

Israeli soldiers opened fire, killing 13 people on the Lebanese side and an unconfirmed number, which Syria puts at 23 although Israel disputes this, on the Syrian side.

Brigadier-General Michael Edelstein, the officer crafting Israel's counter-demonstration doctrines, said troops were now better equipped and trained to police the occupied West Bank and the boundaries with Gaza, Lebanon and Syria.

"The balance has changed. We have more means that we can use, therefore the use of lethal weapons will decrease," he told foreign reporters in a briefing.

He said there was no plan to reinforce military garrisons, which had been practising non-lethal riot control techniques.

Israel has also invested heavily in riot-dispersal gear including accurate tear-gas launchers, high-powered loudspeakers that emit an intolerable buzzing noise, and cannons for dousing crowds with water or a foul-smelling liquid known as "skunk".

The objective, Edelstein said, was "to be able to handle riots while diminishing casualties on both sides".

Asked if this meant that Israeli forces, accused in the past of shoot-on-sight policies against Palestinians, would now show more tolerance, he said: "Much more tolerance."

The administration of U.S.-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has denied seeking bloodshed and Edelstein, like other Israeli officials, said it was too early to know how this month's showdown at the United Nations would resonate locally.

But the political upheaval of the "Arab Spring" and the events on the border have made Israel nervous.

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