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## House demolition in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

House demolition is a controversial method used by the [Israeli Defence Forces \(IDF\)](#) in [Jerusalem](#), the [West Bank](#) , and the [Gaza Strip](#) against [Palestinians](#) and in some cases [Israeli settlers](#) . IDF explanations for [house demolitions](#) include use as a [counter-insurgency](#) security measure to impede or halt militant operations and as a regulatory measure to enforce building codes and regulations. [Israel/Occupied Territories: House Demolition](#) House demolitions are also claimed to be a potent [deterrent](#) against [terrorism](#), [House demolitions as punishment](#) B'Tselem - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories in significantly decreasing Palestinian terrorists attacks.Efraim Benmelech, Claude Berrebi, and Esteban F. Klor, 'Counter-Suicide-Terrorism: Evidence from House Demolitions,' in The Journal of Politics, Vol. 77, No. 1 (January 2015), pp. 27-43.Ludovica Iaccino, [punitive demolition of Palestinian terrorist houses 'decreases suicide attacks'](#), [International Business Times](#) 10 December 2014.According to the study "Counter-Suicide-Terrorism: Evidence from House Demolitions," demolishing the homes of Palestinian terrorists results in "an immediate, significant decrease in the number of suicide attacks." [Human rights organizations](#) and the [United Nations](#) criticize the ongoing demolitions [Israel levels Palestinian homes](#) of Palestinian homes as violating [international law](#), and [Amnesty International](#) has contended that the Israeli government actually uses demolitions to [collectively punish](#) Palestinians and to seize property for the expansion of [Israeli settlement](#) s. [Mass Demolition: Security Rationales, Demographic Subtexts](#) House demolitions have been used to remove illegal (by Israeli law) Israeli settlements.

### History

The practice originated under the [British Mandate](#) , when the government gave authority to military commanders to confiscate and raze "any house, structure or land... the inhabitants of which he is satisfied have committed... any offence against these Regulations involving violence." In 1945 the authorities passed the [Defence \(Emergency\) Regulations](#) [Harvard Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research](#) The Legality of House Demolitions under International Humanitarian Law. Retrieved 30 June 2007. and Regulation 119 made this practice available to the local Military Commander without limit or appeal. In a 1987 letter, the British said this regulation had been repealed in 1948.In a 1987 letter, the British Foreign Ministry indicated that "in view of the Palestine (Revocations) Order in Council 1948 (S.I. 1948/1004, at 1350-51), the Palestine (Defense) Order in Council 1937 and the Defense Regulations 1945 made under it are, as a matter of English law, no longer in force." See Emma Playfair, "Demolition and Sealing of Houses as a Punitive Measure in the Israeli-Occupied West Bank," *Al Haq*, 33, April 1987. However, the repeal was not published in the [Palestine Gazette](#) , as required in law at that time, and Israel still operates the contentious policy of punitive military house demolition under the 1945 British DER 119. During the [2nd intifada](#), the IDF adopted a policy of [house demolition](#) following a [wave of suicide bombings](#) . Israel justified the policy on the basis of [deterrence](#) against [terrorism](#), and providing an incentive for families of potential [suicide bombers](#) to dissuade the bomber from



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attacking. Demolitions can also occur in the course of fighting. During [Operation Defensive Shield](#) , several IDF soldiers were killed early in the conflict while searching houses containing militants. In response, the IDF started employing a tactic of surrounding such houses, calling on the occupants (civilian and militant) to exit, and demolishing the house on top of the militants that do not surrender. This tactic, called "Nohal Sir Lachatz" "Pressure Pot", is now used whenever feasible (i.e., non multi-rise building that is separated from other houses). In some heavy fighting incidents, especially in the [2002 Battle of Jenin](#) and [Operation Rainbow](#) in [Rafah](#) 2004, heavily [armored IDF Caterpillar D9 bulldozers](#) were used to demolish houses to widen alleyways or to secure locations for IDF troops. According to a report by Amnesty International in 1999, house demolitions are usually done without prior warning and the home's inhabitants are given little time to evacuate. [Israel: House demolitions -- Palestinians given "15 minutes to leave..." Amnesty International](#) . December 8, 1999 In February 2005, the [Ministry of Defense \(Israel\)](#) ordered an end to the demolition of houses for the purpose of punishing the families of [suicide bombers](#) unless there is "an extreme change in circumstances". [BBC News](#) , "[Israel limits house demolitions](#)" , Thursday, 17 February 2005 However, house demolitions continue for other reasons. In 2010 (to 9 Nov) 315 Palestinian-owned structures have been demolished in East Jerusalem and Area C (including 17 structures demolished by their owners following demolition orders). 402 people have been displaced and about 1,296 people have been otherwise affected.<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101118w0001.htm#10111866000542> In 2009, after a string of fatal attacks by Palestinian against Israelis in Jerusalem, the Israeli High Court of Justice ruled in favor of the Israeli Defense Forces to seal with cement the family homes of Palestinian terrorists as a deterrent against terrorism.<http://www.haaretz.com/news/court-orders-home-of-jerusalem-yeshiva-terrorist-sealed-off-1.267483>

Effectiveness

A January 2015 efficacy study by [Benmelech](#), Berrebi and Klor distinguishes between “punitive demolitions”, in which homes belonging to the families of terror operatives are demolished, and “precautionary demolitions”, such as the demolition of a house well-positioned for use by Palestinian snipers. Their results, which [The New Republic](#) calls "politically explosive" indicate that "precautionary demolitions" have caused [Suicide attacks](#) to increase, a “48.7 percent increase in the number of suicide terrorists from an average district,” while in the months immediately following a demolition, punitive demolitions caused terror attacks to decline by between 11.7 and 14.9 percent.

Purpose

IDF arguments

House demolition is typically justified by the IDF on the basis of:

- ▶ [Deterrence](#), achieved by harming the relatives of those who carry out, or are suspected of involvement in carrying out, attacks [Benmelech](#), Berrebi and Klor call demolitions of this type, targeting the homes of terror operatives “punitive demolitions”.
- ▶ The following types are labeled as “precautionary demolitions” by [Benmelech](#), Berrebi and Klor, however punishing they may feel to the impacted families.
- ▶ [Counter-terrorism](#), by destroying militant facilities such as [bombs](#) [labs](#), weapons factories, weapons and ammunition [warehouses](#), headquarters, offices etc.
- ▶ Forcing out an individual barricaded inside a house, which may be rigged with explosives, without risking soldiers' lives

- Self-defence, by destroying possible hideouts and [rocket propelled grenade/ gun](#) posts<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=22&ItemID=5544> Israel's top court approves razing Palestinian homes, Znet
- [Combat engineering](#) , clearing a path for [tanks](#) and heavy [armoured personnel carriers](#)
- Destroying structures rigged with [booby traps](#) and explosives in order to prevent risk to soldiers and civilians

### Human rights organisations' criticism

The [United Nations](#) (UN) and [human rights](#) groups such as [Amnesty International](#) and the [International Committee of the Red Cross](#) who oppose the house demolitions reject the IDF's claims, and document numerous instances where they argue the IDF's claims do not apply. They accuse the Israeli government and IDF of other motives:

- [Collective punishment](#), the punishment of an innocent Palestinian "for an offence he or she has not personally committed." [Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention](#), International Committee of the Red Cross
- Theft of Palestinian land by [annexation](#) to build the [Israeli West Bank barrier](#) or to create, expand or otherwise benefit [Israeli settlements](#). *Update to Amnesty International's briefing to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*, Amnesty International, 1 February 2007

According to the United Nations, about 1,500 homes were demolished by the IDF just in the [Rafah](#) area in the period 2000-2004. In 2004, [Human Rights Watch](#) published the report 'Razing Rafah: Mass Home Demolitions in the Gaza Strip'.  
{cite web |url=http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11963/section/20  
|title=Razing Rafah - ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS |date=2004-10-17  
|publisher=Human Rights Watch |accessdate=2009-09-28}}

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