Ethics and Targeted Killings

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***Q. 1 Why does Israel justify and pursue a policy of targeted killings?***

Israel adopted the policy of targeted killing in order to suppress the surging wave of terrorist attacks from the Palestinian land. There were numerous incidents over the year that motivated Israel to pursue this policy of targeted assassination. For instance, multiple hijacking incidents of Israeli airplanes were witnessed. Israeli citizens were not only subjected to terror attacks in their country but they also faced numerous incidents abroad[[1]](#footnote-1). The incident with most significance occurred during the 1972 Munich Olympics when eleven Israeli athletes were ruthlessly murdered. Additionally, there were incidents of cross border terrorist attacks from Hezbollah, Lebanese based terrorist group. These incidents left negative connotations on the minds of the general Israeli population[[2]](#footnote-2). The Israeli population was left to think whether they are safe or not in their own country. It is worth mentioning that all the terrorist outfits that were targeting Israel were based in neighboring states of Israel. The neighboring states of Israel are all Arab nations with no official relation with Israel. For this reason, the terrorists that have had committed a heinous act that resulted in the death of innocent Israeli citizens could not be extradited to Israel. Therefore, Israel was left with this option of targeted killings to dismantle the terrorists’ infrastructure and target the perpetrators.

Since the early 2000s, Israel has adopted the policy of targeted killing to neutralize the terrorist threats facing its population. Israel has employed state of the art modern artillery and weaponry to target the terrorists based primarily in Palestine. Although the Israeli policy has drawn widespread condemnation on different international forums, Israel enjoys special support from major international players such as the US. After the deadly attacks of 9/11, the US has been in the driving seat to identify, locate, and neutralize terrorists anywhere in the world. Since US policy of targeted killings was successful in neutralizing terrorists in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Israeli actions of neutralizing terrorists outside their territory were justified by the Israeli authorities. Israeli authorities argued since they devised the policy of targeted killing, the US found it pragmatic enough to employ it to neutralize terrorists.

There is another critical aspect of the targeted killing policy of Israel. Although international laws have outlawed assassination during peace and war, targeted killing has been often conflated with assassination drawing the ire of Israeli authorities. Israel has justified its policy of targeted killings by arguing that it is not at war with Palestine since war is between two armies and two states[[3]](#footnote-3). These two attributes are not found in the case of Palestine. However, since Israel has been involved in armed conflict with the Palestinians, they have a right to target militants. According to many legal analysts, this point of Israel is valid. The reason for its validation is that Israel is drawn into armed conflict with terrorists. According to Law Professor John Norton, if one is engaged in armed conflict, targeting militants cannot be conflated with the assassination- which is outlawed by International laws. This point was reflected when the Bush administration went against the executive order and reserved the right to target individuals who they believe were terrorists. Furthermore, Israel states that International laws bind their signatories to prevent their land from being used in planning and perpetrating terrorist attacks. In order to abide by the International laws and frameworks, they conduct preemptive strikes against targets that they feel would become a source of scourge for the Israeli population[[4]](#footnote-4). Additionally, Israel has blamed Palestinian authorities that signed Oslo accords for funding and arming terrorists. Israel states that, since the Palestinians authorities have not stuck to their end of the agreement in curbing terror financing, they hold the right to conduct preemptive strikes against the terrorists.

***Q. 2 Are David’s recommendations completely sound or should they be modified? If they are completely sound, please support your argument of why. If targeted killings are completely wrong, please support your argument of why. If David’s recommendations are not completely sound present and support modifications to his recommendations.***

As long as the dispute does not come to a peaceful solution, Israel will continue to pursue its policy of targeted killing to neutralize terrorists[[5]](#footnote-5). Since there is convergence on the point of view that Israel will not abandon its targeted killing policy, one can offer some suggestions aimed at bringing improvement in the policy of targeted killing. David has rightfully concluded that Israel must not beat around the bush and should come out unapologetically regarding its policy of targeted killing. Since according to Israel’s stance, it is their right to respond vociferously against any terror attack, they should openly exercise their right. Israel must take ownership of any preemptive or non-preemptive strike conducted against militants. Furthermore, David recommended that Israel must maintain a balance posture while pursuing the policy of targeted killing. Certainly, Israel has set its sight to annihilate terrorist organizations and dismantle their infrastructure, it must abstain from becoming a state that evades the law and does not believe in due process of law. As it is the attitude of terrorist organizations to defy law and Israel must keep it distinguishable. Additionally, Israel should comprise some sort of mechanism or policy that oversees the panel or body that sanctions the killings. Therefore, in case there is collateral damage, the decision-makers can be brought to justice. David has brilliantly argued that Israel must not target political leaders. This recommendation is significant because there needs to be political leadership on the other side with which Israel would negotiate any sort of settlement. Furthermore, Palestinian political leaders are revered by Palestinians. Therefore, killing political leaders would not only increase hate for Israel among the Palestinians but there will be no chance left of embarking on political dialogue. Lastly, David has concluded that Israel must openly come out and make it clear to the world that targeting killing of terrorists is merely a temporary solution[[6]](#footnote-6). Certainly, if Israel opts this strategy, then it would give away an idea to the world that it is not merely pursuing targeted killing policy to shed blood of innocent Palestinians but it believes in a peaceful and long-lasting solution to the long-festering Palestinian problem.

***Q.3 What does targeted killings mean to the future of war?***

With technology making great strides, militaries all around the world have employed it to revolutionize warfare. Before the invention of drones, militaries engaged in ground battles. However, after the invention of drone, militaries have gained the capability to hit any target while sitting anywhere in the world. The drone technology has so far proven a useful tool in neutralizing terrorists anywhere in the world. Since pilot-less or rather soldier-less warfare is the future, there are significant ethical issues attached to the usage of drone technology. The countries that have acquired drone technology have, more often than not, engaged in operations on the land of other countries with which they are not at war. The secretive operations have witnessed collateral damage; however, the perpetrator of the attacks so far remained out of public sight. In order to ensure the technology is not misused, the military high command that sanctions a targeted strike must be brought to justice. According to Gregoire Chamayou, the use of drone technology in targeted killings must take into account the consequences of this technology[[7]](#footnote-7). Furthermore, Chamayou argues that people living in areas with a constant drone hovering above them develop psychological disorders[[8]](#footnote-8). This has the potential to lead further hatred against authorities. Therefore, it can be concluded that since targeted drone strikes are based on surveillance, their innocence is determined on the very same basis. If the authorities that sanction targeted killings are allowed to conduct their operations without little to no accountability, then it can be concluded that the world is going to witness more bloodshed and even more collateral damage.

# End Notes

1. Luft, Gal. "The logic of Israel's targeted killing." *Middle East Quarterly* (2003).
2. Guiora, Amos. "Targeted killing as active self-defense." *Case W. Res. J. Int'l L.* 36 (2004): 319.
3. David, Steven R. *Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of targeted killing*. Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 2002.
4. Chamayou, Grégoire. *Drone theory*. Penguin UK, 2015.

1. Luft, Gal. "The logic of Israel's targeted killing." *Middle East Quarterly* (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Luft, Gal. "The logic of Israel's targeted killing." *Middle East Quarterly* (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. David, Steven R. *Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of targeted killing*. Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. David, Steven R. *Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of targeted killing*. Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. David, Steven R. *Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of targeted killing*. Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Guiora, Amos. "Targeted killing as active self-defense." *Case W. Res. J. Int'l L.* 36 (2004): 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Chamayou, Grégoire. *Drone theory*. Penguin UK, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Chamayou, Grégoire. *Drone theory*. Penguin UK, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)