

Why the violence in Israel and Palestine since October 1?

Since October 1, we have seen a low-level but on-going string of attacks by youthful Palestinians on Israelis, particularly Israeli police, IDF military personnel and residents of illegal settlements encroaching on Palestinian land in the occupied territories. The Netanyahu government has attributed these events to incitement by Palestinian Authority President Abbas. And unfortunately, many members of Congress, even Rosa DeLauro, were persuaded to sign a letter of complaint to Abbas, circulated by AIPAC. The real story of this ongoing outbreak of hostility is more serious and worrisome, a fact that Israel's senior defense and intelligence officers have themselves indicated in a striking break with the Netanyahu government.

Concurring with outside experts, these Israeli officials note that the new Palestinian violence is random and spontaneous, expressing the despair of the new generation that grew up since the last intifada of 2000, with steady assurances from Israel and the US that a Palestinian state, as required by the Oslo Agreements, would soon be achieved. They see clearly that Israel never misses an opportunity to avoid this result, a pattern recently acknowledged by Sec. of State Kerry and US Ambassador Shapiro as well.

But for Palestinians the oppressive reality of their lives is not just a matter of evasive diplomacy. During these Oslo years, Israel has relentlessly expropriated Palestinian land to build illegal "settlements" for Israeli Jews, constructed separation walls and a network of roads, for Israelis only, that carve up the West Bank into bantustans, separating villages from each other and farmers' homes from their fields. When Palestinians assert their international legal right to protest peacefully, their protests are disrupted violently by the IDF and by hostile settlers, while the IDF arrests hundreds who are held in "administrative detention," sometimes for years, without charge or judicial review. **Those** provocations are rarely reported in the US.

Meanwhile, Israel maintains a tight siege around Gaza, including a naval blockade against Palestinian fishing boats. Israel has also destroyed Gaza's only port and only airport. The IDF fires regularly into the territory to keep farmers from reaching their fields and fishermen from plying their trade, but this also is rarely reported in western media.

On three occasions since 2008, when Palestinians responded to Israeli provocations, Israel has rained down full-scale warfare on Gaza, massively disproportionate to the provocation and often focused on civilian targets. Such massive disproportion also characterizes the Israeli response to the current wave of random and limited violence. Most alleged attackers are killed on sight, rather than arrested. International human rights organizations like Amnesty International have called them "unadjudicated executions." Many deaths and most injuries, since October, have been meted out by the IDF, at peaceful, public protests far removed from the random violence.

This long-standing pattern of disproportionate violence and unrelieved dispossession and oppression defines the life and prospects of Palestinians in the occupied territories. Under the circumstances, it is remarkable that so few young people have resorted to violence. The AIPAC letter signed by so many in Congress accuses President Abbas of incitement, because he accurately noted that young Palestinians were angered when Israeli rightist officials called for changing the status of the Muslim holy site Al Aqsa, in Jerusalem. Israel has a long history of destroying Muslim mosques, so Palestinians have reason for concern about Al Aqsa, as well as about worsening conditions in the occupied territories.

We all need to pay much closer attention to the actual conditions giving rise to recent violence. US policy has been enabling oppressive conditions while raising faint objections to Israel's violations of international law and agreements. The US is even on the verge of increasing military aid to Israel, even though Israel is already the fourth strongest military in the world. These patterns are not sustainable. Progressive Americans and their political leaders need to reassess their past positions and require far more from the government of Israel. The 67-year occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem is illegal; resistance is a legal right of occupied people. It's time for the US to stop enabling Israel; join the rest of the world and demand an end to the occupation.

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