

Israel Protests: “Democracy” in an Apartheid Regime?

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Massive anti-regime protests, unprecedented in their size and scope erupted on March 26-27 in cities and towns across the state of Israel. The political crisis in Israel brought a surprising admission from the highest level of the U.S. government regarding its real relationship with the country.

Demonstrations which had been taking place every Saturday night since mid-January exploded in numbers on Sunday, March 26, when huge protests followed the firing of the “Defense” Minister, **Yoav Gallant** earlier the same day. Gallant was dismissed by **Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu** for speaking out against a plan for “judicial reform” that if adopted would constitute a legislative coup. The “reform” would be a crucial first step opening the door for a wide-ranging series of reactionary measures by the coalition of extreme religious fundamentalists and unabashed fascists who dominate the present government.

On March 26, hundreds of thousands took to the streets and much of the country was shut down by a general strike the following day. This came after thousands of military reservists announced that they would not report for duty in protest of the plan. On March 27, Netanyahu announced that a final vote would be postponed for three weeks, obviously hoping that the interlude would diminish opposition energy.

The glaring omission

The glaring omission in the demonstrations has been any mention of those who are the primary targets of the new regime – the Palestinian people. Even participation by Palestinians living inside the 1948 borders of Israel with the Palestinian flag has been discouraged or, in some cases, prevented. Instead, the protests have been seas of blue and white Israeli flags.

The fascist **National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir** announced that anyone carrying a Palestinian flag in the Jerusalem protests would be arrested and jailed. He was saved the trouble of carrying out his threat by the protest organizers who made it clear that they didn't want to "confuse" the message that this is a family dispute among Israel-loyal Zionists. Video of attacks on the tiny handful who dared to unfurl Palestinian flags by protest participants as well as security forces have been widely circulated.

pic.twitter.com/2gj6v4QFWK. קרדיט טליה נמחיה. ירושלים, עם כיבוש, דמוקרטיה עם כיבוש, ירושלים. קרדיט טליה נמחיה.

— Fadi Amun | פאדי אמון | فادي أمون (@FadiAmun) [March 27, 2023](#)

In exchange for tolerating the pause in voting on the judicial reform, Ben-Gvir was promised by Netanyahu that he would be able to set up a "national guard" under his direct command. Such a new military formation is expected to be composed of thousands of volunteers from the most fascist elements of Israeli society and carry out horrible atrocities against Palestinians.

Leaders of the Israeli protests say that they are fighting for democracy. But it is not possible to speak of democracy in any real sense inside an apartheid system. Under the defunct South African apartheid system, whites could vote, go to court, print newspaper, etc. But no one could credibly call apartheid South Africa a "democracy," and no one today can credibly claim that Israel does not have an apartheid system. Apartheid is an international crime.

The day before taking office in late December 2022, Netanyahu issued a statement declaring that the new government's **top priority** is to "advance and develop settlement in all parts of Israel — in the Galilee, the Negev Desert, the Golan Heights, Judea and Samaria [West Bank]." The Negev and Galilee are areas inside the 1948 borders of the Israeli state that have large Palestinian populations.

Netanyahu's statement was nothing less than an announcement of his intention to carry out ethnic cleansing, the most extreme undemocratic policy imaginable. But this blatant threat is ignored - or condoned - by the opposition political leaders and protest organizers.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army and its fascist settler partners continue their rampage of terror across the occupied West Bank. There, especially in the northern West Bank cities and refugee camps, the occupiers are facing growing armed resistance.

The Israeli Supreme Court - Myth & Reality

The characterization by the present government and its supporters of Israel's Supreme Court as a bastion of "leftism" and support for Palestinian human rights has no basis in reality. While the court has made rulings supporting democratic rights in Israel, it continues to validate nearly all attacks on Palestinian rights. It has upheld or ignored countless blatant violations of international law in regard to the occupation.

Among the most egregious violations upheld by the court are the massive building of settlements on occupied land, and the dual criminal justice systems for Palestinians and Israel settlers living in the West Bank. Palestinians endure life under military law and emergency decrees copied from the British colonizers' regulations. The conviction rate for

Palestinians is 99.4%. The settlers live under Israeli civilian rule.

In a February 14 opinion piece for the Israeli newspaper, Haaretz, Nathaniel Berman wrote of the court at times ruling that the government was not proceeding quickly enough in its illegal actions against Palestinians. Berman cited a recent ruling regarding the expulsion of hundreds of residents of the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar in violation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. The decision was written by Justice Noam Sohlberg, himself a West Bank settler. Even on the few occasions where the court has ruled in favor of the Palestinians, the decisions have often been ignored by the military or the government.

The Khan Al-Ahmar ethnic cleansing case, like all violations of Palestinian rights, is not on the radar of the Israeli protest organizers.

Why, then, is the regime so determined to permanently weaken the court system? The answer is that Netanyahu and his coalition partners are driven by a determination to remove all obstacles to their expansionist and regressive vision of the future. At the same time, Netanyahu, facing long-standing corruption charges, would very much like to choose his own judge if ever forced back into court.

Out of crisis comes a surprising admission

Given the \$3.8 billion in military aid and the invaluable diplomatic/political protection provided by the U.S. to Israel, Washington's view is of the utmost importance to any Israeli government. The inclusion of undisguised fascists and other extraordinarily regressive ministers doesn't comport well with the time-worn notion of Israel as "the only democracy in the Middle East."

For a while, U.S. leaders have tried to play down the crisis, with President Biden, Secretary of State Blinken and others making repeated bland statements about "shared values," etc.

But the firing of Gallant, an ally and a proven practitioner of war and occupation, sent a shock wave through the White House and the Pentagon as reflected in a statement from the U.S. National Security Council: "We are deeply concerned by the ongoing developments in Israel, including the potential impact on military readiness raised by Minister Gallant, which further underscores the urgent need for compromise."

So, there it is. All the talk about "shared values" and "friendship" is just that, talk. The real concern in Washington is about Israel's readiness to play its assigned military role in the U.S. empire, the role for which it is so lavishly rewarded.

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