

“Violence will escalate as long as extremists are allied to Netanyahu”: Interview with Tawfiq Toameh

By [Tawfiq Toameh](#) and [Steven Sahiounie](#)

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Jana Majdi Zakarneh, a 16-year-old girl, was [killed by Israeli forces](#) as she was standing on the roof of her home in Jenin, in the Occupied West Bank of Palestine. She was shot in the head, and others were wounded in the 10 pm raid on Sunday.

More than 50 Palestinian children have been killed by Israel to date in the occupied territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. More than 215 Palestinians have been killed in 2022, including 17 women. The UN reported that 2022 is the deadliest year in the West Bank since 2006.

Almost daily, the Israeli forces have been raiding and killing Palestinians living under occupation, and illegal Israeli settlers have been increasing attacks on Palestinians living in their own homes.

It appears that the West Bank of Palestine is at the boiling point. Steven Sahiounie of MidEastDiscourse interviewed [Tawfiq Toameh](#), a Palestinian living in Los Angeles, California who is an expert on political affairs in the Middle East and the US. The interview brings up questions on various timely issues affecting the Middle East.

Steven Sahiounie: Benjamin Netanyahu has come back to power in “Israel” and has an extremist ally. In your opinion, will this lead to war in Occupied Palestine?

Tawfiq Toameh: Benjamin Netanyahu is an extremist, and we now have more extremists in his government. Ben-Gvir, and Smotrich are very extreme to the right, and they hold very

sensitive positions. Especially Ben-Gvir, who is in charge of internal security affairs, which will mean everything is in his hands as far as how to direct the army and the forces in the West Bank. We already see the result of forming this government: you can see how many Palestinians are killed daily, five Palestinians almost every day since Ben-Gvir won the election and started forming the government with Netanyahu. The violence against Palestinians has been escalating tremendously, and right now they have still not formed the government. Once they have formed it and taken office more escalation in Palestine will happen. More violence, attacks on Palestinians, annexation of land, settlements, ethnic cleansing in East Jerusalem, taking houses of Palestinians, and throwing Palestinians out of their homes. So we expect the violence to escalate in the next few years as long as those extremists are in the Netanyahu government. I am expecting more violence, confiscation of land, and settlements in the next few years.

SS: According to media reports, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is going to do a peace deal with the Israeli occupation very soon. In your opinion, how will this affect the Palestinian cause?

TT: Normalization with Israel would not serve the interests of the Palestinians, Arabs, or the Arab world. Israel is an occupying power, occupying Palestine for many decades, and Israel has never fulfilled any of the UN resolutions regarding the Palestinian right for sovereignty over the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Also, the right of return of Palestinians who were expelled from Palestine in 1948. So, Israel is still an occupying power, and normalization with the Arab world would mean that the Arab world have to recognize Israel as an occupying power, and that will not serve the Palestinians interest. It will give Israel more power to make Palestinians suffer more under the occupation, and will they will continue to annex: take more land from Palestinians to build more settlements, continue the confiscation of homes, continue its ethnic cleansing in East Jerusalem, and continue its aggression against Palestinians.

So, that will encourage Israel to keep doing that because of normalization. I think it is better first for Israel to recognize the Palestinian rights to sovereignty, Palestinian right to return, for full sovereignty over East Jerusalem and the West Bank and Gaza, and then normalization will be acceptable at that time.

SS: If Riyadh and Tel Aviv make a peace treaty, in your opinion, will the resistance movements in the region launch operations on both Saudi and "Israel"?

TT: If Riyadh and Tel Aviv make a peace treaty, I think there would be a lot of condemnation from Palestinians, from different factions of Palestinians, but not from the PA, because the Palestinian Authority is a different story. Most of the Palestinians would condemn normalization, but I don't think that they would go into military resistance to attack Saudi Arabia or Israel; I don't think they would do it, because if you look at the past, Israel has normalized its relationship with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan and nothing happened, just peaceful condemnations and protests against that move. I think the same would happen if the peace treaty between Israel and Saudi Arabia took place: it would be the same as with the previous countries mentioned.

SS: Turkey has threatened a further invasion of northern Syria in order to push back the Kurdish militias in Syria who are supported by the US. In your opinion, if Turkey invades northern Syria, what would be the US response?

TT: About Turkey invading northern Syria: I believe right now there is talk between the US and the Kurdish militia, and they are trying to do some rearrangements with the organization of the Kurdish militias which would be acceptable; with new leaders and different faces. Maybe that would be acceptable to the Turkish government, and they are also trying very hard to stop the Turkish invasion into northern Syria. Turkey gave a time limit for this dialog to take place and to convince the militia to withdraw their forces from northern Syria in four different regions: Tal Rifat, Menbij, and two other cities. That is the demand of the Turks, to have all of these militias to be moved away further to the south and away from the borders of Turkey. If that does not happen, I believe an invasion will take place from Turkey into Syria, and I think that the US will continue to condemn even if the invasion happens. The US will not militarily face Turkey in Syria. I think the US will condemn, and maybe the US will ask the Turkish to pinpoint their missile attacks in some areas so they can avoid any casualties of the US military. There are 60 to 70, maybe 100, US military personnel in that region. So I think, if the invasion takes place, I don't think the US will do much other than condemnations.

SS: The conflict in Syria has turned into a stalemate over the terrorist controlled Idlib. In your opinion, will a decision be made to eliminate the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham terrorist group from Idlib?

TT: Concerning Hayat Tahrir al-Sham: I don't think they will eliminate them. I think they have support, and I believe Turkey supports them, and they are considered part of the so-called "Freedom Army" of Syria. They are protecting parts of Idlib, if not all of Idlib, from the Syrian Arab Army attacks, or from the taking back of Idlib by the Syrian government. There is a lot of interest for the group to be in Idlib, or maybe somewhere else. To eliminate them is a very big question, and I don't see that happening in the near future.

Note: the answers of the guest do not represent the views of MidEastDiscourse and its chief editor, Steven Sahiounie.

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Steven Sahiounie is a two-time award-winning journalist. He is a regular contributor to *Global Research*.

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Articles by: **Tawfiq Toameh**
and **Steven Sahiounie**

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