

# Berlin: Israelis and Iranians protest danger of war in the Middle East

Our correspondents  
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Several hundred Israelis, Iranians and German citizens demonstrated in Berlin on Saturday to protest against US and Israeli preparations for war against Iran. The demonstration was called at short notice by Israeli and Iranian organizations in the city to warn of the dangers of an escalation of tensions that could lead to a military conflagration throughout the Middle East.

The statement issued by the organizers declared that they were opposed to the arming of Israel by the German government and the sanctions imposed by Western countries against Iran. The protesters made clear that while they did not support the policies of the Iranian government they recognized that the threat of military action by Western countries against Iran could precipitate a military confrontation with enormous repercussions for the entire region.

Their statement continued: “In light of the growing threat of war we are convinced of the necessity for a powerful opposition against the drive for war and a critical analysis of the roots of the current conflict. We are seeking to take action against the war by establishing links between people from the region ... and call for a critical public debate in Germany regarding Germany’s intervention in the Middle East.”

The organizers had also called upon those taking part to refrain from bringing any national flags to discourage any displays of nationalism or anti-Semitism. A small group of Zionists sought to disrupt the protest and held up placards calling for the toppling of the Iranian government. They were ignored by the demonstrators, who proceeded to march through the city chanting demands for the ending of German weapon exports to the region.

Notable for their absence were all of the established political parties in Germany. Not a single banner was to be seen on the protest from the Social Democratic

Party, the Greens, the Left Party or the trade unions. All of these organizations have signaled in recent weeks that they are prepared to stand behind the German government and support German military aggression in the Middle East in the event of a US-Israeli strike against Iran.

In light of the short notice for the demonstration the organizers declared they were pleased that so many took part in the protest. Supporters of the WSWs distributed hundreds of copies of the leaflet “The Attacks On Gunter Grass—a balance sheet”, which were warmly received by those taking part. WSWs reporters also spoke with a number of participants.

Sadei S. has lived in Germany for some time and is studying to become a teacher. She greeted the demonstration as an opportunity to prove that Israelis and Iranians had joint interests. The fact that Israel had nuclear weapons has been known for some time but nobody has condemned this because of fears of being branded an anti-Semite. On this basis Sadej welcomed the recent poem by Günter Grass, saying, “It is high time someone publicly spoke out on this issue. It is particularly significant that the silence was broken by someone who is so prominent, a Nobel Prize winner.”

Sadej was critical of the SPD. Grass was a long-time member of the party until he left in the early 1990s, but most party leaders had criticized his stance. “The SPD has obviously capitulated to pressure from Israel”, Sadej said. “I am disappointed with SPD leader Andrea Nahles who spoke out against Grass. After all, she is supposed to be a representative of the left in the party.”

Sadej was also critical of the Left Party for its silence regarding its attacks on Grass: “The party’s presidential candidate Beate Klarsfeld was one of the first to slander Grass. She made her name as a defender of human rights and opponent of fascism, but her

comments on Grass were indefensible and indicate that the Left Party is also capitulating to Israeli pressure. I want to make it clear the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis was a historic crime. But that crime does not justify a second crime, the preparations for war against Iran.”

One protester from Iran, 50 years old, said, “I’m basically against war; it is always the population which suffers the consequences.” She had fled with her family from Iran a few years ago. She admitted that to begin with she had placed some hopes in President Ahmedinejad’s term of office, but was subsequently disappointed by his policies.

She pointed out that in the last election he received only 30 percent of the vote. Nevertheless, she maintained his lack of popularity was no justification for war propaganda against Iran by the US and Israel. “What politicians and the media say is not the main question”, she said. “It is what they do which is important. They are sending weapons from Europe and the US to Israel! Any war would end up in the destruction of both Israel and Iran and their respective populations.”

She expressed her anger over the campaign against Günter Grass in Germany: “In Germany you cannot criticize Israel, because any such comments are deemed anti-Semitic. The issue at hand, however, is criticism of Israeli policy and not the Jews.” When asked for a solution to the conflict in the Middle East she said that both Israel and the Palestinians must have the right to exist. She continued, “I was never in the Palestinian region, but a friend told me how terribly they are treated in the camps.”

Miriam from Tel Aviv declared that she was opposed to a military strike by Israel against Iran and was also against the government of Benjamin Netanyahu. However, she went on to claim she was convinced that Iran was building a nuclear bomb. She also declared that Günter Grass was not the right person to express criticism of Israel. It was all “very complicated” in Israel and very hard to understand for Europeans.

Her remarks were countered by a young man standing close by, who reminded her that Israel was the country with nuclear weapons, not Iran. In addition, Israel has launched numerous wars and military strikes against the Palestinians and Lebanon in past years

Another protester from Israel, who has lived for some

time in Germany, said that the propaganda against Iran fed into deep-seated fears among the Israeli population against attacks by another state. She also spoke out against the policies of Netanyahu and said that the Israeli and Iranian people would have to fight together against the threat of war.

One young protester, Jana, declared that the campaign against Grass proved that the media were simply tools of politicians and their interests. It was clear that Iran was being selected for aggression not only because it had important raw materials, but also because of its important geo-strategic location.

Hate campaigns against Iran had occurred in the past, with similar methods of propaganda. The population could not do much against the war because politicians were intent on pursuing their own interests, Jana said. But it was necessary for people to educate themselves about the political background and raise their awareness.



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