

Thousands in Israel protest against Gaza bombardment

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29 July 2014

Since the Israeli government's bombardment of the Gaza Strip began nearly three weeks ago a number of protests have swept Israel and the Occupied Territories. The protests against war—whose numbers far outweigh those of various right-wing groups favoring the bombardment—give the lie to the claims of the Israeli government that its actions in Gaza and the Occupied Territories are supported by the vast majority of Israeli society.

On Saturday, between 5,000 and 10,000 gathered in downtown Tel Aviv, Israel's main financial hub. The protesters chanted, "Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies," "Enough killing," "We don't want a government of inciters," and other antiwar slogans. Police initially had attempted to call the protest off, citing fears of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. "Israel Police works to preserve the values of free speech and democracy, however the current circumstances, our commitment to saving human life takes precedence," read an official statement.

The protest was allowed to proceed, however, after a brief 12-hour pause in hostilities was agreed to between the Israeli and Palestinian governments. Later, the Israeli police intervened to end the protest on the grounds of fear for civilian safety after several hundred right-wing protesters staged counter-protests and the cease-fire ended.

Other gatherings occurred in the occupied West Bank throughout the weekend, where the Palestinian Authority government of Mahmoud Abbas permitted protests for the first time in nearly a decade against the siege in Gaza.

On Friday, 3,000 protested in Umm al-Fahm, located in northern Israel. Another 1,000 marched against the bombings in Fureidis, an Israeli-Arab town near Haifa. According to *Israel Hayom*, a number of protesters

carried coffins with slogans reading: "Here lies the conscience of the Arab nations, which have done nothing to stop the suffering of the residents of Gaza."

There are fears within the Israeli and Arab ruling establishment that popular opposition may break out of the confines of officially sanctioned protests. A march of 15,000 at the Al-Amari refugee camp in Ramallah resulted in the death of a youth and several dozen injured when IDF troops opened fire on the protest. "All the wounded people were hit by live ammunition," stated Palestinian Health Ministry official Osama Al-Najjar to the *Jerusalem Post*.

Since Thursday, eight civilians have been killed in Israel in confrontations with Israel Defense Forces (IDF) troops, who have claimed to be implementing "riot dispersal means" to deal with the demonstrators. In Nablus, 18-year-old Khaled Azmi Odeh was shot dead by a right-wing settler, who shot the youth and three others as they walked across a main thoroughfare.

In describing the killing of the youth in Ramallah at the hands of the IDF, *Time Magazine* quotes 36-year old Samira Hamdan, who was present at the incident. "I am saddened to say that it really does feel like this is the Third Intifada," Hamdan said. Fearing further atrocities from the IDF, Hamdan continued, "This means more deaths and harsher conditions than ever before. But it's not just Gaza or Mohammed Abu Khdeir. It's the night invasions of homes, the re-imprisonment of released prisoners, and more deaths which have caused the Palestinian people to explode."



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