

The War in Gaza and the Domestic Threat in the West

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Since October 7 and the launch of the Swords of Iron war, and against the backdrop of increased public unrest and a wave of protests branded as “pro-Palestinian,” there has been a sharp uptick in the number of antisemitic and anti-Israel incidents in the West. These demonstrations are greater in scale and intensity than ever before, though the identity of the organizers of most of them comes as no surprise. As has been the case for the past two decades, the organizers are activists in civil society organizations. Many have a patently anti-Western agenda, camouflaged as promoting the rights of minority groups. They are part of the “red-green alliance,” which is a vanguard of the campaign to delegitimize and boycott Israel (the BDS movement). They comprise Western, radical far-left groups, acting alongside organizations that support the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and working in conjunction with political Islamist organizations. How do Western governments respond to this outbreak of hatred and violence, and can they successfully confront these fundamental domestic problems that threaten the security of their citizens – Jews and non-Jews alike – and the stability of their countries?

Since Hamas launched its murderous attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 and the Swords of Iron war began, there has been a sharp increase in the number of antisemitic and anti-Israel incidents in Western countries. These have [included](#) physical attacks against Jews, threats of violence, attempts to attack Jewish public institutions, antisemitic graffiti, and hate and incitement rhetoric in the public sphere – including traditional media outlets and social media. Every day there are dozens of demonstrations across the world, branded by slogans expressing support for violent resistance (“intifada”) and the liberation of Palestine “from the river to the sea.” As in the past, most of the large demonstrations in the West are

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organized by civil society organizations, which are part of the so-called “red-green alliance.” These groups are part of the ideological networks that for the past two decades have been at the vanguard of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) campaign to delegitimize and boycott Israel. Many have a broader agenda, which seeks to appeal to Westerners under the guise of the democratic-liberal world order, ostensibly in the name of human and minority rights. Among them:

- Far-left Western organizations working alongside radical left-wing Arab organizations – such as the Samidoun network, which is affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) terrorist organization, and runs campaigns and organizes rallies across the world calling for the group’s “political prisoners” to be released.
- Organizations and groups with an Islamist background (political Islamism), many of which are affiliated with the operation of Muslim Brotherhood networks (Hamas’s parent movement) across the world.

Far-left Activities

Over the past few decades, post-colonialist theories that emerged from prestigious campuses have flourished in the West. According to these theories, the “war on terror” that the United States launched following the September 11 attacks was designed to recapture the Middle East. Various radical groups, which after the collapse of the Soviet Union sought a new cause, identified Israel – a liberal democracy that enjoys a close relationship with the US – as a symbol and easy target. Israel is portrayed as a colonialist settlement, operating a regime of “apartheid,” in which the “white Israeli” “oppresses” the “oppressed” Palestinians. The Palestinians are portrayed as the “indigenous people,” victims of ethnic cleansing, land appropriation, and rights violations.

This approach toward Israel has gained much traction of late, thanks to the trend of “intersectionality,” whereby disadvantaged minority groups with differing agendas come together against the “repressive” establishment – including those within Western states themselves. Therefore, the support that radical climate activist Greta Thunberg expressed for the Palestinian-Hamas narrative should come as no surprise – and she is not alone. In a similar case, an activist who [identified](#) as the spokesperson for the international climate activism group Fridays for Future (FFF) accused Israel of “genocide” and said that the head of the leading Jewish organization in Germany was creating “an atmosphere of pogroms” against Palestinians.

In contrast, the German branch of FFF issued a statement supporting Israel's right to exist and avowing that international humanitarian law applies to everyone and human rights must be safeguarded. In addition, there was a debate within the branch over whether to dissociate itself from the activities of the international organization. Germany provides an excellent example of the disagreement between those members of the far-left who support Israel and those who oppose it. A number of German groups traditionally associated with the far-left recently [added](#) their support to calls from Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his government to outlaw the PFLP, the Samidoun network, Hamas, and Palästinensische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland (PGD) – known as the leading pro-Hamas organization in the country – and to sever diplomatic relations with Iran.

Activity of Networks Affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood

Beyond the widespread activities of Hamas's overseas branch, for many years the organization has relied in Western countries on the operation of social and civil networks affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in political, media, socio-education, and financial terms. Islamist organizations in the West do not enjoy the support of most of the Muslim communities in these countries, yet they have managed to appropriate for themselves the role of representatives of Muslim communities in dealing with the establishment. They are seen as an organized force operating to undermine the hegemonic "Western" world order – and this underlies the relationship they began forging in the early 2000s with fringe groups and professional unions on the far-left, which spearheaded the foundation of the BDS movement and the expansion of cooperation with other members of the "red-green alliance." In recent years, there has been a change in the approach taken by some Western countries to the activities of Islamist groups on their soil, which is increasingly seen as encouraging the kind of radicalization that undermined social integration and cohesiveness.

Among the organizations prominent at [demonstrations](#) held over the past few weeks at some of the leading campuses in the United States is Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) – an essentially Islamist organization that [became](#) "hybrid" and now includes activists from different backgrounds. In New York, among those organizing the demonstrations are far-left organizations like Samidoun, along with the Muslim American Society (MAS), which is affiliated with Muslim Brotherhood activity, and with another "hybrid" organization, Within Our Lifetime (WOL).

In Germany, one person who is frequently involved in organizing demonstrations is Majed al-Zeer, a leading figure in a pro-Hamas network affiliated with European activities of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Zeer posts videos from demonstrations

across Europe on X (formerly Twitter) and even shared, for example, a schedule of protests in the Netherlands organized by Palestinian Community in the Netherlands (PGNL), which, over the past few weeks, has conducted a campaign for the release of Amin Abou Rashed, a senior member of the network who was arrested by Dutch authorities some five months ago on suspicion of funding Hamas.

The Response by Western Governments

In recent years, in light of increased antisemitism across the world, many governments have taken measures to improve their response to the threat: security at Jewish institutions has been significantly beefed up, the [United States](#) and the [European Union](#) have drawn up strategies to tackle the phenomenon, and many countries have appointed officials to oversee their handling of the issue. At the same time, following deadly terror attacks by supporters of al-Qaeda and ISIS on European soil, and given the increasing far-right violence, the [United Kingdom](#) and other countries began to realize that in addition to preventing violence from radical ideologies (Preventing Violent Extremism), they needed to identify and recognize groups and organizations that expose members of the young generation to such ideologies and find effective ways to prevent those exposed from adopting a path of violence (Preventing Extremism).

Since the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas, French authorities have been working on a blanket ban on demonstrations. The German Chancellor announced that his government was planning on outlawing the Samidoun network, and the Interior Minister said that wherever possible, she would approve the deportation of Hamas supporters. The German newspaper *Bild* published a 50-point manifesto, designed to “make clear what we expect from everyone who wants to live in this country with us.” In the United Kingdom, then-Home Secretary Suella Braverman described the demonstrations as “hate marches” and met with police commanders to ask them to tighten supervision of the demonstrations. In the United States, the head of the FBI warned of terror attacks inspired by the October 7 massacre, and there is a public debate raging over the role of university leaders in dealing with manifestations of hatred and antisemitism on campuses.

Conclusion

The events of October 7 are not just another round of escalation in the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. It is a litmus test for protecting the humanist and liberal values of the enlightened world, as Israeli President Isaac Herzog wrote in his letter to American university and college presidents on November 7: “This conflict is far more than a clash between Israel and Hamas: At

stake is whether the enlightened world will defend the basic norms of humanity, or choose to accept, even support, their violation.”

In recent years, the crux of the debate over the campaign to delegitimize Israel has touched on the question of limitations to freedom of expression in the public sphere and the legal ramifications of these limitations. The debate barely touched on the cynical and dangerous way that radical organizations and terror groups abuse the public sphere under the guise of upholding human rights and rectifying social injustices.

Therefore, this moment is a major test – and an opportunity – for liberal democracies to deal with the threat posed, mainly on the domestic front, by forces that are taking advantage of the liberties granted to them by the liberal-democratic system to undermine their very existence from within.

The main challenge is to come up with an informed definition of the limits of discourse and activity in the public sphere – and strong action against anyone who violates these guidelines. This is the test facing all public leaders, on every level and in every organization, who must now draw a clear line between what is permissible and what is not. It is a test for governments and institutions, which in response to the challenges and threats must formulate a comprehensive policy anchored in legislation, instructions, and regulations – backed by suitable enforcement. It is also a test for those who influence the formation of perceptions and positions among large groups of people – including public figures, celebrities, the heads of media organizations and social media networks, educational institutions, religious leaders, and teachers.

Finally, for Israel and the Jewish communities across the world, this is a test of their ability to jointly recruit partners to counter the campaign of delegitimization against Israel and fight antisemitism, which must be part of the effort to deal with the root problems – widening radicalization and a discourse of hate, alongside ideologies, systems, and organizations that nurture and spread them.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurtz, Eldad Shavit and Judith Rosen