

Unrest increases within Israel

Tuesday 9 January 2024, by [RANDALL Daniel](#) (Date first published: 29 December 2023).

According to the UN, 150,000 more Palestinians have been displaced from central Gaza, as the Israeli army advances on the Bureij, Nuseirat, and Maghazi refugee camps. The town of Rafah has seen 100,000 new arrivals in recent days.

Israel's war has now killed over 21,000 people in Gaza, many of them children. Over 50,000 are injured. Large swathes of northern Gaza have been reduced to rubble and ashes, becoming an uninhabitable wasteland.

On 28 December, around 1,000 Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel rallied in Tel Aviv to demand a ceasefire agreement, the return of hostages, and a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. The protest, organised by Standing Together, was the largest action in Israel explicitly calling for an end to the war since 7 October. Chants and slogans included "In Gaza and Sderot [an Israeli town on the Gaza border], children want to live." On 26 December, 18-year-old Tal Mitnick became the first Israeli to be jailed for refusing to fight in Gaza.

Images and videos from Gaza reveal the extent of the destruction Israel's war has wrought. On 24 December, the IDF made the first admission since the war began of "unintended harm" to civilians, claiming the wrong types of munitions were used in a strike on the Maghazi camp, in which 86 people were killed. In general, though, Israel continues to claim it makes every effort to avoid targeting civilians. Despite these claims, the strategic conduct of the war reveals a clear disregard for civilian life and willingness to destroy civilian infrastructure. Israel's retort, that Hamas's embedding of its military infrastructure within and beneath civilian infrastructure makes some "collateral damage" unavoidable, does not excuse the IDF. Every military decision is a choice; striking a Hamas facility knowing the strike will likely kill many civilians represents an affirmation by Israel that destroying one rocket launch site or weapons cache is "worth" killing dozens of innocent Palestinians.

Such a strategy is only possible on the basis of a profound dehumanisation of the Palestinians, seen as an enemy people. Videos from Gaza show Israeli soldiers laughing about the destruction they have caused; in one, a soldier knocks on a door. When no-one answers, he shrugs and walks away. The camera then pulls back to reveal the door is within a small section of wall, the only part of a building still standing in an expanse of rubble. The soldiers laugh.

Senior figures in Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, including Netanyahu himself, have again raised the prospect of ethnically cleansing the Palestinians out of Gaza altogether. Netanyahu indicated support for the idea, saying the government was working on proposals for transfer. However, he cited the unwillingness of neighbouring countries to absorb expelled Palestinians as an obstacle.

That obstacle will likely prove insurmountable; Israel is unlikely to be able to force Egypt, the only plausible receiving country, to accept Palestinian refugees expelled from Gaza. But the fact that such discussions are taking place, in forums that are by no means fringe, is indicative of the way in which many on the Israeli right see the current war as a means to expand and deepen Jewish

supremacy between the river and the sea. Israeli settler and state violence in the occupied West Bank has also continued, with recent army raids described by Al-Jazeera as “the most intense” since 7 October. More than 300 Palestinians have been killed, and nearly 4,800 arrested, in the West Bank since the war began. On 28 December, armed settlers attempted to take over buildings in Jerusalem’s Armenian Quarter.

Exchanges of fire between Israel and Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Shi’a Islamist paramilitary party in Lebanon, continue on the Lebanon/Israel border. On 25 December, an Israeli strike near Damascus, Syria, killed Sayyed Razi Mousavi, a senior Iranian military official. The Houthis, another Iran-backed Islamist militia based in Yemen, have continued to carry out drone attacks on shipping traffic in the Red Sea. These ongoing dynamics show that Iranian regional imperialism is a significant military element. Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, Assad’s regime in Syria, and the Iranian itself represent a rival imperialist pole that opposes and resists Israel in the name of a reactionary alternative.

At the time of writing, both Israel and Hamas maintain public stances of outright opposition to any further ceasefire deal. Israel insists the war will only end when Hamas has been “destroyed”; Hamas says it rejects any ceasefire agreement or hostage-exchange deal short of the full cessation of the war and the withdrawal of Israeli troops. The Egyptian government said on 28 December that it was awaiting formal responses from both Israel and Hamas to a ceasefire plan it had proposed, involving several phases. According to Al-Jazeera:

“In the first phase, Hamas would free all civilian captives in return for the release of Palestinian prisoners over a truce of 7-10 days. During the second stage, Hamas would release all female Israeli soldiers in return for more Palestinian prisoners, taking place during another weeklong truce. In the final phase, the warring parties would engage in ‘a month of negotiations to discuss the release of all military personnel held by Hamas in exchange for a lot more [Palestinian] prisoners and Israel pulling back to Gaza’s borders’”.

The Egyptian plan also involves a proposal for a technocratic post-war government in Gaza, appointed via Egypt-supervised negotiations between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, prior to elections taking place. On 29 December, a Hamas delegation travelled to Cairo to discuss Egypt’s proposal, although Hamas has publicly rejected the idea of power-sharing.

Khaled Mashal, one of Hamas’s senior political leaders based in Qatar, said in a recent interview with a Saudi Arabian newspaper that Hamas would consider recognising Israel as part of negotiations towards a future Palestinian state. Mashal’s comments are perhaps further indication of tensions in Hamas between its political wing, more prepared to entertain the prospect of negotiations with Israel and a two-states settlement, and its more hardline military wing.

Whilst international diplomatic pressure on Israel has a role to play, pressure inside Israeli society itself remains a key source of leverage on the Israeli government. Activists internationally are right to demand arms embargoes and the withdrawal of military aid to Israel, but the reality is that Israel, as a net exporter of arms, is not dependent on further imports to continue prosecuting its war. Pressure from a growing peace movement, and the wider movement led by families of hostages held in Hamas captivity demanding a hostage-exchange agreement, stand the best immediate chance of imposing some restraint on the government.

Longer term, socialist-internationalists who believe in equal rights for all peoples will do most to bring that horizon closer by supporting forces inside Israeli and Palestinian society resisting war, occupation, and racism and fighting for a shared future based on justice and equality.

Daniel Randall

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and or French.

P.S.

Workers' Liberty

<https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2023-12-29/unrest-increases-within-israel>