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USA

Israel-Palestine Conflict Gives Birth to a New U.S. Anti-War Movement

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Israel's merciless bombardment of Gaza destroying apartment buildings, hospitals, schools, and places of worship killing thousands, its siege cutting off food, water, and electricity, and its massing of tens of thousands of troops on the Gaza border preparing an invasion has horrified millions of Americans, and thousands of them have joined protest demonstrations in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. among other cities. These demonstrations, organized around the slogan "Ceasefire Now" by Jewish, Palestinian, and left groups have been surprisingly large and militant, combining mass marches with nonviolent civil disobedience actions in which hundreds have been arrested. All of this has suddenly created a new American anti-war movement.

In Washington, D.C. on October 18 hundreds of protestors calling for a ceasefire took over a congressional office building. Organized by the Jewish groups Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now, during the occupation, five rabbis read testimonials from Palestinians and the group prayed and sang in Hebrew and English. Three hundred were arrested there. In Los Angeles and Chicago thousands marched and, as in other cities, called not only for a ceasefire but also for an end to Israel's genocidal war, a stop to ethnic cleansing, and an end to apartheid in Israel/Palestine. In New York City, where on October 20, I joined the rally and march of thousands, we engaged in civil disobedience, blocking one of Manhattan's main streets in front of the offices of Senator Kristen Gillibrand. Some 150 of us were arrested and jailed. And also in New York, the next day thousands rallied in Bay Ridge, a Palestinian neighborhood, where there was a sea of Palestinian flags and some of the chants were in Arabic.

Everywhere these demonstrations have been highly emotional, filled as they are with Jews and Palestinians some of whom have family either in Israel or in Palestine. Speakers at some rallies made it clear they were supporting the Palestinian movement for self-determination, not Hamas' heinous violent attack on Israeli civilians. In the one I joined in New York one of the speakers said, "We will not tolerate hate speech in this movement, no antisemitism, no Islamophobia, no hate against any group," a statement greeted with applause and cheers. Many of the young demonstrators, whatever their nationality or religion, have donned kufiya scarves as a symbol of solidarity with Palestine.

Biden's literal embrace of Netanyahu, the US. Ambassador's veto of a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning violence against all civilians, and U.S. legislators' overwhelming support for Israel have disappointed and angered many. These demonstrations, intended to put pressure on U.S. legislators, are demanding an end to U.S. funding of Israel's war machine. In some rallies we chanted, "Not a penny, not a dime, no more money for Israel's crimes." In a reprise of a slogan from the anti-Vietnam War movement, people chanted, "Hey, Biden, what do you say? How many kids did you kill today." Sometimes Netanyahu's name was substituted for Biden's. Some protestors' placards carried the number of Palestinian children killed, a growing number every day.

The new anti-war movement is fighting against powerful, pro-war propaganda from the United States, Israel, and much of the media. A recent poll showed that among registered voters, 61% sympathized with Israel and only 13% with Palestine. Among Democrats, 48% say their sympathies are more with Israelis compared to 22% who said Palestinians. This is a complete reversal of Democrats' opinions since a poll taken three years ago.

All of those in the movement recognize that it will take continued pressure, more protests and more civil disobedience, and much more to stop the U.S. complicity in Israel's war crimes.

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