

Army Units Begin Leaving Deir Ezzor after Completing Mission of Ridding City of Armed Terrorist Groups

Aug 17, 2011



DAMASCUS, (SANA) – An official military source stated that army units began leaving the city of Deir Ezzor and returning to their barracks after completing their mission of ridding the city of the armed terrorist groups that terrorized citizens and vandalized public and private property.

Life is returning to normal to the city streets as local authorities are working to restore and repair establishments and directorates that were vandalized by the terrorist groups.

70 Journalists from 43 Arab and International Agencies Document Truth of Events in Deir Ezzor

A media delegation containing 70 journalists, reporters and photographers from 43 Arab and foreign agencies on Tuesday witnessed the reality of the situation in the city of Deir Ezzor, photographing the army as it leaves the city.



The journalists documented the heartfelt farewell of the townspeople as they gathered on roads and threw rice and roses on army units, reciting slogans lauding the role of the army in protecting the country and its people.

The journalists toured the city and met citizens, listening to their testimonies about the unfortunate events that took place recently and the criminal acts committed by armed terrorist groups which cut off

roads, disrupted life, murdered innocent, destroyed public and private property, vandalized facilities and terrorized locals.

People of Deir Ezzor: Army Units Provided Security and Stability to the City

People of Deir Ezzor expressed gratitude to the army units for restoring security, stability and normal life to the city.

Sumaya Abdelwahed, an engineer, thanked the army for carrying out its mission and restoring calm and tranquility to Deir Ezzor, noting that army personnel were highly civilized and restored things to order, adding "we appreciate their great sacrifices for the sake of the safety of the country and citizens."



In turn, engineer Fayssal Hneidi expressed happiness over the return of normal life to the city thanks to the army who treated the locals with respect during its stay.

For his part, Dr. Shawki Ghazi saluted the army and said that the people of Deir Ezzor support the reform program led by President Bashar al-Assad, calling on locals who left the city in fear of the armed groups to return and help rebuild what was damaged by these groups.

Another local, Mohammad al-Salem, expressed satisfaction over the return of calm and stability and the markets resuming its natural activity after the difficult times after gunmen divided the city with roadblocks, threatened citizens and destroyed public facilities.

H. Sabbagh

Interior Ministry... law-enforcement forces, backed by an army unit complete their mission in al-Ramel al-Janoubi

Aug 17, 2011



LATTAKIA, (SANA) -

Interior Ministry on Tuesday announced that the Law-Enforcement forces, backed by an army unit completed their mission at al-Ramel al-Janoubi in Lattakia, putting an end to the armed terrorist groups who terrified the safe citizens by their criminal acts.



Brigadier General Mohammad Hassan al-Ali said the Army unit began moving out of al-Ramel al-Janoubi after completing its mission, adding "the neighborhood is recovering and the citizens are practicing their normal life that was spoiled by the acts of the terrorist groups.

Law Enforcement Forces Continue Removing Barriers Set up by Armed Groups in al-Ramel al-Janoubi

An official source told SANA reporter in Lattakia on Tuesday that the law enforcement forces are continuing to remove barriers and roadblocks set up by the armed terrorist groups along the crossroads and alleys of al-Ramel al-Janoubi neighborhood in the city.



The source added that the forces arrested a number of the gunmen and dismantled the bombs and mines planted by these groups in the streets of the neighborhood, asserting that some gunmen have fled from the aforementioned neighborhood to the neighboring alleys, opened fire and threw sticks of dynamite, causing a number of casualties and terrifying the civilians.

The source also pointed out that the law enforcement forces are still pursuing those gunmen to restore tranquility and security to these areas.

[People of al-Ramel al-Janoubi: Intervention of Law Enforcement Forces Necessary to Stop Criminal Practices of Armed Terrorist Groups](#)

People of al-Ramel al-Janoubi neighborhood said that the intervention of law enforcement forces was necessary to stop the criminal practices of armed terrorist groups and restore security and stability to the neighborhood.



One of the locals, Khaled al-Sheikh, said that the people of the neighborhood have had enough of the armed groups and their practices, stressing that the situation in the neighborhood was tragic and that pursuing a normal life was difficult, not to mention the atmosphere of fear and terror caused by the gunmen, particularly for women and children.

Ahmad al-Esta, a vegetables vendor, said that he hadn't been able to work and make a living for a long time due to the terror caused by the armed groups which hindered the economic activities of many

people, added that a lot of the locals left the neighborhood in fear of the gunmen who imposed strange practices on the local that contradict the Syrian society's values and customs.

Aisha, a homemaker, said that the situation in the neighborhood was terrifying due to the practices of the gunmen, saying "we were feeling like death was surrounding us from every side... fear seized the hearts of children who didn't understand what was happening around them... their questions were heart-wrenching."

"What do these people want from us? We want to live in safety," were the words of seven year-old Safiya.

Abu Samer, another local, expressed relief over the intervention of law enforcement forces to restore security and stability, calling for showing no leniency in pursuing the criminals and presenting them to justice.

English Bulletin

Syria Condemns Terrorist Attacks in Several Iraqi Cities

Aug 17, 2011



DAMASCUS, (SANA) – "Syria's government and people received with deep concern and grief the news of the terrorist bomb attacks took place in several Iraqi cities which resulted in a large number of deaths among the brotherly Iraqi people," a Syrian official source said on Tuesday.

The source added that Syria condemns these heinous crimes and stresses support to the Iraqi efforts to prevent every sabotage act targeting the security, stability and safety of Iraq and its people.

The source said: "We offer condolences to the families of innocent victims and wish stability and strength to Iraq."

Bloody terrorist bomb blasts ripped through five Iraqi cities claiming the lives of 66 people while 250 people were injured.

R. Raslan/ Ghossoun

Syrian troops 'withdraw' from key cities

State media say security operations ended in Deir ez-Zor and areas of Latakia after assaults said to have killed dozens.

Last Modified: 17 Aug 2011 06:42

Syrian military and security forces are withdrawing from the city of Deir ez-Zor and key areas in Latakia, according to Syrian state media, following operations which anti-government activists say have left dozens dead.

Convoys of army vehicles were seen leaving Deir ez-Zor after the military cleared the area of "armed terrorist gangs," SANA, the state-run news agency, reported.

Journalists on a government-organised trip to the city on Tuesday reported armoured personnel carriers and other military vehicles were leaving, and footage showed pictures of crowds chanting and cheering as the soldiers left.

But only hours later, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that one person was killed when security forces opened fire to disperse an anti-government protest in the city when "hundreds of people" marched in Takaya street.

Residents said tanks were still present at the outskirts of Deir ez-Zor and that troops were raiding houses looking for wanted dissidents. Activists say at least 32 people have died since troops seized control of the city last Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Syria's interior ministry said security forces had completed their operation in the al-Ramel al-Janoubi neighbourhood of the coastal city of Latakia, which had been subjected to a four-day assault that activists say has left at least 36 people dead.

Brigadier General Mohammad Hassan al-Ali said al-Ramel al-Janoubi, which houses a Palestinian refugee camp, "is recovering and the citizens are practicing their normal life that was spoiled by the acts of the terrorist groups," SANA reported.

Al Jazeera is unable to independently verify reports from Syria because of media restrictions.

Heavy fire

A resident of the al-Ramel al-Janoubi neighbourhood, who called himself Ismail, told Al Jazeera on Tuesday that gunboats and tanks had been used in the assault on Latakia. He said snipers were stationed around the city, shooting at anyone who ventured into the streets.

Regional powers have turned up the pressure on Assad

"What's happening is really severe ... The moment they see anything moving they will shoot it," he said.

Troops raided and destroyed houses in several neighbourhoods while gunfire could be heard, residents said.

"The heavy machine gun fire and bullets were intense in areas of Latakia, Ramel, Masbah al-Shaab and Ain Tamra for more than three hours," said the UK-based SOHR.

The group said soldiers raided the Sqanturi area and made dozens of arrests.

The UN agency that aids Palestinian refugees in Latakia said that thousands of refugees had fled their camp which reportedly came under fire after President Bashar al-Assad's forces began shelling the city.

"A forgotten population has become a disappeared population because we have no idea of the whereabouts of as many as 10,000 refugees who fled Latakia over the last few days," said UNRWA spokesman Chris Gunness.

Anti-government protesters meanwhile continued to take to the streets on Tuesday night - including in Homs, Albu Kamal near the Iraqi border, Binnish in the north and in some Damascus suburbs - despite reports of deaths and arrests as the military cracked down on demonstrators.

Violence condemned

A senior official in the Palestine Liberation Organisation condemned the violence used against Palestinian refugees in Latakia.

"The shelling is taking place using gunships and tanks on houses built from tin, on people who have no place to run to or even a shelter to hide in. This is a crime against humanity." Yasser Abed Rabbo, the PLO secretary general, told the Reuters news agency.

British Foreign Minister, William Hague, meanwhile said in a statement: "The regime's violence continues despite widespread condemnation by the international community. The calls for the violence to stop, including from Syria's neighbours, have not been heeded."

Western diplomats said the UN's top human rights body is likely to hold an urgent meeting next week to discuss the escalating crackdown in Syria, according to the AP news agency.

Syria's key regional ally Iran warned on Tuesday that any Western intervention in the "internal affairs" of Damascus would stoke "public hatred" in the region.

The crackdown in Syria has escalated since the beginning of the fasting month of Ramadan, when nightly prayers became the occasion for more protests against Assad and 41 years of Baathist rule.

Source:
Al Jazeera and agencies

Yemeni leader vows to return 'home soon'

Ali Abdullah Saleh says he will return soon during broadcast from Saudi Arabia where he is recovering from attack.

Last Modified: 16 Aug 2011 16:58



Street protests calling for the ousting of President Ali Abdullah Saleh have continued for months in Yemen
[Reuters]

Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Yemeni president recovering in Saudi

Arabia from wounds sustained in an attack on his palace in June, has vowed to return home soon.

Saleh, who appeared in good shape compared with previous appearances, spoke on Tuesday in a televised address.

The president renewed his calls for early presidential elections, telling supporters: "See you soon in the capital Sanaa."

He also blasted the opposition, saying they were made up of the "leftovers of Marxists, the Taliban and the imamate," Yemen's ousted monarchist rulers.

Parliament's Common Forum opposition is due to meet on Wednesday to elect an umbrella "national council" aimed at taking over power in the absence of the president.

The United States and Saleh's Saudi hosts have pressured him to remain in Saudi Arabia, fearing his return to Yemen could spark a civil war.

Saleh said he was willing to transfer power to his vice-president if the opposition pulls armed tribal fighters from the streets and the opposition ends its street rallies, the Associated Press news agency reported.

Fierce clashes

Saleh's address came as fierce clashes overnight between tribesmen and Yemen troops left 23 tribesmen dead, according to a tribal source.

"Twenty-three of our fighters were killed in fierce overnight clashes with the Republican Guard," said the source from the Bakil tribe, adding that the worst fighting was concentrated in the area of Sheheb Arhab.

The trouble began last week after the elite Republican Guard, which is led by Saleh's son, Ahmed, installed a checkpoint that allegedly harassed residents of the area that is considered the northeastern gate to Sanaa.

The source said troops chased tribesmen to their villages after few skirmishes, adding that the Republican Guard and the army had recently deployed reinforcements in Arhab, which lies 40km outside Sanaa.

Tribal sources claimed that the army was planning a war against the Bakil tribe, Yemen's largest confederation of smaller tribes.

But officials have claimed that gunmen belonging to the opposition were plotting to take control of a nearby army base and the Sanaa airport.

Dozens were allegedly killed in clashes that erupted in late July between armed tribesmen and the army at the nearby Samaa camp, which the defence ministry claimed gunmen wanted to control in order to seize the international airport.

Deputy information minister Abdo al-Janadi accused Mansur al-Hanaq, a former member of the influential opposition Islamist Al-Islah (Reform) party, of being behind the attack.

A military official said "these armed criminal elements aimed to control the Samaa camp in an attempt to take over Sanaa International airport as part of their plan to overthrow the constitutional legitimacy and seize power by force," according to defence ministry website 26sep.net.

The Republican Guard has been fighting tribes in various regions of Yemen as several of the heavily armed tribesmen sided with protesters demanding the ousting of Saleh since January.

Saleh, in power since 1978, has come under intense pressure from street protesters demanding his resignation and has remained in Saudi Arabia for nearly two months after his palace was attacked.

Source:
Agencies

Quartet alarmed by Israel's settlement plans

Mediating group says it is 'greatly concerned' by recent announcement to advance planning for new housing units.

Last Modified: 17 Aug 2011 00:07



Israel approves the building of almost 300 new homes in Ariel, inside the occupied West Bank [GALLO/GETTY]

The Middle East Quartet, consisting of the US, Russia, the EU and the UN, has expressed concern over Israel's move to build 277 houses in the occupied West Bank and 900 houses in occupied East Jerusalem.

"The Quartet is greatly concerned by Israel's recent announcements to advance planning for new housing units in Ariel and east Jerusalem," the the mediating group said in a statement on Tuesday.

"This comes at a critical juncture with Quartet efforts ongoing to resume negotiations which are the only way to a just and durable solution to the conflict," the statement said.

The statement came amid intense efforts by Tony Blair, the Quartet's special envoy, to get Palestinians and Israelis back into direct talks.

Israel approved on Monday **the building of almost 300 new homes** in Ariel, a settlement inside the occupied West Bank, taking the total to more than 2,700 new settler homes approved in the past two weeks.

The planned expansion has brought a furious response from the Palestinian Authority, which has shunned direct talks since Israel ended a moratorium on settlement building in September last year.

The US said it found the reports of new Israeli settlement plans "deeply troubling" and counterproductive to the US effort to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

Israel has rejected international criticism insisting that the settlements are not an obstacle to direct talks.

Palestinians and Israelis are building up to a new diplomatic confrontation as Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority president, prepares to seek full United Nations membership at the UN General Assembly in September.

Israel says this is a threat to the peace process and the US is expected to veto any application to the UN Security Council.

Quartet divided

The Quartet itself has been divided in recent months over how to end the conflict that it has been trying for years to settle.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held a meeting in Washington last month and could not even

agree on a joint statement.

The European powers want the Quartet to take a stronger role in efforts to get the Palestinians and Israelis back to the negotiating table, even if this means setting out the parameters for talks.

The US has pushed back such a move, diplomats said.

Blair, the former British prime minister, who has been the Quartet's special envoy since 2007, is working on a Quartet communique which he hopes could end divisions between the international powers and help get talks started again before the UN assembly.

"Those efforts are still going on. Tony Blair is in the centre of efforts trying to find the relevant wording to move forward," said a senior diplomat at the United Nations.

"Mr Blair is making progress. If you are talking about success -- not yet," the envoy told reporters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Source:
Agencies

Israeli parliament meets over protests

Emergency session to discuss month-long mass protests against high prices of food, housing education and healthcare.

Last Modified: 16 Aug 2011 10:04

Israeli politicians have interrupted their summer recess to participate in a special debate on protests over the cost of living that have shaken the country.

Tuesday's session of the Knesset, Israeli parliament, comes after a month of mass protests against the high prices of food, housing, education and healthcare.

Although the parliament will debate the social upheaval, it is not expected to take action on any reforms until it returns to work in late October.

The unrest began in mid-July when disgruntled activists pitched protest tents in a wealthy district of Tel Aviv to illustrate their inability to afford

housing in the city.

Al Jazeera's Cal Perry updates from Tel Aviv

Their protest quickly snowballed into a much larger movement, tapping into deep frustration across Israel over the cost of living and income disparity.

The movement managed to bring at least 250,000 people into the streets across Israel on August 6.

Protesters gathered outside the parliament on Tuesday before the debate.

Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, cancelled a foreign trip to address the issue, and has set up a committee headed by respected economist Manuel Trajtenberg, to draft reform proposals.

Reporting from Tel Aviv, Al Jazeera's Cal Perry said that, "I think it's a good litmus test, not only for the people here protesting, but also for the prime minister, for him to find out how much pressure he is actually under within the Israeli government.

"A lot of the people here are wondering if they're going to hear the bigger and broader debate about the economy in Israel. People here, within the tent city, want to keep the protests very focused on the economic issues at hand... rent prices, people's pensions, very specific issues."

Netanyahu has said that Israel will not spend outside its current budget and says that the sweeping and costly economic reforms championed by protesters could push the country into a financial crisis.

Israel's opposition has seized on the social upheaval to attack Netanyahu's government, with Tzipi Livni, head of the opposition Kadima party, accusing the prime minister of failing to understand the protesters.

Source:
Al Jazeera and agencies

Israeli air strikes hit Gaza Strip

One person killed and five others wounded, according to Palestinian medical sources.

Last Modified: 16 Aug 2011 02:55



An injured woman is wheeled into a Gaza City hospital following Israeli air strikes early on Tuesday [AFP]

One person has been killed and five others have been wounded in Israeli air strikes on the Gaza Strip, according to Palestinian medical sources.

The first raid, early on Tuesday, targeted Zeitun, east of Gaza City and injured three men involved in firing rockets at Israel, the medical sources told the Reuters news agency. One among them later died.

The warplanes also targeted two Hamas training camps, one east of Gaza City and another west of Khan Younis city.

Two people were reported to have suffered minor injuries, according to the AFP news agency, which carried images of an injured women arriving for treatment at a Gaza City hospital.

Three Palestinian civilians, among them a boy, were injured, sources

said, in a separate air strike that targeted a tunnel beneath Gaza's border with Egypt.

In a statement, the Israeli military said the raids were launched in response to the firing of a rocket from the Gaza Strip at the southern town of Beersheva.

Aircraft "targeted four targets in the Gaza Strip. Direct hits were confirmed," the statement said.

An Israeli police spokesman said a rocket had been fired at Beersheva, without causing casualties. Israeli public radio said a second rocket was also fired at the town, but it was not known where it fell.

Since last month there has been an increase in the number of rockets fired at southern Israel from the Gaza Strip followed by Israeli air force reprisal raids after several months of calm following a flare-up in April when an anti-tank missile hit an Israeli school bus, killing a teenager.

Israel responded to that attack with a series of air strikes that killed at least 19 Palestinians in the deadliest violence since Israel's devastating 22-day assault on Gaza in December 2008-January 2009.

Source:
Al Jazeera and agencies

Why boycott Israel?

A founding member of the campaign for the academic and cultural boycott outlines the motivation behind the movement.

Lisa Taraki and Mark LeVine Last Modified: 13 Aug 2011 15:45



French activists demonstrate in solidarity with Palestinians, showing support for an int
[EPA]

Author and history professor Mark LeVine speaks with sociologist Lisa

Taraki, a co-founder of the Palestinian campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel.

Mark LeVine: What is the "**Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions**" movement and how is it related to the academic and cultural boycott movement? How have both evolved in the past few years in terms of their goals and methods?

Lisa Taraki: **The BDS movement** can be summed up as **the struggle against Israeli colonisation, occupation and apartheid**. BDS is a rights-based strategy to be pursued until Israel meets its obligation to recognise the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and complies with the requirements of international law.

Within this framework, the academic and cultural boycott of Israel has gained considerable ground in the seven years since the launching of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) in 2004. The goals of the **academic and cultural boycott** call, as the aims of the **Palestinian Civil Society Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions** issued in 2005, have remained consistent: to end the colonisation of Palestinian lands occupied in 1967; to ensure full equality of Palestinian citizens of Israel and end the system of racial discrimination; and to realise the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

The logic of the BDS movement has also remained consistent. The basic logic of BDS is the logic of pressure, not diplomacy, persuasion, or dialogue. Diplomacy as a strategy for achieving Palestinian rights has proven to be futile, due to the protection and immunity Israel enjoys from hegemonic world powers and those in their orbit.

Second, the logic of persuasion has also shown its bankruptcy, since no amount of "education" of Israelis about the horrors of occupation and other forms of oppression seems to have turned the tide. Dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis, which remains very popular among Israeli liberals and Western foundations and governments that fund the activities, has also failed miserably. Dialogue is often framed in terms of "two sides to the story", in the sense that each side must understand the pain, anguish, and suffering of the other, and to accept the narrative of the other.

This presents the "two sides" as if they were equally culpable, and deliberately avoids acknowledgment of the basic coloniser-colonised relationship. Dialogue does not promote change, but rather reinforces the status quo, and in fact is mainly in the interest of the Israeli side of

the dialogue, since it makes Israelis feel that they are doing something while in fact they are not. The logic of BDS is the logic of pressure. And that pressure has been amplifying.

Institutional pressure

The Palestinian-led academic and cultural boycott is an institutional boycott; that is, it does not target individual scholars or artists. This point has also remained the same since the inception of the BDS movement. Yet it's important to state here that all Israeli universities and virtually the entire spectrum of Israeli cultural institutions are complicit in the state's policies, and as such are legitimate targets of the boycott. Guidelines and criteria for boycott, however, have been elaborated since the founding of the movement, as more experience is gained on the ground, and in response to requests for guidance from conscientious academics and cultural workers wishing to respect the Palestinian boycott call. PACBI in particular spends a great deal of effort guiding and advising international solidarity activists. Consistency is achieved through adhering to the guidelines developed by PACBI, in cooperation with other elements in the Palestinian BDS movement.

World renowned public intellectuals, academics, writers, artists, musicians and other cultural workers have now endorsed the academic and cultural boycott call; their names are too many to note here, but the interested reader can consult the [PACBI website](#). In addition, several campaigns for academic and cultural boycott have been established around the world: in the UK, the USA, France, Pakistan, Lebanon, Germany, Norway, India, Spain, South Africa, and Australia, and many other countries. The newly established European Platform for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (EPACBI) is an important coordinating body in Europe.

The lethal Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip in the winter of 2008-2009 and the murder of Turkish solidarity activists aboard the Mavi Marmara in May 2010 served as further catalysts in the tremendous spread of BDS actions around the world, which include cancellations of artistic performances in Israel, protests against complicit Israeli institutions' performances abroad (such as the past and current protests around performances by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra), and many more creative forms of protest and boycott of Israeli and brand-Israel projects and institutions.

Israel's crackdown on dissent

ML: The Israelis have recently passed a so-called "anti-Boycott law", which opens Israelis who support any form of boycott, even if it's limited

to settlement products, to significant civil penalties and lawsuits to force them to stop their actions. Can you comment on this whole discourse, especially the commentary in the Israeli press critical of it, claiming it represents a move against democracy, towards fascism, and similar responses which seem to suggest these are unprecedented measures?

LT: The Palestinian BDS movement is encouraged by the adoption of the logic of BDS, and boycott in particular, by sections of the Israeli left, and feels it has been vindicated in its argument that pressure - and not persuasion - is the best way to make Israelis realise that the system of occupation, apartheid and colonialism must end. Having said this, I must note that there are at least two disturbing aspects to the new surge of activity surrounding the new anti-boycott law passed by the Israeli Knesset recently.

First, the boycott being defended by leftist and liberal Israelis targets institutions (such as the University Center of Samaria and the cultural center in Ariel) and products of the Israeli colonies in the West Bank only. This boycott, then, is silent on the complicity of all mainstream Israeli institutions - and indeed many industries, such as the weapons industry - in maintaining and legitimising the structures of oppression.

Second, this boycott is often cast in terms of "saving Israeli democracy". As such, it is an Israel-centred discourse and project, and the point of reference is neither Palestinian rights as stipulated by international law nor an acknowledgment that they are heeding the call of the Palestinians. One outstanding exception is the Israeli group "**Boycott from Within**", which explicitly endorses the Palestinian BDS call and considers it the basic point of reference for its agenda of activism - such as urging artists and musicians not to perform in Israel, supporting a military embargo of Israel, advocating for different divestment campaigns, and many other activities that target all complicit Israeli institutions. Other Israeli groups, such as the Coalition of Women for Peace, ICAHD, and others have also endorsed the Palestinian BDS call publicly.

ML: What is your impression of what happened with the latest Gaza flotilla? Some commentators have argued that the "successful" use of supposedly "non-violent" strategies by the government of Israel to put pressure on other governments to stop the flotilla before it got anywhere near Gaza represents a defeat for the rising tide of non-violent resistance, showing that the Israelis have learnt the lessons and are now able to beat the activists at their own game.

LT: I don't agree with that assessment at all. I think the main aim of the flotillas, which has been to highlight, resist, and protest Israel's illegal

siege of the Gaza Strip, has been realised, despite Israeli efforts to bear extreme pressure against governments to prevent the vessels from sailing. The ridiculous Israeli response to the recent "Welcome to Palestine" campaign did more to publicise the campaign than would otherwise have happened.

You are right to frame the flotilla movement as a part of the international movement to isolate, expose, and bear pressure upon Israel to respect international law and end its system of colonisation, occupation, and apartheid. That this movement - still in its early stages - has achieved world recognition is attested to by the state of disarray in official Israeli and Zionist circles. Already, several conferences and strategy papers have been launched in Israel and abroad to counter what is being marketed as the "delegitimisation threat". If BDS, the annual and growing Israel Apartheid Week events, and other resistance actions such as the waves of flotillas are mere nuisances, I doubt that so much effort would be invested merely out of an "academic" interest in them. Strong-arm tactics with some governments may have prevented the flotillas from reaching Gaza, but the strength of the BDS movement - and other solidarity actions - is that they are built on people's initiatives, [these] cannot be easily suppressed, despite intimidation, legal threats and lawsuits, and other silencing tactics.

A wider perspective

ML: In the BDS literature, there is a critique of those, like myself, who argue that anyone who wants to join BDS for Palestine should also adopt similar actions *vis-a-vis* other countries involved in massive systematic oppression and/or occupation (China, India, the US, to cite the most obvious examples), and that the need to think systemically is not merely an ethical imperative but a strategic one as well. Your response, when we last met in Ramallah, was that this strategy is utopian, that Palestinians have enough trouble getting people to engage in BDS merely against Israel, and that enlarging it would be untenable.

Can you explain how BDS can become more effective without thinking of joining with other movements against oppression and occupation that might call for a similar campaign?

LT: The BDS movement does operate with a conceptual framework, of course. This includes an analysis of global and regional power relations. BDS is predicated on the fact that the collusion of the hegemonic, or major world powers of the so-called "international community" with Israeli impunity is the single most important factor that enables Israel to continue flouting international law. The hegemonic powers not only shield Israel from censure; they have also often turned a blind eye to

grievous offences committed by their allies - but only when it serves their own interests. The inconsistency of US and European foreign policy is not something I need to stress, I believe. Plenty of rogue regimes continue to oppress and suppress their citizenry without international censure, as we all know.

What is important to note, however, is that when an oppressed people decide to appeal to the world to help them achieve self-determination and freedom through boycotts and other pressure mechanisms, as the vast majority of Palestinian civil society has done, then the response of all conscientious people would usually be to respect that appeal directly and immediately. It certainly was the case in South Africa. I don't think anyone had the temerity to suggest, during the anti-apartheid struggle in that country, that the existence of a full-throttle anti-imperialist movement would be the precondition for supporting the boycotts called for by the oppressed in South Africa, or that a boycott of the US, the UK (and indeed Israel) was the only principled course of action to take. That would have been a recipe for paralysis.

Israel, unlike many other oppressive states, enjoys the full support of the hegemonic powers, as I have noted. Precisely because of this, since there is no other impetus for change, it is incumbent upon forces that support justice to heed the Palestinian call. If there were a robust BDS movement in China or in Morocco today urging a boycott of the existing regimes, then certainly it would be an obligation to respect the call of the oppressed.

The growth of the movement

ML: It seems increasing numbers of diaspora and Israeli Jews are supporting BDS, at least in principle - although as you alluded to - what they imagine BDS is and what it *actually means* can differ significantly. How is the growing support impacting the success of BDS? Do you think it is penetrating more into Israeli society? And have you seen any changes in the way the Israeli government deals with non-violent protest in the last year or so, given the increasing success of the movement?

LT: My comments concerning the Israeli boycott of the colonies in the West Bank are relevant in this context as well. I think most Israelis are very far from becoming convinced that BDS is an effective strategy for radical change of the status quo, and that is because Israeli society has no incentive to change the status quo. Only pressure, in the form of various BDS measures, can move the Israeli body politic. That is the logic of BDS, after all. As for the treatment of protests by the Israeli government and military, it's obvious that they are continuing to

reassess their on-the-ground tactics in the face of the continuing escalation of protests, both by Palestinians and international and Israeli supporters. The use of force has been a constant for several decades now and is nothing new. During the first intifada, which was a form of civil resistance and disobedience, the response of the Israeli military was deadly and violent, just as it is today. The language of force will not be abandoned. That is the logic of a colonial power, after all.

ML: Can you elaborate a bit more on what the initiators of the BDS movement mean when they describe institutions or artists/academics who "serve Brand Israel". What is "Brand Israel" and whose interests does it serve?

LT: "Brand Israel" is a worldwide campaign launched in 2005 by some agencies of the Israeli government and major pro-Israel groups internationally, primarily in the United States. It's a diffuse and diverse effort, but the main idea behind it is to portray and promote Israel as a normal country for tourism, youth culture, enjoyment of the fine arts, sports, and all other "normal" and "civilised" pursuits. Public relations firms have played an important role in crafting the Israeli brand. In addition, Israeli consulates and embassies as well as Jewish and Zionist organizations (such as Hillel in the US) are actively involved in promoting Israeli art, scientific accomplishments, and other "achievements" abroad. The modernity, diversity, and vitality of Israel are stressed in Brand Israel promotional activities.

I may add that the Israeli writer Yitzhak Laor has uncovered evidence of official Israeli sponsorship of Brand Israel-type activities, and with a price tag attached; in an [article published in 2008](#), he revealed that any Israeli artist or cultural worker accepting financial support from the Israeli Foreign Ministry for exhibiting or showcasing his or her work abroad was obligated to sign a contract stipulating that he or she "undertakes to act faithfully, responsibly and tirelessly to provide the Ministry with the highest professional services. The service provider is aware that the purpose of ordering services from him is to promote the policy interests of the State of Israel via culture and art, including contributing to creating a positive image for Israel".

What this reveals, then, is that, in light of the bad press Israel has been receiving in past years, it has been deemed necessary to make sure that artists and other cultural workers - perhaps because of their reputation as idiosyncratic or even eccentric - know what is expected of them when they accept state funding of their tours abroad. They are supposed to act as "cultural ambassadors" for Israel, which - in large part - is to become apologists for Israeli policies and practices that oppress the Palestinians.

ML: In terms of the academic boycott, if I have a student who needs to come to Israel to develop her or his Hebrew in order better understand the dynamics of the occupation and can only afford to do this through various programs such as Erasmus or Education Abroad Programs that involved affiliation with Israeli universities, or wants to do research at Israeli archives on the country's history that require students to be affiliated to Israeli universities to obtain research clearance, what is the official position of PACBI towards this?

LT: The **PACBI guidelines** for the implementation of the academic boycott, which apply to international academics and students, are clear: any interaction with Israeli universities, regardless of the content or form (studying there, accessing archives, giving a course, attending a conference, conducting research) violates the academic boycott if such an interaction entails official contact with the institution.

This can include accepting an invitation to attend a conference, registering for a course, accepting employment or agreeing to conduct seminars, or conducting research in affiliation with such institutions. While using a university facility such as a library does not strictly violate the boycott, doing so in the framework of affiliation with the university would.

Institutional study abroad schemes, research activity conducted in the framework of institutional cooperation agreements - such as the various EU-funded programs, including Erasmus Mundus - violate the boycott. Regarding the study of Hebrew, I think that the international options for pursuing that are very wide indeed; most universities in the West offer Hebrew instruction.

In general, conscientious scholars and students are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the logic and aims of boycott and to abide by its spirit if situations other than the ones noted above are encountered. Since Palestinians - including academics and their representative body, the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Employees - have called for an academic boycott, it becomes a responsibility of conscientious academics and students considering visiting the area for research or study purposes to become familiar with the context, which includes thinking seriously about the meaning of their affiliation with Israeli universities in light of the boycott call.

ML: Critics might say that this response is explicitly putting politics - however worthy - ahead of the advance of scholarship. For historians, for example, it is impossible to produce new knowledge without accessing archives. For student historians, their degree depends on their access to archives. If the archives are controlled by the state, then

is the mere fact of using them mean complicity with the state?

LT: This is not putting politics above scholarship; it is about applying ethical principles to the practice of scholarship. No scholarly activity takes place in a vacuum, and every scholar must consider the consequences of his or her research strategies when pursuing scholarly activity. State control of some archives does not necessarily preclude using them, as I noted earlier; usually, it is enough to prove one's academic credentials to gain access to them. It is the same as using Israeli medical facilities or any other public service. The main issue is institutional affiliation.

Drawing inspiration

ML: Are there any lessons from the so-called Arab Spring, or from other mass mobilisations globally against oppression in the past year or two that can inform and even help the BDS movement and Palestinian resistance more broadly? Do the events of the last eight months give you hope, or is the situation in Palestine different enough - being at once a colonial situation and an internal struggle for democracy both within Israeli and Palestinian societies - that these other mass mobilisations can't really help beyond inspiring Palestinians to stay the course?

LT: The revolutionary spirit that has ignited the Arab will no doubt make the question of Palestine more urgent than before, both in those countries that have begun the process of revolutionary transformation and those in which struggles for freedom and democracy are still unfolding. Once there are free and unrigged elections for new parliaments in Egypt and Tunisia as well as other Arab countries, the new parliaments will have to be sensitive to the views of the people - unlike the situation that has hitherto prevailed.

It is well known that Palestine is an Arab question, and that includes widespread rejection of Israel's destructive role in the region. The forces of counterrevolution may try to combat popular sentiment, and there will be continuous contestation and ongoing struggles, but the policies of Arab countries will not be the same now that the revolutionary spirit has taken hold of the imagination of the Arab people.

ML: How do you think the sudden rise of the protest movement in Israel for "social justice" will impact the BDS movement and Palestinian resistance more broadly to the occupation? Especially with the likely coincidence of renewed protests in Israel next month and a major Palestinian push for statehood at the UN, is there a space for Palestinians to make a significant intervention in the protest discourse inside Israel that helps reshape it towards broader ends? And if so,

what role would BDS play in this?

LT: From all indications, the protest movement in Israel has nothing to say about justice for Palestinians, either as citizens or as occupied people. The Palestinian BDS movement does not address the Israeli public directly in order to persuade it or to appeal to its sense of justice. That is not the logic of BDS. It is up to Israeli political forces to make that connection and to influence their public. We expect that pro-BDS Israelis, however small their numbers might be, will be taking this up within their society.

Lisa Taraki is a sociologist at Birzeit University in the occupied Palestinian territories and a founding member of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)

Mark LeVine is a professor of Middle East history at the University of California, Irvine, and is the author of Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam and the soon to be published An Impossible Peace: Israel/Palestine Since 1989.

The views expressed in this article are those to whom they are attributed and do not necessarily represent al Jazeera's editorial policy.

Source:
Al Jazeera

Opinion

Not the Israeli summer... yet

Recent protests in Israel vaguely resemble the earlier protests that sparked the Arab Spring.

Mark LeVine Last Modified: 10 Aug 2011 12:31

Somewhere in the afternoon of this past Saturday, while hundreds of thousands of Israelis celebrated their renewed civic spirit and sense of national solidarity through their participation in the rapidly escalating protests against high housing prices and social inequality, a car approached the Shavei Shomron checkpoint north of Nablus. Inside were Rami Hwayel and several other cast members of a new production of "Waiting for Godot". The play, which is being directed by famed Israeli auteur Udi Aloni is in rehearsals in Ramallah, but the cast was heading home to Jenin, to their home base at the Jenin Freedom Theatre.

When they reached the checkpoint, soldiers demanded to see their ID cards, after which, without warning, they pulled Hwayel out of the car, blindfolded him and threw him in an army vehicle to be taken away. As of Sunday no one had been told why he was detained. The military has slapped a gag order on all reporting about his detention inside Israel, and he can be held without charge or even access to a lawyer for up to a month. He is the third member of the Freedom Theatre to be detained in the last few weeks, all without official explanation or due process. According to an Israeli attorney who's met with them, at least one of the captives has been "treated inhumanely".

These two events - one "history-making", the other all too mundane - point to the long journey Israelis will have to traverse before their increasingly massive protests against sky high housing prices and other social injustices becomes the revolution many already **believe it to be**.

A social revolution?

The huge public rallies mark an attempt by the Israeli public to bring issues such as affordable housing, healthcare, raising the minimum wage and education, among the movement's key **demands**, back into the light of day. It's also a clear antidote to the long felt apathy and impotence on the part of Israelis towards changing their dysfunctional political system.

From the **start of the protests**, which I wrote about when they first began in Tel Aviv, organisers have been very careful to characterise their actions as a struggle for "social" rather than "political" justice. One of the main slogans of the protests, "The people demand social justice", copies the meter and rhythm of the chants from Tahrir, but it is definitely not the same thing as "The People Demand the Fall of the System", the ubiquitous battle cry of the Arab world this year.

But can the hundreds of thousands of protesters in Israel hope to achieve what can only be described as a socio-economic revolution - in the most basic sense of the word, as they are trying to return back to an earlier social compact - without radically transforming the existing political system? If the protests in Tunis or Cairo are any guide, economic grievances will not be addressed unless, as the chant says, the existing system, and the state that enforces and represents it, is dismantled.

Part of the reason Israel has found itself in the current, very political, crisis is precisely that for decades Israelis have allowed "politics" to be limited only to the specifics of the Israeli-Arab conflict and the occupation, leaving everything else to the category of "social issues" to be negotiated in the back rooms of the Knesset. As in every other

country, the back rooms of power are the last places you want to entrust issues related to the welfare of society as a whole.

Bring the social to the public

The organisers of this still somewhat amorphous movement, many of who come from the Israeli Left and the Kibbutz-affiliated movement, *Dror Yisrael* (which describes itself as the **largest movement in Israel** with both Arab and Jewish members), surely understand that the social and political are inseparable in reality. Indeed, maintaining that rhetorical fiction has been one of the mechanisms by which Israel's political and economic elite have managed both to continue the occupation indefinitely while arrogating an ever increasing share of the once egalitarian society's national wealth to themselves.

One of the key elements of neoliberal discourse is precisely its claim that the politicisation of markets - that is, government intervention in any form - makes them inefficient and inequitable. Only by leaving them alone, or at least alone with economists, hedge fund managers, bankers and IFI officials from the WTO, IMF and their sister institutions, will markets be able to function efficiently, allowing the most wealth to spread widely across society.

In the United States, as long as Americans could keep going deeper into debt to finance both consumer lifestyles and health and other costs the state refuses to cover, this fiction could be sustained. Today it stands unmasked, yet so strong is the ideology that very few people are taking to the streets, a once progressive Democratic president bows to its will even at the cost of his political life, and the most angry Americans have joined the Tea Party, a movement that reinforces the very dynamics causing their suffering.

The power of memory

But Israelis' long dormant memory of the social solidarity and collectivist social ethos that once energised Zionism has provided the foundation for this sudden explosion of support for re-orienting the economy back towards a more egalitarian past, when the Israeli state took care of its citizens to a far greater degree than it does today.

The big tent strategy pursued by protest organisers has helped unify previously disconnected protests on issues such as gasoline, bread prices, and even cottage cheese prices, as well as strikes by social workers and doctors during the last year, enabling them to morph into one larger movement. But in order to achieve this unity a decision was clearly made to keep the occupation out of the discourse of the protests. Such a strategy allowed organisers to weather the attempts early on by

the government and right wingers to label the movement precisely as one of Leftie elitists who are out of touch with majority of Israeli values. That in turn created space for representatives of the entire spectrum of Israeli political and social life to participate in the movement, including Palestinians.

Even some of the most hard core settlers have joined the protests, arguing that on social issues they are "more left than the Left". This claim is not that wide of the mark; one of the traits most Israelis admire about settlers, even when they don't support them, is precisely the collective ethos, "pioneering spirit" and self-sacrifice that once were traits of Israeli society more broadly, when it was under the hegemony of the Labour movement.

Mirroring Tahrir?

The big tent strategy is not all that different from the strategy successfully pursued by the organisers of Tahrir Square (to go back further, it was also behind the success of Serbia's *Otpor* movement, one of the inspirations for the Arab Spring, which brought together the unprecedented political coalition necessary to topple Slobidan Milosevic in 2000).

As one organiser of the current tent protests in Israel put it, "We want to find solutions relevant to the entire nation... This is a battle of the people. Right or Left doesn't matter - we want to break these definitions... The people understand that (the government) is pulling a divide and conquer - for years they have been trying to create conflict between us."

It is perhaps a bit too easy to blame the government for trying to divide and conquer the people in Israel. That tactic has certainly been deployed successfully in Egypt and other authoritarian societies, but in Israel the public surely has to accept a large share of the blame. Essentially, after more than half a century of socialist Zionist hegemony, in which the identity of the individual Jewish Israeli was shaped by and through his or her membership in the Zionist collective and its institutions - the state, the army, and other vehicles for socialisation into Israeli Jewish society - Israelis were seduced by the siren of neoliberalism, just as happened in the US, the UK and increasingly across much of Europe in the last two generations.

This philosophy, which first entered Israel in the 1970s, promised a new era in which the free market and an individualist consumer ethos would enable greater wealth and fulfilment for all, or at least for all Jews. It became the dominant social identity in the 1980s, and helped reshape Israel into the consumer society it has become and away from the

socialist ethos that defined Zionism and ensured its cohesiveness, survival and then successful transition to statehood in the previous half century.

A new enemy?

The increasingly rapid decline of the United States is only the most recent exemplar of the way "really existing neoliberalism" works on individuals and their freedoms and choices. The ideologies of "choice", "freedom" and "individualism" have always masked the reality that in power, neoliberals have tended not to "shrink the state" so much as redirect resources away from the majority of the people and towards the corporate interests they represent, while allocating social and other discretionary spending to groups who are most willing to help preserve their power even if they don't share their ideology (the decades' long feting of *Shas* and other *haredi* groups by successive secular and neoliberal parties is the best example of this trend).

And so the increasingly neoliberal policies of successive Israeli governments, of the so-called Left as much as of the Right (which is why organisers of the protests have correctly decided that using such labels is meaningless), have played a major role in the rise in housing prices and other goods and services against which Israelis are finally rebelling.

Similar to Egypt, as the protests have picked up steam concrete demands have been joined by broader ideological critiques. Today, organisers are increasingly labelling the enemy as the liberalisation and privatisation of the Israeli economy. "This is now a very widespread public struggle fighting against privatisation policies, and the mainstream of Israeli society is demanding a return to socio-economic policies that allow every citizen to acquire basic human needs", one of the movements' main **Facebook pages** explains.

It seems that Israelis are finally beginning to understand that the main threat to their health, life chances and futures are not Palestinians in Gaza or Jenin but the corporatised crony capitalism that now dominates their economic and political systems.

But there are contradictions in this new found critique of neoliberalism by young middle class Israelis. They are best evidenced by the focus by organisers on the attempts by the state to privatise land, **which they argue**, "goes directly against the principles of Zionism, since he is attempting to sell away the country's resources and deny its citizens basic rights, choosing instead to pursue greed, wealth, and power over the ideal of a moral Jewish state".

As I argued in my last column on the protests, organisers rightly point out that these policies "harm[ed] the weaker sections of society (Arabs, *Haredim*, *olim*) for quite some time" before finally affecting the middle classes. But what they are not seeing, or at least do not feel comfortable discussing, is that from the start the core "principles of Zionism" existed only to protect and benefit Jews, not the indigenous population.

And indeed, the whole point of collective Jewish ownership and the "conquest of land" that spurred large scale Jewish land purchases in Palestine beginning in the years before World War One was to ensure that Palestinian inhabitants could never again gain access to land acquired by Jews. As Israeli courts have forced the government to become somewhat more equitable in allowing Palestinian citizens access to land, the privatisation strategy was deployed in good measure as a way of using market mechanisms to prevent Palestinian citizens from buying land when the previous legal and administrative mechanisms could no longer be used.

History repeating itself

When Shai Zamir, an activist from Tel Aviv, **argued** that "One needs to make no effort to hear the sounds of the construction cranes and the loud French of apartment owners who don't live here - they loudly mock us, letting us know that our time has passed: Goodbye young people, see you later students, let's hug the artists and party goers and welcome the rich; nice to meet you, money", any Palestinian from Jaffa hearing his words could nod knowingly, as they've experienced the same dynamic for decades - indeed, from the creation of Tel Aviv a century ago.

That the market force first unleashed on behalf of the nationalist collectivist ultimately hurt mainstream Jewish Israelis of the sort who are now camping out across the country offers yet more proof that neoliberalism is like a Golem that ultimately turns on those it was supposedly meant to protect. The question is: do Shamir and his comrades understand this? Do they understand that the economic woes from which they are now suffering are the direct fruits of a century of Zionist policy, in which neoliberalism was adopted by many of the country's elite because it was considered the best way to continue Jewish control over the country's territory, wealth and resources?

If the just released "**Vision Document**" and its six points focused entirely on economic issues is any indication, the answer is no.

Among the innumerable banners in the current protests are myriad ones with slogans arguing that given the sacrifice so many Israelis make by serving in the army, they expect their government to keep its end of the

bargain by giving them the chance at a decent life upon the fulfilment of their military obligations. As one protester said, "I am willing to die for my country, but I can't afford to live in it." Many banners similarly expressed sentiments such as "a strong army requires a strong society".

Herein lies the basic contradiction at the heart of Israeli identity, and now the protests. Israelis have been all too willing, not merely to die for their country, but to oppress their neighbours on its behalf. The corrosive effect of this schizophrenia were masked for decades by the powerful collective Zionist identity developed by Ben Gurion and the first generation of Zionist leaders. But once Zionism and Israel become both more normalised (that is, the existence of the state was not considered in constant peril) and fell prey to the spell of neoliberalism and the death grip it puts on any mechanisms for social solidarity outside of war and violence (as we see in the US), young Israelis were fated to be unable to live in the country for which they have been taught to die for from birth.

The real cost of occupation

Many of those arguing for the need to bring the occupation into the protest discourse argue that the costs of settlements and other components of the occupation - providing security, soldiers, building roads and infrastructure, etc. - have diverted increasingly scarce public funds away from precisely the kinds of programmes the protests are calling for. Organisations like Peace Now and the Adva Centre, and scholars like Shlomo Swirsky, offer detailed **analyses** of the costs of the occupation, which show that the price of the settlements reached **2.5 billion shekels** a year, with at least 45 billion shekels spent since 1967. The homes, roads and public institutions built in the Occupied Territories total some 16 billion shekels.

These costs are certainly significant, but within the context of a GDP of around \$220 billion the extra the yearly cost comes to about 3 tenths of 1 per cent of the country's GDP, or less than 2 dollars per day per Israeli tax payer. For comparative purposes, this figure is roughly a third of the percentage of GDP the **US spends on its occupations** of Iraq and Afghanistan, while both countries spend roughly 6 per cent of GDP on defence and security as a whole.

The point here is not that the occupation and Israel's relatively militarised economy (at least compared to most Western countries) aren't harming the country. It's that the occupation and the larger militarisation of Israel's economy, culture and identity it enables have been the perfect mask for the increasing concentration of wealth, and the attendant rise of inequality and poverty, corruption and cronyism, within Israel that are the hallmarks of neoliberalism. The occupation

might be harming the interests of the average Israeli, but it has played a crucial role in the enrichment and power of Israel's political and economic elites, and they have little incentive to end it any time soon.

A Palestinian role?

As soon as I heard about Ramy Hwayel's detention, I SMS-ed my friend Matan Cohen, a long time anti-occupation activist who also works with the Jenin Freedom Theatre and is one of the most sophisticated of the emerging generation of Israeli observers of their country's political dynamics. In discussing the links between the two events, he pointed out a dynamic which most Israelis protesting would do well to note.

Specifically, the genius of neoliberalism is that it has exposed the inner contradictions of the welfare-warfare state in Israel, enabling the country's economic elite, like their counterparts in the US, to keep the warfare state while providing less and less towards the welfare of the citizens who serve it. "Until we dare to ask for welfare without warfare we will remain caught up in ethnonationalism," Cohen argues, and ethnonationalism in the midst of neoliberalism ensures both continued conflict and continued concentration of wealth away from the majority of the people.

Because of this dynamic, the continuation of the daily routine of occupation during these protests and the unwillingness of the vast majority of protesters, even from a more "social" as opposed to "political justice" point of view, to bring the occupation into the protest discourse, harms the chances for realising the larger vision the emerging movement represents.

Put simply, without taking on the occupation - that is, without getting very political - there is simply no way to tackle the supposedly "social issues" the protests are trying to address. But what's important to remember here is that Palestinians have, in fact, been even greater victims of the neoliberal policies against which Israelis are now rebelling than have been Israelis themselves. They are therefore potentially powerful allies of the Israelis protesting in Tel Aviv.

However, as of now, many experienced Palestinian activists are not sanguine about the chances for such cooperation, especially as long as the protest movement steers clear of addressing the occupation. Birzeit University sociologist Lisa Taraki, a founder of the Palestinian Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel movement, explained in an interview I conducted with her that "the protest movement in Israel has nothing to say about justice for Palestinians, either as citizens or as occupied people." There is therefore little reason for the BDS movement to go out of its way to "address the Israeli public directly in order to persuade it or

to appeal to its sense of justice."

But other activists see at least the possibility of an opening for joint action. One youth activist in Gaza told me that "Gazans can use this to their advantage by regularly contacting organisers in Tel Aviv. Such interaction might bring forth something positive both sides can fight for, [such as] social and economic injustices inflicted upon the majority of the population, both Israelis and Palestinians." His problem, however, is that any attempt to coordinate publicly would be met with retribution by Hamas, especially if there is no explicit peace and justice component vis-a-vis Palestinians in the Israeli movement.

Sadly, we could imagine simultaneous protests by hundreds of thousands of Israelis and Palestinians, against the forces that oppress them both and towards the kind of mutual solidarity that would enable greater freedom and equality for both communities. But as long as Israelis can't talk about the occupation Palestinians will remain both outside the protest movement and the biggest victims of the forces it is trying to combat.

Back to the beginning

And this brings us back to the seizure of Rami Hwayel. My first thought was that Israel's detention of now three members of the Jenin Freedom Theatre is likely a response to the powerful favourable press the Theatre has received of late, particularly with the much publicised recent visit of famed philosopher Slavoj Zizek and American film producer Jame Schamus to Ramallah for a workshop with Theatre members, and the willingness of Israeli auteur Udi Aloni to direct "Waiting for Godot", not despite the cultural boycott of Israel by most Palestinian arts institutions but precisely in accordance with and even support of it.

For Cohen, however, the more likely possibility is that Hwayel's detention was merely "routine", part of the brutal bureaucracy of the occupation in which Palestinians have no rights, and can be detained, brutalised, and even killed without much thought or even intention.

This is the fundamental challenge that organisers of the protests face. If they cannot use this moment to help shape a new discourse that recognises all the peoples of the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River as possessing the same fundamental rights, Israel's uber capitalist elites will manage to find new combinations of neoliberalism, religious fundamentalism and ethnonationalist extremism with which to maintain their power while keeping Israelis divided, not just against Palestinians, but against themselves.

As the late Palestinian leader Faisal Hussein said a generation ago,

"The main enemy is the occupation, the main enemy for the two communities - for the Palestinian community and the Israeli community. And the occupation can hurt the morals of those controlling the occupation no less than the people who are under it, maybe more... We must, Palestinians and Israelis, work together, to end this occupation."

The leaders of the current protests would do well to heed his words.

Mark LeVine is a professor of history at the University of California: Irvine, and author, most recently, of *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the soul of Islam* (Random House 2008) and *Impossible Peace: Israel/Palestine Since 1989* (Zed Books, 2009).

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy.

Source:
Al Jazeera

Scuffles at office of Bahrain rights probe

State-appointed commission closes its office after hundreds protest against recent statements made by the panel.

Last Modified: 16 Aug 2011 10:24



Hundreds of Bahrainis are fighting to get their jobs back after they were sacked during martial law [REUTERS]

A state-appointed commission probing rights abuses in Bahrain has closed its office after protesters reportedly scuffled with staff members following reports that the panel had cleared government officials of

wrongdoing.

The Bahrain Commission of Inquiry said in a statement on Tuesday that no conclusions had been made and that probes would continue into the demonstrations and the sweeping crackdown that followed on the Sunni monarchy-ruled Gulf island nation.

But the commission said its main office would be shut and vowed it would not allow itself to be used as a "political tool" by either side.

Bahrain's king had invited the panel, headed by international law professor Cherif Bassiouni, to examine charges of widespread torture and abuse by security forces during two months of martial law after pro-democracy unrest was suppressed.

Recent comments by Bassiouni praising the co-operation of the interior minister and saying he could see no policy of excessive use of force or torture infuriated majority Shia Muslims, who dominated the protests and bore the brunt of the crackdown.

The official Bahrain News Agency reported on Monday that the commission believed no "crimes against humanity" had been committed after Bassiouni was quoted in a newspaper interview saying torture claims would require proof.

Interviews stopped

"Hundreds of people forced their way into our office, having been angered over what they believed to be the Commission Chair's 'conclusions' in the investigation," the panel said.

"After attempting to accommodate the crowd by offering to take down their information in order to schedule appointments, some in the crowd became restless and verbally and physically threatened the staff," it said in a statement.

"Individuals yelled insults, posted threatening messages on the office walls, sent threats via text and email, and even physically shoved and spat at a member of staff."

The panel said it would continue to accept statements submitted by email but would stop granting media interviews.



Activists have urged hundreds of Bahrainis fighting to get their jobs back after they were sacked during martial law to gather at the commission headquarters.

The activist group, called "Return To Work Is My Right", said on Tuesday that it would investigate the incident but defended the decision to congregate at the offices, saying the commission was their last hope after the government had ignored them.

Ongoing protests

The government in the island state, ruled by the Sunni Muslim al-Khalifa family, said the democracy movement was sectarian in origin and backed by Shia nation Iran across the Gulf.

Bahrain is home to the US Fifth Fleet and its Shias are regarded by Saudi Arabia, which sent in troops to help quell the protests, as a soft target for Iranian influence.

King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa last month approved some parliamentary reforms that would give the elected chamber more powers of oversight but not lessen the powers of an appointed upper house or allow political parties to form governments.

Those reforms were the result of a national dialogue established to address some of the complaints of protesters, who were inspired by the popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia.

The main opposition parties pulled out of the dialogue, focusing attention on Bassiouni's commission as the next hope of democrats to act as a catalyst of change in the country.

Source:
Agencies

Libyan rebels tighten grip around Tripoli

Opposition says its forces have reached Al-Heisha and captured two towns on supply roads in campaign to isolate capital.

Last Modified: 17 Aug 2011 02:37

Libyan opposition forces have pushed further to isolate Tripoli, moving toward a western town that links the capital and Sirte -- Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's hometown and a stronghold for his military.

"The scouting teams of the revolutionaries reached the outskirts of Al-Heisha after expelling Gaddafi forces," the rebel military command said in a statement early on Wednesday.

Al-Heisha lies roughly 70km south of Misurata and 250km from Tripoli, near two key crossroads that link loyalist-held territory in the west with that in the oil-rich Sirte basin.

It was just the latest in a series of battlefield operations to isolate the capital.

In addition to gaining a foothold in Az-Zawiyah, rebels said they had taken two towns near Tripoli on key supply roads Gharyan, 80 km south of the capital and Surman, less than 16 km west of Az-Zawiyah.

"Gharyan is fully in the hands of the revolutionaries," a rebel spokesman, Abdulrahman, said by telephone. "Gaddafi has been isolated. He has been cut off from the outside world."

Government spokesman Moussa Ibrahim acknowledged in remarks broadcast on state television that rebel fighters were in Gharyan. "There are still armed gangs inside the city. We are able to drive them out," he said.

But while rebels controlled most of Az-Zawiyah, Gaddafi forces shelled the city, wounding several civilians.

Funerals were held for 23 others who rebels said were killed the previous day.

Nuri el-Bouaisi, an oil production engineer in the city, said rebels had cut off pipelines that transport gasoline and diesel fuel to Tripoli.

"We shut down all four pipelines to Tripoli," El-Bouaisi said, whose claim could not be verified.

NTC-Gaddafi talks denied

Meanwhile, a UN envoy has arrived in neighbouring Tunisia, where sources say rebels and representatives of the government are in talks on the island resort of Djerba.

The envoy, Abdul Ilah al-Khatib, told the Reuters news agency he would meet "Libyan personalities residing in Tunisia" to discuss the conflict.

Talks could signal the endgame of a battle that has drawn in the NATO alliance and emerged as one of the deadliest confrontations in the **wave**

of unrest sweeping the Arab world.

But spokesman Farhan Haq said the United Nations had "no concrete information" on any talks in Tunisia and that its Libya envoy, al-Khatib, was not taking part in any such talks.

The reports of rebel-government talks also sparked a swift denial from Gaddafi's government. His spokesman dismissed reports of negotiations about the Libyan leader's future as part of a "media war" against him.

"The leader is here in Libya, fighting for the freedom of our nation. He will not leave Libya," spokesman Moussa Ibrahim said.

Abdul Hafez Ghoga, vice chairman of the **National Transitional Council (NTC)**, also denied that such talks were under way.

Gaddafi forces on Sunday fired a scud missile near Brega on the main frontline in the east of the country; the first use of the weapon since the **uprising against his rule began** six months ago, according to a US military official said.

Although no one was hurt in the attack and the missiles are considered unreliable weapons, Richard Weitz, director of the Centre for Political and Military Analysis at the Hudson Institute, told Al Jazeera the use of scuds could signal Gaddafi's determination to fight.

Source:

Al Jazeera and agencies

Opinion

Middle East Policy: A zero-sum game?

The Obama administration has failed to bridge the gap between the United States and the Muslim world.

Michael Hudson Last Modified: 17 Aug 2011 06:45



President Obama's Middle East policy seems to be little different from his that of his predecessors [REUTERS]

Washington is enjoying a mostly pleasant summer. The Atlantic seashore two hours away is packed with carefree beachgoers of all ages. Looking at them you wouldn't think that US politics had sunk to the lowest level of dysfunction in the memory of veteran Washingtonians.

Public opinion towards Congress and the president has turned rancid in the wake of the cascading economic and financial crisis. Americans were appalled at the spectacle of the bitter and embarrassing fight over raising the debt ceiling. The historic principle of compromise that makes our cumbersome system of government work seems to have been

thrown in the trash by ideological extremists, primarily the "tea party" faction of the Republican Party. An economy almost dead in the water is failing to produce jobs; infrastructure is crumbling; stock market gyrations are fueling panic. If ever there were a time for bold presidential leadership this is it. But it's not there. Democrats are seething over Obama's lacklustre performance.

But wait ... you thought this article was about the Middle East! Well, it is - but you can't understand the fatigue and inertia in Washington's policies towards what it considers the most dangerous region of the world without this gloomy preamble.

The other day, following his uninspiring speech to the nation after Standard and Poor's downgrading of US bond ratings, President Obama took a helicopter up to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware to pay his respects to the 30 US special forces soldiers who had been shot down over Afghanistan. These casualties were the largest one-day loss in ten years of war. Bin Laden has been avenged. Afghanistan is now fully Obama's war, but getting out with dignity is proving much more difficult than going in. Meanwhile, officials and experts are expressing growing alarm over the political meltdown in Pakistan - accelerated by the military's humiliation over the US operation against bin Laden.

As for America's other war of choice in Iraq, the US cannot quite figure out whether to go or stay. Every day Iran extends its influence in the country the US once believed was a bulwark against Tehran's regional designs. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government, rife with corruption and inefficiency, still lacks the legitimacy to stand alone without continuing US military support. Kurdish-Arab tensions remain high, and now Muqtada al-Sadr has reemerged, calling upon his followers to kill any remaining US soldiers.

The public is fed up with these costly involvements in Afghanistan and Iraq - but isn't it lucky that Washington can easily afford them thanks to our robust economy?

Which side of history?

Then there is the so-called "Arab Spring." In a speech last June, Obama declared that the US was going to get on "the right side of history" by supporting the popular uprisings across the Arab world, instead of propping up dictators in hopes of containing Islamist radicalism. The US moved fairly quickly to abandon its "friends" - Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt - in those apparently "easy" revolutions. But now it watches uneasily as the new regimes struggle to legitimise themselves against continuing popular protest.

The less "easy" and ongoing upheavals in Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria pose more perplexing problems. In Libya, Obama has come around to "leading from behind" Sarkozy and Cameron, because the Congress and the public are allergic to yet another US military adventure. Washington seems helpless to influence the chaotic situation in Yemen, where al-Qaeda and other anti-American elements are reportedly trying to fill the vacuum left by the injured and absent President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Bahrain has exposed US inconsistency most dramatically. Verbal scoldings over a particularly brutal crackdown could not convince Arab and Muslim opinion that Washington was not applying a double standard - hardly standing on "the right side of history". The issue here was Saudi Arabia, which dispatched **troops to help crush the Bahrain popular protests**. King Abdullah - already furious that Washington had "betrayed" Ben Ali and Mubarak - did not conceal his displeasure over US dithering on Bahrain.

The Syrian revolt poses the most serious challenge to Obama. Characteristically, he has been slow to call for regime change because the Assad regime, unpleasant as it is, has been a stabilising element in the always volatile Arab-Israeli conflict. Washington and Tel Aviv both worry about the consequences of chaos as well as the behaviour of a successor regime. Still, the temptation to help bring down Iran's key ally in the eastern Mediterranean as well as weaken Lebanon's Hezbollah is strong, especially since the gross brutality of Assad's response to the protests so far has not stifled them. But the US has little real leverage apart from verbal criticism, and Assad thus far shows no sign of being cowed by Washington.

Indeed, the US, which has dominated almost the entire Middle East for decades, seems now to be a mere bystander to the historic upheavals shaking the region. Despite its pervasive military presence from the Mediterranean to the Gulf, the US lacks the respect that otherwise might give its words more weight.

Perhaps the primary cause of America's declining influence is its stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict. If the US was really serious about getting on "the right side of history" in the Middle East, it would have long since adopted a balanced and proactive stance. Let us say it frankly: this would mean putting tangible pressure on Israel to adhere to the international consensus - land for peace, based on the 1967 lines, in the framework of the 1967 UN Security Council Resolution 242. "Pathetic" does not adequately describe Obama's position on this matter. In fairness, several of his predecessors were almost equally supine.

Does Palestine still matter? It probably will matter even more as

populist upheavals reshape the political landscape in the Arab world, **as others have observed**. Next month the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, plans to request that the UN General Assembly recognise a Palestinian state. Such a decision requires Security Council approval, and the US undoubtedly will veto the measure. "Voting against the Palestinian state would be a historic, deadly mistake in the record of US President Barack Obama, in whom there was hope for change," said Marwan Barghouti - perhaps the most popular of Palestinian leaders - **from his prison cell in Israel recently**. "Such a veto will be confronted by millions-strong protests throughout the Arab and Muslim world, indeed throughout the whole world."

Even if he were not overwhelmed by his domestic woes, Obama would find it difficult indeed to exert bold leadership on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Even if he wanted to make the balanced course correction that so many favour, he finds himself hamstrung. His inner circle is too resistant, too close to Israeli interests. And a powerful coalition of the Israel lobby, Christian fundamentalists, "Tea Party" Republicans and policy hawks are calling for much tougher US policies toward Iran and Syria. A **recent puff piece on Hillary Clinton in Vanity Fair** comments approvingly: "And ever since Obama bollixed up his relations with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in 2010, Hillary has worked overtime to soothe Bibi."

And as Congress adjourns for its summer vacation, some 81 Congressmen, about a fifth of the House of Representatives, are heading for Israel to do some "fact finding" - courtesy of an Israeli foundation linked to the Israel lobby (AIPAC) in Washington. As reported by **Al Kamen in The Washington Post**, "unlike a proper congressional trip, we're told that the AIPAC foundation 'runs [the members] pretty good'." What better preparation for the 2012 elections?

Michael C Hudson is the Seif Ghobash Professor of Government and International Relations at Georgetown University. He is currently serving as the Director of the Middle East Institute at the National University of Singapore. He has written, edited and contributed to numerous books including Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration (Columbia University Press), Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy (Yale University Press) and The Precarious Republic: Political Modernization in Lebanon(Random House).

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy.

Source:
Al Jazeera