

Democracy or Apartheid: You Can't Have Both

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For two consecutive nights this week, during the holy month of Ramadan, the Israeli military stormed Al-Aqsa mosque. They entered the mosque before prayer was over, firing rubber bullets, stun grenades, and tear gas at Palestinian worshippers. These events left at least 12 Palestinians injured, and over 400 were arrested on the first night. Following the raid, Israeli violence spread across the west bank. Dozens have been hurt by inhaling poisonous gas fired by Israeli forces, and a settler in occupied East Jerusalem shot a Palestinian child.

Following the raid on Al-Aqsa on Wednesday night, Israeli settlers were escorted to Al-Aqsa by Israeli forces on Thursday morning. Prior to their arrival, Palestinian worshippers were forced out so that it could be secured for the settlers for the first day of the Jewish Passover holiday. This double standard is not uncommon for Israel as it is inherent to the structure of the settler-colonial state. Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem (80% of the Palestinian population) under Israeli control are not citizens and cannot become citizens of the state in which they live, nor can they vote for the government which controls their lives. The other 20% of Palestinians, who have Israeli citizenship, have a 2nd class status.

Recently the world has witnessed Israeli settlers come together in an ongoing protest to protect their "democracy." Since January 7, a crowd of over 100,000 have protested every Saturday in response to a judicial overhaul that was proposed by Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government. The protestors consider the reform plan, which has now been suspended, a threat to democracy.

But we must ask ourselves, what are these protestors really fighting to maintain? How can there be democracy in an apartheid state? Whose democracy is this?

The idea that Israeli "democracy" can be protected by blocking the judicial overhaul is a myth. Any plans Israel had for democracy were destroyed when they began the Nakba in 1948. In fact, the reform plan is a product of the settler colonial state, as it would allow the

expulsion of Palestinians from their homes even more efficiently than before, a fundamental goal of the Zionist movement.

This is a fight to maintain and protect the status quo for Israelis, not Palestinians who have been denied all basic democratic rights under Israel since 1948. For Palestinians, there is no democracy.

Despite these blatant acts of unjustified violence committed by Israel, there is no outrage among Israelis. The tens of thousands of people who showed up just last week to protect democracy are suddenly silent. Moreover, Palestinian worshippers are beaten by Israel all the time, this violence is routine during Ramadan. In 2021, Israel unleashed an 11-day bombardment on Gaza during Ramadan and there has been no outcry by Israelis to prevent that from happening. This is evidence that the movement for democracy in Israel is not about democracy at all, but about maintaining the apartheid state of Israel as it has existed for the past 75 years – at the expense of Palestinians.

It is insulting for Israelis to launch this “democracy” movement when Palestinians have been ignored for decades. Meanwhile in the the United States, our government is the #1 foreign funder of Israel, which means we have a responsibility to hold them accountable. Yet, year after year a majority of Americans sit silent while our government aids and abets in Israel’s extremely undemocratic apartheid of Palstinians.

If the United States truly wants to spread democracy around the world, we must stop funding such blatant violence and human rights violations. You simply cannot have it both ways.

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