

## **Netanyahu is leading Israel into civil war between Jews and Palestinians**

**For years, through illusions, incitement, a captive media, brutal policing and discriminatory laws, Netanyahu has repressed Israel's Palestinian citizens, preparing the ground for violent conflict. And now it may be starting**

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There's been plenty of talk in the Israeli media recently about whether to eulogize Benjamin Netanyahu as a political genius or a failure who won some lucky breaks.

What is indisputable, though, is his greatest decades-long magic trick: Building an almost impermeable bubble around Israeli Jews to shield and blind them from both entrenched oppression of, and escalating violence against, the Palestinians, both inside the 1967 borders and beyond them.

A whole generation of Jewish Israelis, raised in the safest (for them) Israel ever, have grown up with no awareness of the Green Line at all. They heard stories about the intifadas but for them, the conflict was 'well-maintained' and mostly out of sight and mind. The Abraham Accords, with the eager, unconditional embrace of Gulf states, seemed to prove that there was no 'Palestinian issue' anymore.

What they couldn't see from their segregated world was that for Palestinians, the conflict never ended.

But even the most carefully constructed house of cards eventually starts tumbling down, and that exactly what is happening now. Over the last few months, the anger has been building up, this time not in the West Bank, or in Gaza's open-air prison, but right under their noses, among the Palestinian citizens of the state.

Impregnable Netanyahuism, the work of a master illusionist, is shattering, from the Al Aqsa mosque courtyard to Sheikh Jarrah, from Haifa to Gaza, and its real cost, in lives, can't yet be calculated.

Netanyahu built a multidimensional bubble for Jewish Israelis constructed out of a subservient police force, national media, an embrace of neoliberalism

and the attempted co-option of select politicians from among the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The Israeli police, during the past few years, have become known for the violent suppression of any group that dares challenge them.

There are hierarchies in terms who gets beaten the hardest. The Ashkenazi middle and upper class for the most part have, historically, been spared much of the violence though the last year's weekly anti-Netanyahu protests taught us that they, too, can be punched and humiliated. Still, this is nothing compared in terms how police officers treat Ethiopian Israelis, Haredim, and of course, Arabs, who get hit the hardest (if not shot).

Since the start of Ramadan almost a month ago, the Israeli police force has provoked Palestinians in Jerusalem, from barricading the steps at the Damascus Gate, the blows dealt to the protesters (often joined in solidarity by Israeli Jews) at Sheikh Jarrah, and more recently the astonishing use of tear gas and shock grenades inside the Al-Aqsa mosque. In fact, had the regular police, and the much more brutal border police, pulled back, in many cases it would have ended without incident.

The police force's most recent turn towards gratuitously violent suppression is fully backed by Netanyahu's staunchest stooge, Amir Ohana, Minister of Public Security, who represents more than anyone the Netanyahu's increasingly authoritarian state.

But he is not alone: over the years, Netanyahu has created a state ruled not by politicians, but by a close-knit political mafia, kept in sync by his enforcer, MK Miki Zohar. Together, the two, along with the other obedient party lackeys, enforce strict allegiance to Netanyahu, the sole leader.

Then there is the media. It is not by chance that Netanyahu understood early on that he needed to control the media, and, over time, he pretty much succeeded. He didn't manage to cover his tracks completely, as the witnesses in his ongoing trial for bribery and corruption have revealed.

He is charged with illegally influencing, and intimidating, media outlets for positive coverage, such as the popular newspaper Yediot Ahronot and the news site, Walla.

Ironically, it was Netanyahu's greediness and desire for complete control that was his undoing. After all, why did he risk offering bribes and making threats

when he already 'owned' a great chunk of the media, in the form of the Sheldon Adelson-funded Netanyahu mouthpiece freebie newspaper Israel Hayom?

He managed to install "friendly" analysts in private-sector TV stations, such as Channel 12, and pushed Army Radio, the country's most popular station, rightwards, not least thanks to a plum presenter job for one of his attack dogs. Netanyahu has won a strong grasp over Israel's once raucous media, both directly and indirectly.

And Netanyahu tapped into one of the most effective narcotics to suppress even incipient public concern about the cold war with the Palestinians: the material comfort afforded by neoliberal economics.

The strong economy brought so many construction cranes to Tel Aviv that they compete with birds in the sky; Israel is years into its role as the start-up nation, attracting much international investment in high-tech and Israeli companies expanding abroad.

If the BDS movement ever believed it stood a chance, those cranes would be the best refutation, along with an ever-strengthening shekel which allowed Israelis from all walks of life to holiday abroad.

For most Palestinians, the story is very different. Their energies are by necessity too often channeled into a frustrating, if not desperate, attempt to hold on to basic rights or to access them at all.

In East Jerusalem, Palestinians face growing random attacks by Jewish supremacists, often by members of settler groups who have waged a decade-long campaign of legal pressure and evictions. Residents who leave Jerusalem for abroad, to further their education or economic prospects, often lose their residency rights.

They know by lived experience that there are two systems in Israel, one for Jews, and one for them (perhaps better described by the word "apartheid.")

The claims and slogans of the Sheikh Jarrah protesters are not empty words. Palestinian East Jerusalem is the target of a drawn-out demographic engineering effort to move Arabs out, and move Jews in. On one hand, Israel does not want them as full citizens with equal rights, while on the other, Israel also does not want them to participate in the Palestinian elections

either. They are stuck between two worlds, not here, not there, despite living in Jerusalem, their city.

The Palestinian citizens of the state (or, in the nomenclature the state prefers, Israeli Arabs) are the constant talk of Israeli news programs, which simultaneously exclude their voices and deny them any connection with the Palestinian people.

While they suffer numerous inequalities, and were definitively downgraded as “second-class citizens” by the Jewish Nation State law, the state is incapable of taking responsibility in dealing with rising violent crime in Arab cities. The double standards between Jewish and Arab citizens are blaring.

Then there’s the rise of Mansour Abbas and his Islamist Ra’am party, whom Netanyahu courted with great enthusiasm in the hope of constructing a governing coalition.

Abbas seemed for some Jewish Israeli pundits to be a dream come true, and for a time, he reciprocated, vowing to push his Palestinian identity aside in favor of joining a right-wing government that would give Arabs a fair share. Abbas even got a desperate Netanyahu to actively entice him to join, only to find out that the other coalition partners, from the far-right Kahanist list, rejected him, because, well, he is Arab.

There is no doubt that racism hurts most when it comes from the people you are closest too, and Palestinians in Israel have learned that even the most politically sanitized Arab can be smacked down, and not necessarily by a Jewish supremacist rabbi, either.

As Jerusalem went from simmering to flames, they witnessed how the Israeli news media pointed an accusing finger at them for taking part. Watching the media’s “Arab experts” explain how Palestinians might want to pray at Al-Aqsa and show solidarity with “Palestinians” was farcical, if not downright pathetic.

It was these same Israeli citizens whose buses to Al-Aqsa the police blocked in the middle of the highway in a failed attempt to block them from reaching Jerusalem; it was these same Arabs protesting in Haifa and Nazareth who were attacked by police force that also attacked protesters at Sheikh Jarrah, Damascus Gate, and Al-Aqsa Mosque. It was the same media that endlessly portrays the “good Arab” versus the “bad Arab” which put them on trial and found them guilty.

It is clear now that Netanyahu may even succeed in achieving the goal of the most recent deterioration: to ensure that his rivals Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett won't be able to form a government, and with Abbas realizing that an Israel-Hamas escalation leaves his joining any government untenable.

But the deeper narrative is that his sleazy vision of total control founded on the demonization of Palestinians cannot be propped up forever by propaganda and repression.

The genie is out of the bottle. We are all witness to the fact that Netanyahu's provision of "normalcy" for most Israeli Jews was no more than an illusion cloaking his quest for sole power. And, now as we can see that iron fist wrapped in a neoliberal dream, that descent into Netanyahuism, we Israelis need to stare in the mirror.

We need to see, really see, what a blatantly racist society we have become, where people dance at the Western Wall while Palestinians, our fellow citizens, who serve us coffee and treat our sick in hospital, bandage their wounds.

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