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Can the Zionist project survive?



Sources: The Leap [Photo: Israel's military offensive on Gaza in August 2022 has killed 46 people, of whom 16 are children (Photo courtesy of UNRWA Spain/Ashraf Amra)]

The protesters who have challenged Netanyahu are motivated by what might be called Israel's fantasy: that of a secular democratic state with enough moral capital to justify its occupation of Palestine at home and abroad.

Looking at this month's news in Israel, we might think that the country is under attack from all sides. Three Anglo-Israeli settlers were killed by guerrillas in the West Bank; an Italian tourist was killed and seven others were injured in Tel Aviv in what may have been a car accident, but which was widely presented as a terrorist incident; and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) claimed to have intercepted the largest salvo of rockets fired from Lebanon since 2006. As is often the case in such cases, these reports carefully ignored the death camps in the occupied territories, where Israeli soldiers murder increasing numbers

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of Palestinian youths, either by executing them or by bombing their homes to dust. What was novel about the media coverage, however, was its air of perplexity: how could Israel's far-right government fail to provide security – or at least a sense of security – to its Jewish citizens? Whose fault was it?

For Benjamin Netanyahu, the Responsibility lay with the ongoing protest movement. Since In early January, hundreds of thousands of protesters have opposed his judicial reforms, which would allow political control of the Courts, would guarantee the current prime minister to escape conviction in his trial for corruption and would increase the influence of Judaism orthodox both in public life and in the judicial system. Netanyahu has accused his critics of dividing and weakening the nation. while lashing out at the soldiers in the reserve who They threatened not to stand for office if such measures were approved. People around him have also spread the rumor that United was funding the protesters (it was a fake news, but it contained its degree of truth given the public condemnation. of President Biden's reforms).

Judging by the latest polls, the message of Netanyahu has not penetrated. For many Israelis, it has been the first Minister who has created these security risks. His Popularity has reached an all-time low and would likely lose elections if they were held today. Having failed in his attempt to regain the confidence of his former supporters, attracting them to the warm embrace of the Zionist consensus under the threat of war, which supposedly emanating from Iran and its allies, it must now choose between two Both unattractive options: scrapping reforms and stifling the street resistance or go ahead with them and deepen the Existing divisions among Jewish citizenship. The prediction that these divisions could undermine the Israeli state from within it seems. premature at the moment, but there is no doubt that they have left the Discovered serious cracks in the Zionist building, cracks that could widen over the next few years.

If the social rupture It is not glimpsed on the immediate horizon, this is largely due to to the country's gigantic security apparatus. Israel remains more of a an army which has endowed itself with a State which has its army. There can be no substantial changes in the policy of security without the consent of leading military figures, whose will will will not be evidenced even by the new Authoritarian government. This stratum has clearly indicated its commitment for maintaining the current framework. In essence, this means continuing with the indiscriminate killing of Palestinians, with the practice of demolition of houses and with the sanction of pogroms carried out by the settlers. It also means applying discrimination. institutionalized against Palestinian citizens of Israel, who are

denied the right to freedom of expression and assembly. And it ultimately involves the regular bombardment and siege of Gaza, as well as almost weekly air raids over Syria.

The *apparatchiks* who design and implement these activities form the core of the recent demonstrations. Military officers who have committed countless war crimes in the Gaza Strip, and before that The West Bank and Lebanon now play a crucial role in the emerging Opposition bloc. They are part of an Ashkenazi (Jewish) elite. The broader European policy sees Netanyahu's policy as an attack on their power bases within the state: not only in the security apparatus, but also in financial institutions, in the judicial system and in academia. They intuit that the Reforms will weaken their grip on these institutions, while that will empower an insurgent coalition of Orthodox Jews, settlers and followers of the Likud Mizrahi (Oriental Jews), who wish to do of Israel a more religious, more nationalist and more expansionist country. In his opinion, the triumph of this neo-Zionist coalition would threaten his Secular lifestyle, would compromise the security of the state and tarnish even more its international image.

Hence the description What the Western media do about the protests The current situation presented as an attempt to save Israeli democracy from Political overreach is hopelessly distorted. The movement does not claim to protect the rights of minorities (the the first duty of every democracy) and much less the rights of the Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line. During the first hundred Days in office of the new government, while secular Jews Israelis were struggling to preserve their hegemony, almost a hundred Palestinians, many of them children, were killed by the forces Israeli. This massacre did not conform to the content of any of the demonstrations recorded during the last months. Who They tried to raise Palestinian flags next to the Israeli ones were forcibly expelled from them. Evidently, the Arabs did not they have a place in this dispute between the Jewish families of Israel.

On the contrary, the protesters are motivated by what might be called Israel's fantasy: that of a state secular democratic with sufficient moral capital to justify within and outside the country its occupation of Palestine. They are happy to be perceived as an exceptional nation, which must subjugate the Arabs to preserve the dream of a Jewish homeland, but they are also desperate to conform to the "civilized" norms of the global North. His liberal Zionism is based on a series of oxymorons: Israel as enlightened occupier, as a benevolent architect of ethnic cleansing, as a progressive apartheid state. Thanks to the Netanyahu government, This image is now threatened; Their contradictions are no longer containable. The reputation of the state is being damaged not only by At national level, but also within

the Community international", which often hails Israel as the only democracy in the world. The Middle East and Tel Aviv as the LGBT capital of the world, while ignores Gaza's besieged ghetto a few miles to the south.

By This reason half a million Jews – mostly liberals, in their Mostly secularists, mostly of Western origin, have thrown themselves into the street to defend the apartheid regime. Although they have forced Netanyahu to delay proposed changes, his ultimate chances Success remains uncertain. Even if the reforms are abandoned, Israel will remain constitutively divided between a Tel Aviv secular next to a religious Jerusalem. No one knows how it is It will develop this tension politically, but one thing is clear: will have little concrete effect on the policy of the Israeli state. towards the Palestinians. Despite their differences, the two sides Israelis are united in their support for the settler colonial project on which the nation was built. Settler colonialism invariably entails the dehumanization of colonized peoples, considered as the main obstacle to political harmony. Herself It is based on the desire to eliminate the native population, either through the genocide, ethnic cleansing or the creation of enclaves and ghettos. In Israel, every Palestinian must be perceived as a savage or a Potential terrorist, all Palestinian territory as a scenario of war.

This underlying logic means that the Palestinians They have nothing to gain from a return to the status quo ante. Of In fact, the previous government, led by the "centrist" Yair Lapid, was equally committed to the maintenance of the violent occupation. The inclusion of an Arab party in the coalition of Government did not bring any tangible benefit to the Palestinian minority of Israel, whose members have continued to be at risk of being shot by criminal gangs or trigger-happy police, while the state turned a blind eye; have continued to be considered citizens of second class under the Apartheid Act 2018; have continued being subject to legal and financial discrimination; and have continued spatially strangled by the proliferation of cities and Jewish settlements. By extolling "democracy" and ignoring these abuses, the current wave of protests has exposed the Israel's fundamental paradox: it cannot be democratic and Jewish at the same time time. Either it will be a racist Jewish state or a democratic state for all. its citizens. There is no middle ground.

Precisely because of that For this reason, a large part of the world's population does not look favorably on Israel. Although so far it has managed to maintain strategic alliances with the governments of the West, the Arab world and, occasionally, the The global South risks becoming internationally isolated. The Protesters rightly fear that if the country

cannot maintain its fantasy image, could suffer a fate similar to that of South Africa of apartheid: a gradual decline in credibility, so that the Politics from below acquire the ability to influence policy implemented from above. In that case, Israel could still be viable thanks to its military strength, but nothing more. This, in turn, it could seriously jeopardize the Zionist project; However, as happened with South Africa in the 1980s, it may also be the moment when the regime tries to save itself by resorting to the worst forms of brutality.

One of the main differences between opponents and supporters of the current government is that the former care what global civil society thinks of Israel, while the latter do not. The Ashkenazi elite advocates a form of "Zionism with a human face" that the current far-right government is increasingly willing to abandon. The outcome of this conflict will determine in part whether Israel can retain its aura of immunity and exceptionalism. During the recent history of Israel-Palestine, world public opinion has often been diverted by other developments: first the Arab Spring, now the war in Ukraine. But the Palestinians' cause has endured despite this wavering attention. Can the Palestinians seize the current moment to turn Israel into an international pariah?

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