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Why I Don't Cheer for Israel's 'Pro-Democracy' Movement



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In conversations about Israel and Palestine, I am often asked about my views on the internal resistance to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

My questioners point to hundreds of thousands of Israelis who have been taking to the streets to protest against the government and its efforts to introduce a judicial overhaul over the past two years and inquire why I remain apathetic to these efforts to end Netanyahu's rule.

My answer is simple – the real problem facing Israel is not its current government. The government might fall, but until we radically transform the nature of the regime, not much will change, and particularly not in relation to the basic human rights of Palestinians. A recent Israeli Supreme Court decision underscores my point.

On March 18, 2024, five Israeli human rights organizations filed an urgent petition with Israel's Supreme Court, asking the court to instruct the Israeli government and military to fulfill their obligations under international humanitarian law and address the civilian population's humanitarian needs amid the catastrophic conditions in Gaza.

The petition was submitted at a time when aid was entering Gaza, but the amount crossing the border was far from sufficient to meet the minimal needs of the population, of whom 75 percent had already been displaced. The rights groups wanted the government to lift all restrictions on the passage of aid, equipment and personnel into Gaza, particularly in the north where there were already documented cases of children dying from malnutrition and dehydration.

The court did not issue a ruling for more than a year, effectively allowing the government to continue restricting aid unchecked. Three weeks after the rights groups filed the petition, the court convened only to provide the government additional time to update its preliminary response to the petition. This set the tone for how the petition would proceed over the next 12 months.

Each time the petitioners provided data on the worsening conditions of the civilian population and emphasized the urgent need for judicial intervention, the court simply asked the government for further updates. In its April 17 update, for example, the government insisted that it had significantly increased the number of aid trucks entering Gaza, claiming that between October 7, 2023, and April 12, 2024, it had allowed 22,763 trucks to cross the checkpoints. This amounts to 121 trucks per day, which according to every humanitarian agency working in Gaza, does not come close to meeting the population's needs.

In October 2024, at least half a year after the petition was submitted, the rights organizations asked the court to issue an injunction after the government deliberately blocked humanitarian aid for two weeks. In response, the government claimed that it had been monitoring the situation in northern Gaza closely and that there was “no shortage of food”. Two months later, however, the government confessed that it had underestimated the number of Palestinian residents trapped in northern Gaza – thus acknowledging that the aid entering the Strip was insufficient.

On March 18, 2025, after Israel breached the ceasefire agreement and resumed its bombardment of Gaza and the minister of energy and infrastructure halted the supply of electricity to the Strip, the petitioners submitted yet another urgent request for an interim order against the government's decision to prevent the passage of humanitarian aid. Again, the court failed to issue a ruling.

Finally, on March 27, more than a year after the rights organizations had filed the petition, the court issued a verdict. Chief Justice Yitzhak Amit and Justices Noam Sohlberg and David Mintz unanimously ruled that it lacked merit. Justice David Mintz interlaced his response with Jewish religious texts, characterizing Israel's attacks as a war of divine duty, while

concluding that, “[The Israeli military] and the respondents went above and beyond to enable the provision of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, even while taking the risk that the aid transferred would reach the hands of the Hamas terrorist organization and be used by it to fight against Israel.”

Thus, at a time when humanitarian agencies have pointed again and again to acute levels of malnutrition and starvation, Israel’s Supreme Court – both in the way it handled the judicial process and in its ruling – has ignored Israel’s legal obligation to refrain from depriving a civilian population of objects indispensable to their survival, including by wilfully impeding relief supplies. In effect, the court legitimized the use of starvation as a weapon of war.

This is the court that hundreds of thousands of Israelis are trying to save. It’s March 27 ruling – and almost all other rulings involving Palestinians – reveal that the Supreme Court of Israel is a colonial court – one that protects the rights of the settler population while legitimizing the dispossession, displacement, and horrific violence perpetrated against the Indigenous Palestinians. And while the Supreme Court might not reflect the values of the existing government – particularly on issues relating to political corruption – it undoubtedly reflects and has always reflected the values of the colonial regime.

Hence, the liberal Zionists who fill Tel Aviv’s streets every weekend are not demonstrating against a judicial overhaul that endangers democracy, but against an overhaul that endangers Jewish democracy. Few of these protesters have any real qualms about the court’s horrific ruling on humanitarian aid, or, for that matter, on how the court has consistently upheld Israeli apartheid and colonial pillars. The regime, in other words, can continue to eliminate Palestinians unhindered as long as the rights of Israel’s Jewish citizenry are secured.

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