

Mass Protests Avert a Coup – For Now

27 March 2023

As we write - a pause has been called in the attempted coup by right-wing ideologues in the Israeli governing coalition.

A huge coalition of civil society comprising Jewish Israelis from diverse sectors of society seems to have forced a suspension of the legislative push to overturn the last vestiges of democracy in Israel-Palestine.

Although this may bring sighs of relief to Jews around the world, we have to understand that this is a battle in a larger war.

The current turmoil is a symptom of a larger problem, exposing a society consumed by contradiction. We cannot return to the comforting myths and slogans that have masked the true nature of Israeli politics and society for decades.

At best, Israeli democracy has always been a democracy for Jews alone. Despite the embracing words in the Declaration of Independence, espousing equality for all, this has never been the case. Until the last few weeks most Jewish Israelis and all Israeli governments since Independence have accepted the status quo whereby access to State resources, including the justice system, was protected. A vast majority seemed unmoved by the second-class citizenship granted to non-Jewish minorities and have accepted the democratic dysfunction in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as necessary accommodations to maintain “security”. Diaspora communities have played along with this self-deception. “The only democracy in the Middle East” is the often-used phrase. We now see demonstrators in the streets of Israeli cities bearing placards stating there is “No Democracy with Occupation”. Does this herald a change of attitude?

Now that the regime operating in the Territories has been proposed as the model for all of Israel-Palestine the general population has woken up and resisted. In numbers. The very basis of “Jewish and Democratic” is finally being questioned. This analysis has even penetrated the IDF where hundreds of serving troops have refused to go to war to defend the indefensible. Their protest goes to the core of their service. Are they defending democracy as they were led to believe or are they being commanded by Jewish supremacists whose strategy involves a disregard for those values?

What is clear is that the Zionist project means different things to different Israelis.

The divisions in Israel are not “disagreements for the sake of Heaven.”

The proposed dilution of democracy presents an existential threat to the idea of Zionism itself.

Are we – the Jewish People – prepared to work to resolve the Israel-Palestine conundrum so that the vision for the future is one of peace and equality for all?

The events of the past few months have re-cast Israel for Diaspora Jewish communities. We must – as Jews connected to Israel – become part of the solution by clearly supporting a just, equitable and truly democratic Israel-Palestine.