

# Palestinians face mounting barriers to peaceful protest

Author:

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RAMALLAH: Abdullah Abu Rahma has been arrested by Israeli soldiers eight times in the last 15 years, spending weeks or months in prison and paying tens of thousands of dollars in fines for organizing protests.

He's among a growing number of Palestinians who have embraced non-violent means of protesting Israel's military rule and expanding settlements, and who are increasingly finding those avenues of dissent blocked.

More than 50 years after occupying the West Bank, Israel is still systematically denying Palestinians civil rights, including the right to gather, Human Rights Watch said in a report released last month.

Israel has also stepped up its campaign against the Palestinian-led international boycott movement, and the US and other countries have adopted legislation to suppress it.

Omar Shakir, the Israel and Palestine director for Human Rights Watch, said Israel has "all but declared Palestinian opposition to the systematic discrimination they face illegitimate."

Shakir himself was deported from Israel in November over his alleged support for the boycott movement.

If it succeeds in banning forms of peaceful advocacy, he says, Israel will have "effectively left Palestinians no choice but submission to a regime of systematic repression, or violence."

For decades, the Palestinians were branded terrorists because of their armed struggle against Israel. At the height of the Second Intifada, the violent uprising in the early 2000s, and for years afterward, observers wondered why there was no "Palestinian Gandhi."

One candidate for such a title might be Abu Rahma, who for several years organized weekly protests in the West Bank village of Bilin.

Abu Rahma said he never threw stones and told others not to do so, partly out of concern they would hurt other protesters.

That didn't keep him from being arrested.

Over the years he was charged with entering a closed military zone – referring to land outside the village – and hindering the work of soldiers, who were overseeing the construction of the fence.

"I don't go to them, they come to us," he said.

In 2009 he was charged with stockpiling weapons after he collected spent tear gas canisters fired by Israeli soldiers and put them on display. He later served a 16-month prison term after a military court convicted him of incitement and participation in illegal protests.

"There have been various, multiple charges of this kind, but not once have they accused me of striking a soldier or throwing a stone," he said. In 2009, he was acquitted on the weapons possession charge and a charge of throwing stones.

Issa Amro, another prominent activist who has organized protests against Israeli settlements in the West Bank city of Hebron, faces 16 charges, including calling for disobedience and disrupting Israeli life – the lives of settlers.

He says he has been detained on 10 occasions this year alone, usually after being beaten by settlers.

"The soldiers never did anything to stop the attackers, but they arrested me every time a settler said I attacked him," he said. As a Palestinian, he is governed by Israeli military law, while the Jewish settlers in Hebron enjoy full rights as Israeli citizens.

"Israeli authorities ban any political expression in the Palestinian territories," Amro said.

"They want us basically to accept the occupation, the discrimination, the land grab, the restrictions, and not to speak up against it."

Human Rights Watch said Israel relies on sweeping military orders, many of which date back to the 1967 Mideast war, when it seized the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza, territories the Palestinians want for their future state.

Civilians can be jailed for up to 10 years for attending political gatherings of more than 10 people or for displaying flags or political symbols without army approval, Human Rights Watch said. Military orders ban 411 organizations, including every major political movement, it added.

"After 52 years, Israel's sweeping restrictions of the basic rights of Palestinians can no longer be justified by the exigencies of military occupation," Shakir said.

"Palestinians are entitled at minimum to the same rights Israel provides its own citizens."

In response to questions about the Human Rights Watch report and the restrictions on protests, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs accused the Palestinian leadership of seeking to "attack Israel in the international arena" rather than trying to end the conflict through negotiations.

Peace talks broke down after Netanyahu was elected in 2009. In September, he vowed to annex large parts of the West Bank, a move that would almost certainly extinguish any remaining hope of creating a Palestinian state.

The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Islamic militant group Hamas, which rules Gaza, have also cracked down on dissent in recent years. The PA has detained hundreds of people, including Amro, who was jailed for a week in 2017 over a Facebook post. Hamas violently dispersed protests last March, arresting dozens of people.

In addition to protesting, many Palestinians have also rallied behind the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, or BDS, a nonviolent campaign that claims to be modeled on the struggle against South African Apartheid.

The campaign has sparked a major backlash by Israeli authorities, who say its true aim is to delegitimize the state and eventually wipe it off the map.

BDS endorses the Palestinian claim of a right of return for the descendants of refugees who fled or were driven out of Israel in the 1948 war that attended its creation. If fully realized, that would spell the end of Israel as a Jewish-majority state. Critics have also seized on statements from prominent BDS supporters to brand it as anti-Semitic, something organizers vehemently deny.

A 2017 law bars entry to foreigners who have called for economic boycotts of Israel or its settlements. Israel invoked the law when it deported Shakir and when it refused entry to US congresswomen Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib earlier this year.

In May, German lawmakers passed a resolution that denounced the boycott movement and described its methods as anti-Semitic. The US House of Representatives passed a resolution opposing the boycott movement in July.

At least 25 US states have enacted laws aimed at suppressing the BDS movement, including Texas, which passed a law forcing state contractors to sign a pledge that they do not support the campaign. A federal judge blocked enforcement of the law in April, saying boycotts are a form of protected free speech.

Gerald Steinberg, who heads a pro-Israel group called NGO Monitor that campaigns against BDS, said its "demonization paints Israelis as blood-thirsty war criminals, land-thieves and child killers."

"These accusations contribute to or are used to justify attacks against students and speakers on university campuses, harassment in other venues and in some cases, violent terror," he said.

Abu Rahma and other activists reject such characterizations, saying their struggle is not against Israelis but against the occupation.

"I see how the occupation is an obstacle to everything," he said. "The path that I am on, I have to continue. I have to struggle. It's not easy."



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## [Palestinian factions argue over role of Soleimani](#)

Tue, 2020-01-07 01:23

GAZA CITY: Palestinian factions backed by Iran sparked controversy yesterday as they not only issued statements of condolence for the death of Qassem Soleimani, the Iranian general killed in a US drone strike in Baghdad last week, but even opened a funeral tent for him in the Gaza Strip.

Soleimani, according to Palestinian sources, had direct contact with Palestinian factions in Gaza and provided them with Iranian aid and expertise, which has raised questions about the impact his death will have on Palestinian forces.

But his role in the deaths of Sunnis in Syria and Iraq made him a controversial figure for several inside Palestinian organizations, even those

that accepted Iranian assistance.

Hossam Al-Dajni, a professor of political science at the Ummah University affiliated with Hamas in Gaza, said that statements made by Hamas and other forces in Gaza regarding expressing dismay at Soleimani's demise were unacceptable to some members, and that internal debates about Soleimani had intensified following his death.

"There is a peculiarity to the Palestinian situation, given the presence of the Israeli occupation, and the need for the resistance forces to support and develop their capabilities in facing the occupation," Al-Dajani told Arab News.

Hamas' opposition to the Iranian-backed Houthi militia group in Yemen, as well as its position on the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, often put it at odds with authorities in Tehran. That said, the Iranian regime still viewed groups in Gaza as important proxies to oppose their mutual enemy, Israel.

Al-Dajani said that Soleimani's personal relations with the leaders of Palestinian resistance groups had been positive, but that Iranian support was a state policy, not an individual position, and that even with his death, it was likely to continue.

Hassan Abdou, a political analyst close to the group Islamic Jihad, agreed that Iranian support for Palestinian factions was an official strategy, saying: "Soleimani was implementing state policy, and he had great experiences and strong relations with the resistance forces. Soleimani's successor, through the leadership of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force, would maintain operational supply lines for the resistance forces in Gaza."

Under Soleimani, Iranian support for the Palestinian factions expanded to include left-wing forces as well as Islamic forces, Abdou said. "Soleimani was an international leader who was not ruled by a doctrine or religion in his confrontation of American imperialism or the Israeli occupation," he added.

Islamic Jihad is known to be the most stable Palestinian faction in its historical relationship with Iran, a relationship not affected by the developments in the region in the past few years.

Abdou believes the group relies on what he described as "constructive ambiguity" regarding its position on actual engagement with Iran in the event of a broad military confrontation with the US.

Regarding the controversy over the opening of a funeral tent for the Iranian general in Gaza, Abdou said those who rejected it were "extremists" with a "sectarian stance," who hated Soleimani for his role in the defeat of Daesh and other extremists in Iraq and Syria.

Military analyst Wasif Erekat claimed the killing of Soleimani would have "a direct impact" on Palestinian forces, but one that would not last long.



He told Arab News that the assassination was: “A great loss for the Palestinian factions because of his experience, capabilities and personal characteristics.

“Iran’s support for Palestine and the resistance factions aims to legitimize its own regional presence. The resistance factions in Gaza are not for Iran, but (served as) functional groups in Iran’s major regional strategy.

“What we are seeing now (the internal disagreement) exceeds all of this, and its price may be high in terms of people’s solidarity and standing with us.”



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Soleimani strike threatens UK ‘lives and interests’ How Iranian, Qatari media glorified Qassem Soleimani

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**[Hurghada Museum: 1,000 Egyptian](#)**

# artifacts awaiting Red Sea tourists

Author:

Tue, 2020-01-07 01:13

CAIRO: The Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities is putting the finishing touches to the Hurghada Museum, which will open by the end of January, coinciding with the national day of the Red Sea governorate.

The Hurghada Museum is the first to be inaugurated in partnership with the private sector in Egypt.

It houses 1,000 artifacts including royal pieces that date back to the royal epoch in Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century.

The museum is expected to contribute to boosting tourism in the Red Sea governorate east of Cairo.

Hurghada is a city in the Red Sea governorate, a major tourist center 400 km from the capital.

The museum, which covers 10,000 square meters, displays artifacts, and has an entertainment area, shopping complex and parking lots. It cost 160 million Egyptian pounds (\$10 million).

Tourism and Antiquities Minister Khaled El-Anany said in a statement issued by the ministry that a few changes were being made to the displays so that pieces would "match certain places in the museum."

El-Anany said that the museum would also include a section to display the cultural heritage and monuments of the Red Sea.

He said the inauguration of the museum "would contribute to a great extent in attracting tourists to visit museums during their stay in Hurghada in addition to enjoying beach activities. Thus, this will increase the state's income and promote Egyptian antiquities."

Museum officials have put on show the statue of Queen Meret Amun, replacing the King Tutmoses III plate.

They decided to give the statue a more prominent place in front of the museum.

Bashar Abu Taleb, head of the Red Sea Tour Guides Union, said that the artifacts reflect the elements of beauty in Egyptian civilization across the eras.

Abu Taleb said the museum introduces beauty at a deeper level and in more detail, in addition to displaying instruments used in daily life, such as makeup, cooking utensils and clothes.

The museum will include a special section displaying the cultural heritage

and monuments of the Red Sea.

Abu Taleb said that the museum would include all the monuments of the Red Sea governorate, which were selected from museum storehouses in Cairo.

The selected pieces include artifacts from Al-Hammamat Valley, the Roman city monuments in Safaga, the Roman city in Gouna, and Wady Gasus, south of Sinai, in addition to monuments belonging to various eras, including gold pieces, artifacts belonging to the family of Mohamed Ali, regarded as the founder of modern Egypt, and a Roman theater. The Red Sea governorate announced on its official Facebook page that Red Sea Governor Amr Hanafy was following up on construction work at the museum.

Hanafy inspected a number of pieces prior to the museum's inauguration on the national day of the governorate scheduled for Jan. 22.

However, the Ministry of Antiquities has yet to officially announce the inaugural date.

World-renowned antiquities expert, Zahy Hawwas, said that the Hurghada Museum was one of the best projects implemented by the Ministry of Antiquities in partnership with the private sector, which built the museum and covered the cost of its completion in accordance with the terms and conditions stipulated by the ministry.

Hawwas said that the Ministry of Antiquities would solely supervise the museum's administration and that it would attract more tourists, encourage holidaymakers to visit museums during their stay in coastal areas, and would also promote Egyptian antiquities.

He said that the museum would highlight the beauty of the displayed pieces.

"It was designed in accordance with international museum standards," Hawwas said.

"The scenario of its displays would manifest beauty and luxury in Egyptian civilization throughout the ages. Some pieces feature the luxurious home environment of the ancient Egyptians such as furniture, makeup, wigs, clothes, ornaments, perfumes, and accessories."

Hawwas said that the museum's displays would also feature sports equipment used for Nile fishing and hunting on land, in addition to musical instruments and dance starting from the Pharaonic era to modern times.

A special daily program will feature cultural activities that will be held at the museum's entertainment zone.







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Egypt displays restoration of Tutankhamun gilded coffin  
Opera about Egypt's King Tutankhamun set to debut in 2020

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# Surge in Lebanese crossing into Syria for supplies, new year celebrations

Author:

Tue, 2020-01-07 01:04

BEIRUT: Officials in Syria on Monday reported a surge in the number of Lebanese citizens crossing into the war-torn country for supplies, and new year celebrations.

Of the 26,500 people who passed through border controls on Dec. 30 and 31, at least 11,000 of them were Lebanese, Al-Watan newspaper quoted a Syrian source as saying.

Since the start of the conflict in Syria, Lebanese visitor numbers to the country have dropped significantly, with the majority of those entering being Syrian workers, merchants, foreign relief workers and diplomats.

However, a customs official at the Al-Masnaa border post with Syria told Arab News: "The movement of Lebanese entering Syrian territories on Dec. 30 and 31 was very active ... Talking about 11,000 Lebanese is very reasonable and perhaps the number is greater than that.

"We have not seen such a movement (of Lebanese citizens) since the beginning of the war in Syria. (The movement was) mostly confined to the Syrians."

Cheaper prices for food and domestic products coupled with lower health care costs have been cited as the main reasons for the sudden influx of Lebanese into Syria.

Due to the economic crisis in Lebanon, hard-pressed citizens have been returning to Syrian markets to stock up on home supplies.

Khaled Al-Husseini, who owns a communications store in Chtoura near to Al-Masnaa crossing, said that \$100 was equivalent to 85,000 Syrian pounds, which could buy a month's supply of food items such as sugar, rice, pasta, grains and other consumables, including cleaning materials, in Syria.

Meat was also cheaper in Syria than Lebanon, he added, with the price of a kilogram of lamb in Syria being 19,000 Lebanese pounds (\$12.58) compared to 30,000 Lebanese pounds in Lebanon. This was "after its price increased due to the liquidity crisis and the high dollar exchange rate in Lebanon," said Al-Husseini.

He noted that there were many reasons for Lebanese crossing the border into Syria.

"It may be for a visit to a religious place and to buy home supplies, clothes

and shoes at the same time because these things are cheaper in Syria than Lebanon, especially sports shoes. Some visitors go to Syria for medical care because the costs there are cheaper than Lebanon.”

A money changer at an exchange located on a road leading to the border at Al-Masnaa, said business was brisk.

“There are some Lebanese people who enter the free market at the Lebanese-Syrian border point to buy cigarettes and tobacco because it is cheaper than Lebanon, and they pay in hard (foreign) currency.

“And there are those who take dollars with them to Syria, and most of them are families of members of Hezbollah who get paid in dollars.”

One resident of a town near the Syrian border, said: “There were people, especially the younger generation, who spent New Year’s Eve in Syria, and they told me that the evening was very enjoyable and cheaper than in Lebanon.”

It takes less than one-and-a-half hours to drive between the capital cities of Beirut and Damascus with travel times even less from central Bekaa to Damascus where many Lebanese saw in 2020.

The customs official pointed out that restrictions applied to Lebanese citizens on the quantity of food and other items they could take out of Syria. This was limited to an estimate of personal needs and larger quantities meant for trade were not allowed.

A treaty signed between Lebanon and Syria allows Lebanese to reside in Syria for up to six months, while Syrians can stay in Lebanon for 15 days provided that they have hotel reservations. However, Syrians with a Lebanese sponsor have the right to stop in Lebanon for one year.

Lebanon hosts about 1 million Syrian refugees on its territory.

Their return to Syria is conditional on obtaining approval from the Syrian authorities.





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Government formation in Lebanon still facing obstaclesLebanon's Aoun hopes government will be formed next week, former minister warns of need for huge bailout

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## [Soleimani strike threatens UK 'lives and interests'](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-01-07 01:01

LONDON: When the sun rose on Jan. 3, the world woke to unprecedented contemporary tensions between the US and Iran.

As an American drone fired missiles at the convoy of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad at around 1 a.m., most of Washington's allies were in the dark.

British sources said the government was not informed ahead of the strike, despite the heavy UK presence in the region and Iraq.

Washington's failure to forewarn London amid heightened regional tensions has

caused confusion and concern among commentators and politicians.

"I've long believed that the purpose of having allies is that we can surprise our enemies and not each other," said Tom Tugendhat, a Conservative MP and chair of the foreign affairs committee in the previous UK Parliament.

The failure to share information has become "a pattern," and it is "a bit of a shame that the US administration of late has not shared with us, and that is a matter of concern," he added.

A source close to Downing Street told Arab News that UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson – who is currently holidaying on the private Caribbean island of Mustique – was unaware that the strike was due to take place.

As global leaders weighed in on the incident, Johnson remained silent until Jan. 5, when he was careful not to deliver a statement that was overly supportive of US President Donald Trump's orders.

Johnson said Britain "will not lament" the loss of Iran's top general, but fell short of supporting the attack.

A surprisingly short statement from Britain's Foreign Office did not contain a line of support for Trump's decision to kill Soleimani.

In a statement, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said Britain had "always recognized the aggressive threat posed by the Iranian Quds force," but he called for de-escalation, adding: "Further conflict is in none of our interests."

Lucy Fisher, defense editor at The Times, said Iran was "convinced of its status as a world superpower," and the chance of it launching attacks on British interests was "very possible given the UK is inextricably linked with the US in the eyes of Iran."

A senior commander in the Quds Force – Iran's international military force, responsible for supporting proxy militias – told The Times on Jan. 6: "Our forces will retaliate and target US troops in (the) Middle East without any concern about killing its allies, including UK troops, as this has turned into a fully fledged war with much collateral damage expected."

The commander added: "We request (the) UK, the key US ally, and other Western allies ... to not stand with this Trump regime."

His inflammatory comments come as Iraqi police confirmed that two rockets had injured six people in Baghdad's Green Zone, where the US Embassy is based.

Iraq's Parliament has backed a resolution supported by Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi to expel foreign forces – including British troops – from the country.

Raab responded by urging Baghdad to abandon the resolution. He told Iraq's government that an ejection of NATO forces would allow Daesh to "exploit the vacuum" left behind.



Arab News understands that Britain's Defense Ministry is preparing new plans to secure UK interests and personnel after the resolution.

The 400 British armed forces personnel based in Iraq have shifted their mission from training local forces to fight Daesh, to defending NATO bases and high-value individuals.

The Royal Navy now plans to resume its escort of merchant vessels through the Strait of Hormuz following the heightened tensions.

HMS Montrose and HMS Defender, a frigate and a destroyer respectively, had ended their escorting duties in 2019, but will now return to their duties.

But despite the widely perceived threat to British interests, and the predictable trouble this has brought to London, the US failed to consult or even brief the UK ahead of the attack.

The diplomatic silence over an assassination that has huge ramifications for British security has led to some questioning the value of the "special relationship" between the two nations.

"We pride ourselves on the so-called 'special relationship,' yet there's often little evidence that the US has a special relationship with anyone other than itself," said Charlie Herbert, a former British Army major general.

Kyle Orton, an independent terrorism researcher, told Arab News: "British interests are at risk, arguably more than American interests if Iran is looking for a calibrated response that doesn't provoke worse from Washington."

But he added: "The need for speed and secrecy makes it imperative to keep the circle of people aware small."

According to reports from the Los Angeles Times, that circle was small but included Israel. Barak Ravid, a journalist with sources in Israel's government, said on Jan. 4 that the "US informed Israel about this operation in Iraq apparently a few days ago."

A well-informed Israeli army officer told the Los Angeles Times that the attack "did not come as a surprise."

After decades of fighting alongside American troops, and with thousands of British military and governmental personnel deployed in the Middle East to work alongside US forces, many Britons will be wondering what more they must do to enjoy the kind of advance notice afforded to Israel.



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How Iranian, Qatari media glorified Qassem Soleimani