Iranian Progressives Respond to Israel's Genocidal Assault on Palestinians

written by Frieda Afary | October 20, 2023

Photo by Naaman Omar, AP images

[Editors' Note: This statement from Iranian progressives indicates that Hamas's October 7 assault on Israeli civilians was "planned with the Iranian government's extensive training and support." We take this to refer to the well-documented Iranian government military support for Hamas, not direct planning of the Hamas attack. The *New York Times* reports that "The United States, Israel and key regional allies have said they have not found evidence in early intelligence gathering that Iran directly helped plan the attack."]

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A majority of the Iranian public who oppose their own government know that for the past four decades the Islamic Republic has instrumentalized the plight of the Palestinians for its own authoritarian purposes. Nevertheless, they feel a deep sympathy with the Palestinian people in their struggle for national self-determination against Israeli occupation.

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The Association for Iranian Studies wrote:

> As academics, we have a moral obligation to counter hate speech and hate-acts and to work toward peace, tolerance and justice. Sometimes, it is difficult to know how to compare different experiences of suffering or to mete out justice, but one thing is certain: Endless cycles of oppression, violence and hate only derail and delay the possibility of a peaceful future. (Association for Iranian Studies, 2023)

Most Iranian progressives have learned lessons from the 1979 Iranian Revolution when a religious fundamentalist, authoritarian and misogynist organization was allowed to represent the aspirations of the masses. They do not wish this on the Palestinian masses.

F. Dashti, a writer for *Zamaneh,* a Persian-language website in Holland with writers inside Iran, wrote: "Of course the Israeli Palestinian issue is very complicated. . . If only these two main elements were involved, perhaps the situation would not become so complicated. However, there are others behind the scene or sometimes on the stage who establish themselves with utterly different interests and calculations. The changes that they have brought about and their occasional ruses for appearing on one side and then on the other, make everything more complicated." (Dashti, 2023)

Khosrow Sadeghi-Borujeni, a labor and social welfare researcher in Iran, writes about Israel's role since 1987 in propping up Hamas as an alternative to the more secular Palestinian nationalist leaders. He cites Adam Hanieh, a Jordanian political economist, on Hamas's torture and murder of Palestinian leftists, and its promotion of misogyny and capitalist exploitation. Borujeni concludes that "if these realities and interactions of existing forces in the field of struggle are not taken into consideration, the legitimate defense of Palestine and the violence of a captive people will only lead to a greater human toll and will be a pretext for further repression of the people of Palestine and Lebanon, in the interest of the U.S. and Israel. Therefore, a force that is **itself part of the problem** and which has itself **benefited** from this problem for decades, cannot take forward steps in the pathway toward **solving the problem**." (Sadeghi-Borujeni, 2023)

A recent statement issued by several Iranian socialist organizations in exile is entitled, "The People of Palestine and Israel Will Not Benefit from This Reactionary War." This statement argues that "in the past few years, with the 'Abraham Accords', reactionary Arab governments have promoted open reconciliation with Israel, which has endangered the position of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and the Islamic Republic in confronting Israel." Thus, the Islamic Republic of Iran "needs this war and is one side of these politics of war promotion." (Rahe Kargar, 2023)

Many activists inside Iran are also deeply concerned about the Islamic Republic's instrumentalization of the Palestinian cause and its use of pro-Palestinian rhetoric to cover over its intensifying repression at home. While the Iranian government speaks about the suffering of the Palestinian people under Israeli colonialism, it continues to crack down on Iran's national minorities such as the Kurds, many of whom have been executed simply for believing in the Kurdish right to self-determination. Kurdish activists who have fled to northern Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government to seek refuge in Kurdish opposition party camps are now being pushed out under Iranian government pressure. Most recently, a prominent Iranian filmmaker, Dariush Mehrjui and his wife, Vahideh Mohammadifar, a screenwriter were stabbed to death in their home in a manner similar to various other dissident intellectuals in the past few decades. Prior to his assassination, Mehrjui had challenged the Ministry of Culture in a videotaped message against censorship. (Najafi, 2023)

S. Shams, a reporter from *Zamaneh* writes: "It seems that a deep dialogue to build solidarity between Iranian and Palestinian fighters does not exist. With the exception of a letter from some Palestinian artists at the beginning of the Zhina Uprising [the Woman, Life, Freedom movement] in defense of Iranian freedom fighters, we have not seen any other clear stances expressed about current struggles inside Iran, and often it seems that Palestinian activists are evasive when it comes to talking about issues in Iran." (Shams, 2023)

In response, a Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions activist states: "The state of constant war severely limits free speech. The Palestinian people are under pressure. They live and struggle in a complicated situation and cannot easily criticize anyone." (Shams, 2023)

While the pressures that the Palestinian people face are immense, and Israel's latest invasion of Gaza is becoming bloodier and more destructive by the day, the possibility of this war becoming a massive regional war with the intervention of Iran and its proxy militia groups is very real.

Iranian progressives are with the Palestinians in their struggle against genocide. However, they also want to make sure that the Iranian government does not take advantage of this war to extinguish the Woman, Life, Freedom movement that emerged in Iran last year as a struggle for women's rights, the rights of oppressed minorities and labor rights. They do not want the world to forget that Narges Mohammadi, an Iranian feminist human rights activist who is incarcerated, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her courageous struggle for women's rights and against the death penalty.

Iranian progressives want to express their solidarity with the Palestinian struggle on the basis of a life-affirming vision that challenges religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, colonialism, imperialism, racism, misogyny, homophobia and class exploitation. (Statement of Minimum Demands, 2023)

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Statement of Minimum Demands of Iranian Unions and Civil Society Organizations. February 14, 2023.

The Statement of Minimum Demands of Independent Iranian Unions and Civil Society Organizations – Iranian Progressives in Translation

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