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# La police israélienne réprime violemment nos manifestations anti-guerre, qui ne cessent de prendre de l'ampleur

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+972 Magazine

As dissent over the Iran war spreads to the political center, demonstrators face crackdowns while opposition lawmakers are still nowhere to be seen.

By Iddo Elam April 1, 2026

Police officers arrest a demonstrator at a rally against Israel's war with Iran, at Habima Square, Tel Aviv, March 28, 2026. (Flash90)

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In partnership with

For the past month, I have been gathering with fellow Israeli radical left activists in Tel Aviv's Habima Square to protest the war with Iran. What began as a demonstration of barely 20 people has steadily grown : By this past Saturday, there were over 1,000 demonstrators, joined by parts of the more centrist anti-government protest movement, with parallel rallies held in dozens of locations across the country.

This expansion of our anti-war protests appears to have unsettled the Israel Police, which has responded with disproportionate and indiscriminate force.

From the outset, we protested because the consequences of this unlawful war were clear. It threatened to ignite a regional conflict that would claim countless civilian lives across the Middle East. To us, its stated objectives echoed past catastrophic Western attempts at regime change that produced nothing but prolonged instability and devastation.

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Yet much of the Israeli media, along with nearly all Jewish opposition lawmakers in the Knesset, did everything in their power to sell Trump and Netanyahu's lies to the Israeli public. And unfortunately, they have largely succeeded.

In the early days, turnout was minimal. Three days into the war, only a handful of us stood in the square ; a week later, we were nearly 100. At each of those demonstrations, police arrested a single protester and violently dispersed the rest " pushing, beating, and snatching signs from our hands.

Israeli police officers arrest conscientious objector Itamar Greenberg during a demonstration against the Iran war, at Habima Square, Tel Aviv, March 3, 2026. (Flash90)

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Over the past two weeks, while the heavy police presence remained, the aggressive dispersal eased. As our numbers grew into the hundreds, the protests continued without major incident. But on Saturday, that changed. From the moment we arrived, it was clear that the police had other intentions.

Hundreds of militarized Border Police and regular officers encircled the square, facing us. Within minutes of our first chants through the megaphone, they began throwing people to the ground. Arrests followed almost immediately. Among those detained was my friend Itamar Greenberg, a conscientious objector who had already been arrested at the first anti-war protest and subjected to an unlawful strip-search.

Israel Police claimed in response to +972's inquiry that the demonstration was "prohibited under emergency regulations" and that officers acted in response to a "real risk to human life" due to the potential for missile sirens. That is blatantly false. This gratuitous show of force came despite the square sitting above one of Tel Aviv's largest public bomb shelters, which serves thousands of residents, and could easily accommodate all of the demonstrators within minutes. The real problem was our message.

Police officers arrest a demonstrator at a rally against Israel's war with Iran, at Habima Square, Tel Aviv, March 28, 2026. (Flash90)

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A shared purpose, a clear adversary

Despite the swift police crackdown, or perhaps because of it, there was a palpable sense of solidarity in the square on Saturday. Even if we did not agree on much apart from the need to end the war, at that moment we all stood together against a common adversary.

I sat down on the ground with several friends in an attempt to resist the police push to clear the area. It only provoked further rage. Four Border Police officers grabbed me by my arms and legs and dragged me across the pavement. "Just get up already !" one shouted, while another forced me onto my stomach and a third yanked me aside. I could see the hatred and anger in their eyes. Their violence felt less like an attempt to disperse a protest than an effort to create chaos and punish those of us who refused to leave.

Police move to disperse a sit-in during a protest against Israel's war with Iran at Habima Square, Tel Aviv, March 28, 2026. (Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90)

Police move to disperse a sit-in during a protest against Israel's war with Iran at Habima Square, Tel Aviv, March 28, 2026. (Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90)

As the crowd compressed under the pressure, we regrouped near a makeshift stage, trying to shield ourselves from the tightening ring of officers who were snatching every megaphone in sight. Hadash lawmakers Ofer Cassif and Ayman Odeh invoked their parliamentary immunity, calling on the officers to de-escalate while continuing to chant against the war from the plenum.

For the first time since the start of the war, former Knesset members from the now-defunct Zionist left party Meretz, including Mossi Raz, Gaby Lasky, and Zehava Galon " who was slated to speak before police dispersed the protest " were also present. The current leaders of the center-left opposition, however, were nowhere to be seen.

Prominent figures of the Zionist left like Yair Golan, and members of anti-government protest groups like "Brothers and Sisters in Arms" (who previously declared their refusal to show up for reserve duty in protest of Netanyahu's judicial overhaul) failed to show up for a simple reason : They do not oppose the war. The sobering reality is that, beyond a handful of Palestinian and non-Zionist Jewish MKs, there is no genuine parliamentary opposition to the war.

Israelis attend a protest against Israel's war with Iran, at Habima Square, Tel Aviv, March 28, 2026. (Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90)

Israelis attend a protest against Israel's war with Iran, at Habima Square, Tel Aviv, March 28, 2026. (Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90)

Yet on the ground, something is shifting. Saturday's crowd included many faces I had not seen at the previous demonstrations. Some told me they were not opposed to the war in its early days. They were not longtime anti-occupation activists, nor had they even explicitly opposed the genocide in Gaza. But week by week, it has become clear to them that this war will not bring security " not for Iranians, and not for Israelis " and will not achieve its stated goals of toppling the Iranian regime or destroying its nuclear program.

The leaders of the Zionist center-left still seem unable, or unwilling, to understand this growing frustration. They remain trapped in a mindset of "completing the mission" in Iran — hardly surprising given the military backgrounds of many of them. For those now joining the protests, that rhetoric feels increasingly divorced from reality.

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The Iron Dome is intercepting our chances of a normal future

Israeli settlers fly an Israeli flag on the house of Ahed Khatib, inside Area B near Aqarba, in the West Bank, February 2026. (Oren Ziv)

'Erasing the lines' : How settler outposts are seizing new regions of the West Bank

What unfolded on Saturday at Habima Square was not just a confrontation between police and demonstrators ; it was also a confrontation between a constituency and a political establishment increasingly unresponsive to a growing demand within its own base : to end this war.

A version of this article was first published in Hebrew on Local Call. Read it here.

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Zionist Left

Iddo Elam is a conscientious objector, political activist with the Hadash party, and musician. He serves as the secretary of the Young Communist League in Tel Aviv.

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For those who care deeply about the people living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, this is your opportunity to move from despair into action.

The effects of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza are still being felt : much of the Strip lies in ruins, millions remain displaced with nowhere to return to, tens of thousands have been killed, and many more are believed to be buried beneath the rubble.

In the West Bank, the Israeli army has displaced tens of thousands of Palestinians from refugee camps, while state-sponsored settler violence is wiping rural communities off the map on a weekly basis. At the same time, Israel's ever-escalating regional aggression threatens to drag the entire Middle East into the inferno.

*Post-scriptum :*

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