



The Crisis of Violence in Israeli Arab Society

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Arab politicians blame the Israeli establishment for the rampaging violence in Israeli Arab society, but ignore the underlying problems in their own sociopolitical culture that foster that violence.

The Joint Arab List, which became the Knesset's third-largest faction in the recent elections, is wasting no time.

Ayman Odeh, who leads the List, called for a general strike to protest the rampaging violence in Arab communities and towns across Israel. Many Arab communities demonstrated against what they called the lack of government involvement in combatting crime and violence.

Israeli Arab communities do indeed suffer serious problems, including illegal weapons in almost every home, domestic violence, and violence against women. Crime is on the rise in many Arab towns, and inter-clan murders have become routine. Arab MKs blame PM Benjamin Netanyahu and Interior Minister Gilad Erdan personally for what they perceive as a lack of initiative in addressing these problems in the Arab sector.

There are many factors contributing to the pervasive crime in Israeli Arab society, beginning with the structure of the family unit and including certain Arab traditions and customs. There are more issues underlying these factors, like difficult economic and social conditions in the Arab communities and a general animosity toward the Israeli establishment. The combination of elements made it nearly inevitable that the crime rate would rise.

The Israeli government has been making efforts in recent years to invest in community resources in the Arab sector in general and in law enforcement measures in particular. Several new police stations were set up in Arab localities, illegal weapons were

confiscated, and the population was urged to willfully surrender its weapons without risk of prosecution. In addition, the government has promised to recruit more Arabic-speaking police officers to serve in Arab localities. The situation remains far from satisfactory, however. There are far too few police stations in Arab communities, leaving them with little deterrence and almost no law enforcement.

While this situation can be partly apportioned to government neglect, Arab politicians blame the Israeli (read: Jewish) establishment for *all* the ills of Israeli-Arab society, without acknowledging the underlying sociocultural and sociopolitical problems plaguing their society.

Thus, for example, there is a tradition in the Arab world of firing weapons to celebrate a wedding. Many people have been wounded or even killed by this dangerous practice, which is common not only in Israel but across the Arab world.

Another problem unique to Arab culture is honor killings, which are committed allegedly for the sake of preserving family dignity. Women are murdered on the slightest suspicion that they had intimate relations prior to marriage, or on suspicion of having broken some other family value or tradition. This problem is more common among Bedouins in the south of the country, but can be found throughout Arab-Israeli communities.

In recent years, the Israeli police have refrained from entering several Arab communities in the north out of fear for their own safety. There is a great deal of hostility among Arab citizens toward the Israeli establishment, and many consider the police their enemy. For this reason, complaints are never filed for many crimes. This lack of cooperation only encourages more violence and crime. On the occasions that police officers do enter Arab communities to combat crime, they are attacked with stones and firebombs.

Israeli Arabs must understand that if they want peace and security within their communities, they must allow the police to do their job. Distrust between the police and Arab citizens does not help either side and only increases crime and violence.

This is not to absolve the Israeli government of the need to invest greater resources in law enforcement in the Arab sector. But without the cooperation of Israeli Arab leaders and citizens, there is little the police can do. Arab politicians and government officials must educate their constituents and encourage them to cooperate with the police, and they must stop promoting division and inciting against the establishment and the state more widely. Instead they need to acknowledge the problems in the Arab communities and allow the police to properly enforce the law.

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