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Jewish Groups Protest Israel's Military Actions

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SAN FRANCISCO – About 300 people demonstrated outside the Israeli Consulate in San Francisco Monday to demand an end to Israel's military attacks on Gaza and Lebanon. Demonstrators said the rally reflects a growing trend among American Jews to voice their criticism of the policies of the Israeli government.

Seventeen protesters were arrested for blocking traffic when they locked arms and sat down in the street. The protest was organized by the groups Jewish Voice for Peace, Jews for a Free Palestine and Break the Silence.



Photo by Bill Carpenter, courtesy of [SF Bay Area Independent Media Center](#)

Crowds gathered in front of the consulate, holding signs that read "U.S. Jews say: Stop all bombing of civilians" and "Break the cycle of violence – negotiate." Some waved Palestinian flags. Demonstrators talked over the music of the local band BLO (Brass Liberation Orchestra).

Samantha Liapes, a member of Jews for a Free Palestine and one of the organizers of the demonstration, says that as the situation in the Middle East becomes more dire, an increasing number of American Jews are beginning to openly question Israel's actions.

"Since the founding of Israel, there have been large numbers of Jews who have been critical of Israel's policies," said Liapes. "Many have chosen to be silent because of pro-Israel pressures and the mainstream conflation of being critical of Israel with being anti-Semitic."

"Now the risk of a major regional conflict, a war, scares people," adds Liapes. "They see that this could be prevented, that military action and violence is being used as a first resort."

Israel launched air strikes on Lebanon in retaliation for the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah on the Lebanese border July 12. Israel was already engaged in a military offensive in the Gaza Strip launched after Palestinian militants captured a soldier on June 25. The United States and Israel claim that Iran and Syria are behind the Hezbollah attacks.

Heather Merriam of the East Bay chapter of Tikkun, a Jewish organization founded by progressive Rabbi Michael Lerner, joined the protest outside the consulate, saying, "We are both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian."



Photo by Bill Carpenter, courtesy of [SF Bay Area Independent Media Center](#)

"We seek the middle path, which is really hard in this conflict," said Merriam. "Both sides are to blame. It's an endless cycle of violence. Israelis have a responsibility not to escalate the situation."

"You could say Iran and Syria set a trap by kidnapping soldiers and Israel fell into the trap," said Merriam. "The soldiers are being used by Israel just like the Palestinians are being used by the Arab world, to further their political cause," she said.

Some say Israel's military actions could lead to increased anti-Israel sentiments as more innocent people are killed.

"Israel doesn't have a concern for Jews in its heart," says Liapes. "If Israel was concerned with the safety of Israelis, they wouldn't be using these tactics as a first resort. This is going to lead to the death of more innocents."

In fact, it was Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 that led to the creation of Hezbollah by a group of Lebanese Shi'ite Muslims.



Photo by Bill Carpenter, courtesy of [SF Bay Area Independent Media Center](#)

Mitchell Plitnick, director of education and policy for Jewish Voice for Peace, one of the groups that organized the demonstration, pointed to the need for international involvement. "The U.S. should start playing the role of a responsible power, stop blocking the UN from setting up a ceasefire," he said, referring to the Security Council resolution that the United States vetoed last week. "The United States will not do anything that interferes with Israel's plight, and may want to see Israel smash Hamas and Hezbollah."

Speaking before the crowd, Amir Terkel, a former Israeli soldier who served in the Israeli army from 1989 to 1992, said his experience in the military made him question Israel's policies.

"Our policies are leading us to self-destruction," said Terkel, who identified himself as one of 1,600 Israelis who refuses to serve in what he calls the "occupied territory."

"We were given directives that had the sole purpose of perpetuating control over the Palestinian people," he said. "We broke into people's houses in the middle of the night, we were told they were suspects in something. Most never saw a judge, a lawyer or heard what they were charged with, and were held for months or years."

"I'm here to support the release of hostages," he said, and the use of "negotiating, not bombing."

Palestinian activist Monadel Herzallah called on the crowd to, "Tell Israel, 'You don't speak for the people of the Jewish faith.'"

Across the street, a smaller crowd of counter-protesters waved Israeli flags and held signs that read, "Those who curse Israel are cursed by God," and "Surrender is not the answer to Islamic fascism."



Photo by Bill Carpenter, courtesy of [SF Bay Area Independent Media Center](#)

Optometrist Stuart Mann, whose sign read, "Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace," said this isn't about Israel and Palestine; it is about the two terrorist organizations Hamas and Hezbollah.

"I don't think anyone here is not for a separate, independent Palestinian state. No one here wants war," he said. "But Israel was attacked. And it is going after Hezbollah and Hamas targets, trying to be careful about who they attack. Israel's got to defend itself."

Another counter-protester, Anne Marx, who attended the demonstration with her husband and baby, added, "It's important for people to know there are Jews that support Israel."

