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Ahed Tamimi provides powerful icon but also distraction from real issues

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“Ahed acted out of conviction and with good cause but she is getting exaggerated attention, even from the Israelis.”

On the first day of 2018, more than 1,000 members of Likud voted for the unlimited construction of settlements in the occupied West Bank, shortly after the Israeli parliament decided to remove two Palestinian neighbourhoods from the jurisdiction of East Jerusalem, purging more Palestinians from their capital.

On January 2, the Knesset passed a measure saying that a two-thirds vote would be required to relinquish sovereignty over any parts of Jerusalem – in clear defiance of UN resolutions that refuse to recognise Israel's rights over all Jerusalem.

A third Israeli bill was passed, loosening restrictions on the death penalty, which previously could only be applied on Nazi criminals if tried in Israeli civil courts. It can now apply to any person convicted of "terrorist activity" in clear reference to the Palestinians.

Perhaps more disturbing is the "Greater Jerusalem Law," which is gaining steam in the corridors of the Knesset. It calls for expanding the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem to include all illegal settlements in the West Bank, such as Maale Adumim and Gush Etzion, bringing 150,000 settlers into the city.

These major developments did not feature heavily in prominent Arab news outlets or on the social media networks of Arab writers and activists. Instead, they were all busy posting flowery prose in homage of Ahed Tamimi, the fearless, unarmed, charismatic 16-year-old girl arrested in December for slapping and kicking an Israeli soldier at the courtyard of her home in Nabi Saleh, north of Ramallah.

In a video that went viral, she is heard saying: "I destroy your face!" Celebrities across the Middle



Symbol of a cause. Ahed Tamimi (R) appears at a military court at the Israeli-run Ofer Prison in the West Bank, last December. (AFP)

East hailed her heroism and major Arabic television channels ran non-stop coverage of her arrest and trial – with good intention.

Many see her as a beautiful manifestation of the Palestinian struggle being passed down to a new generation, hailing her as a heroine, which she is, undoubtedly. Arab secularists were thrilled with the rise of a young teenager, with bouncing curls and piercing blue eyes who is unveiled, unlike previous activists who emerged under Hamas.

Many sincerely think that the more they eulogise Ahed, the more disturbing this would be for the Israelis, forgetting that Tel Aviv is benefiting from diversion of Arab attention from what really matters in terms of demographics, politics and future of Jerusalem.

Focused on Ahed, the Arab

world has failed to notice legislation recently passed by the Israeli Knesset. Even staunch anti-Israeli outlets such as Iranian state-television and Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV are more occupied with Ahed than anything else.

Ahed is no newcomer to Palestinian activism. She made headlines in 2012, raising her clenched fist before an Israeli soldier arresting her mother. At the time she was only 11 but apart from a visit to Turkey and a meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, got none of the international attention she is now receiving.

In a 2015 video, she was seen biting and hitting an Israeli soldier, yet, apart from attention by Palestinian and Arab activists, didn't qualify for online celebrity status. Why, then, has the world suddenly noticed her? She is certainly not the

first Palestinian teen to be filmed taking jobs at occupation forces – and will not likely be the last.

Human rights observers said the Israeli army has killed approximately 11 Palestinian children a month since 2001.

Ahed acted out of conviction and with good cause and those supporting her are doing so in good faith but she is getting exaggerated attention, even from the Israelis. Three Israeli ministers and nearly every major analyst across the spectrum have commented on her affair.

Ahed will probably get released but only after all the Knesset legislation passes. Arab masses will celebrate her freedom, without noticing that, while they were busy and she was away, Jerusalem was swallowed completely and so was the entire West Bank.

Iran's leadership worried over the future – its own

Claude Salhani

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“As for banning the teaching of English in primary schools, the regime is only going to cause further hardships on its populace.”

Once again Iran's ruling mullahs are worried about the future. Rather, they are worried about their own future.

Following the outbreak of violence in recent weeks, there is much that frightens the country's rulers. Iran's mullahs are worried about the internet and social media and they feel particularly threatened by the English language, the lingua franca of the internet.

On all the above counts the mullahs are spot on. They have every reason to be worried.

They have chosen to enter a war from which they cannot possibly emerge victorious. It is only a matter of time before the mullahs and their revolution become a thing of the past. Much like the regime they overthrew, the mullahs too will become obsolete in the not-too-distant future.

A good reason the mullahs governing Iran need to worry is because they are attempting to stop the natural instincts of man – to constantly learn and evolve. They are attempting to stop him from trying to find out more about

himself and how better he would fare if he had the power to contribute more in society. It is this craving to have a say that has flamed revolts and revolutions since the beginning of organised governments.

It may come as no surprise because it is in man's nature to seek a better tomorrow for himself and his family. The mullahs in Iran are, therefore, fighting a losing battle. It matters not how many guns, armoured cars, tanks and torturers they may have at their disposal.

History has shown there is no other way but to embrace some form of liberalism or democratic principles. It is inevitable for change to come to Iran, just as it has in many countries in the past. Successful revolutions are not measured by the amount of blood drawn but for their long-term gains.

From the Soviet Union to the People's Republic of China and the former Soviet satellite states, change from autocracy to a more open and inclusive form of government has worked in favour of the citizens. Though many may argue that they have still a

long way to go.

As someone who has travelled extensively throughout the Soviet Union and in the former Soviet republics, I can attest that the people are, on average, far better off today. That is not to say that the changes from communism or whatever form of dictatorship plagued these societies came about without problems or major headaches.

The mullahs ought to take a little time out and reflect on what Winston Churchill once said about democracy: "It is the worst form of government except all those others that have been tried."

Following the demonstrations that had spread suddenly across the country since December 28, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei decreed that the teaching of English in Iranian primary schools would be banned.

As Iran tried to smother the first stirrings of a rebellion against the rule of the mullahs, the Islamic Republic showed it was clearly drawing the wrong conclusions. Its religious leaders and enforcers insist that the protests have been provoked by social media, so they are restricting access to the

internet. They consider any fresh thoughts from the outside to be a threat.

Even as powerful an organisation as the Soviet KGB was unable to stem the spread of the social media of the Cold War era – Radio Free Europe. Think how much more difficult the task will be today.

As for banning the teaching of English in primary schools, the regime is only going to cause further hardships on its populace. Tehran's decision to ban English language education in primary schools reflects a close-minded approach at home and towards the rest of the world.

It is a theocratic regime that sees bridges to the world as a threat to the anachronistic way of life it's imposing on all Iranians.

It is a regime that promotes hostility to other cultures as it is a guarantee of continued rule. It is also a regime that lacks confidence in itself. It does not want its citizens to know there is a lot out there with different ideas and various possible narratives. By doing so, it is condemning itself to sclerosis and obsolescence.

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