Thousands of Israeli Extremists Assault Palestinians in a Far-Right March Through Jerusalem's Old City

This past Sunday saw tens of thousands of far-right Israeli extremists parade through the heart of Jerusalem's Old City, assaulting Palestinian shop owners, journalists, residents, and onlookers as they chanted racist and genocidal slogans like "Death to Arabs" and "may your village burn." Some of the participants also celebrated the death of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, and attacked media teams while cursing at reporters and interrupting live broadcasts. An estimated at least 70,000 took part in the provocative and destructive march, which was organized for "Jerusalem Day," a holiday which while claiming to commemorate the "reunification" of the city in actuality marks the beginning of Israel's ongoing illegal occupation of East Jerusalem. Peace and social justice activists have rightly denounced the regrettable behavior, which saw hundreds injured and a wave of property damage. Incendiary actions like this only serve to fuel animosity at the array of Israeli human rights violations and abuses committed against Palestinians which include such violence, unlawful land confiscations, the expansion of illegal settlements, and discriminatory policies.

During the march, there were multiple acts of violence perpetrated by the participants and Israeli police forces. The alarming violence that erupted led to more than 165 injuries ranging from heavy tear gas inhalation to beatings and wounds from live rounds and rubber-coated steel bullets. There were also repeated instances of the extremists assaulting Palestinian residents and damaging property. While police cleared Palestinians out of the normally busy area in several instances, observers highlighted that many of the Israeli assailants were not apprehended. The march included the waving of flags, the singing of ultra-nationalist songs, and the shouting of multiple racist chants, among the aforementioned violent attacks. Some of the extremist groups also stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque, raising fears over the site there as well. Analysts criticized the fact that Israeli police forces allowed this behavior to take place while at the same time cracking down against Palestinians in the vicinity. The actions of the police have been pointed to as yet another example of biased treatment toward particular individuals.

The violent march comes at a time when Israel is under heavy condemnation for its violent raids and the murder of reputable Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh. At least 35 Palestinians have been killed in recent Israeli military operations and raids, some of which have been children. Israeli forces have raided Palestinian towns and villages to demolish homes, and have often killed civilians as well. Israel's behavior in this regard has been denounced by rights groups and activists, who have also outlined its destructive role in fueling animosity and a sense of injustice. These actions, combined with the deplorable violence that took place during this past Sunday's marches, all contribute to exacerbating tensions.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh condemned the march as an "aggression which crossed all red lines." For many Palestinians, behavior like this from Israeli extremist groups and forces is unfortunately all too commonplace. They see an Israeli occupation force continually using violence to enforce its rule and push Palestinians from their generational homes. Experts have warned of the detrimental impact that actions like this have on peace and stability, and the possibility of an outbreak in armed conflict similar to that which transpired back in May of last year. Despite this, the Israeli government remains complicit in enabling extremists and stoking violence, and therefore social justice activists have urged for concrete measures to be taken by the international community to deter this type of behavior.