



DYLAN CHAPGIER City on a Hill Press

STUDENTS SUPPORTING PALESTINE staged a protest Wednesday against conflict in Gaza at the Quarry Plaza. A counter-protest was staged supporting Israel.

Gaza Conflict Demonstrates Campus Division

Mid-East crisis sparks heated reactions from student groups

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Shouts of protest rang across Quarry Plaza on Wednesday, as protesters and counter-protesters sounded off on the Israel/Palestine conflict.

The event, organized by the Committee for Justice in Palestine (CJP), rallied dozens of people for chanting, passionate public speaking and sign-carrying aimed at raising awareness about the ongoing conflict that has claimed almost 1,300 Palestinian lives.

On the other side of the plaza, in sharp contrast, more than 30 people stood in silence, holding Israeli flags and signs with slogans such as "Free Gaza From Hamas" and "Hamas, Stop Using Children As Human Shields."

Nathan Zaru, a UC Santa Cruz fourth-year student, stood between the two groups. He is half-Palestinian and half-Jewish, but volunteered to stand as a crowd monitor for the event.

"Yes, there's a cease-fire, but there's still a blockade on Gaza. It's an open-air prison. Both sides have their heads up their asses, but the massacre on Gaza will not stand," Zaru said. "Today I am wearing Palestinian colors because Israel receives unjust and unfair support from the U.S."

The cease-fire, which brought the last of Israel's troops out of the Gaza strip early Wednesday, brought a shaky halt to the 23 days of violence, following a reigniting of the decades-old conflict at the end of last year. Israel still holds a blockade on all traffic entering and exiting Gaza.

Eva Mata, a fourth-year UCSC student and one of the organizers of the event, emphasized that CJP has been advocating Palestinian freedom for a long time. While the most recent con-

flict helped raise awareness, she noted, Israel and Palestine historically share a turbulent relationship.

"It's a motivation to get people out here, to put a spotlight on the issue," she said, adding that the conflict is far from over. "The cease-fire was merely a publicity stunt on behalf of Israel ... for the inauguration of Barack Obama."

Third-year student Shawn Harris, another organizer, echoed that the purpose behind the protest did not change on account of the recent cease-fire.

"The purpose of the protest is for solidarity with the Gazans," he said. "There is still a blockade, it's still a serious humanitarian issue. We're hoping to achieve a heightened sense of awareness on campus."

Still, many onlookers sensed palpable tension in the air. Guy Oron, a fourth-year student, moved to the United States from Israel when he was 12. Standing with Harris, away from either of the opposing sides of the demonstration, the two debated each side's merits as the Israeli group started to pray softly.

"The reason that I'm standing in the middle is because I can't fully agree with either side," Oron said. "There is a serious blockade, but it doesn't make the situation an easy one ... It's not as simple as 'Lift the blockade, Free Gaza.'"

The Palestinian supporter's group's chanting, which varied from "Long live the Intifada" to "Viva Viva Palestina," was an added source of tension.

"How can you be pro-peace and chant 'Intifada, Intifada?'" Oron asked, referring to the Second Intifada, a term for the intensified violence between Israel and Palestine from 2000 to 2008. "I think there's a throwing around of terms. All of these people walking around, accusing Israel of genocide ... do you think they know what they're saying?"



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