

# Dovish Israeli Groups Say They Face Harsh Crackdown

BY DANIELLA CHESLOW  
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — With Israel mired in a wave of near-daily Palestinian attacks, hard-line Israeli politicians and activists are stepping up the pressure on dovish groups that are critical of government policies—drawing accusations of a nationalist witch hunt that risks turning violent.

In recent weeks, lawmakers have circulated bills to curtail the activities of non-government organizations, while a rival hard-line activist group has launched an even fiercer campaign that accuses opponents of being spies and foreign agents. Even the country's president, a member of the ruling Likud party, has come under fire, with nationalists accusing him of coddling hostile groups.

The climate is testing Israel's democratic ideals at a time when the country is feeling pressured at home by public anger over the continuing violence and abroad by growing international criticism of its policies toward

the Palestinians. This sense of frustration and isolation is fueling what some say is a siege mentality that perceives opposition activists as the enemy.

"They are using the fear of the street to manipulate more and more hateful politics ... against everyone who has the courage to stand up and say we are going in the wrong direction," said Ishai Menuchin, director of the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, a group that has called for investigating possible war crimes by the Israeli military.

Menuchin is one of four human-rights activists singled out in a video and newspaper ad published this week by the hawkish non-governmental group Im Tirtzu, which accuses the activists of being foreign agents and undermining the country because their groups receive foreign funding.

"While we are fighting terrorism, they are fighting us," a voice intones in the video on Facebook and YouTube, as photos of the activists are shown. Viewers are then urged to support legisla-

tion banning their groups. Menuchin said he filed an incitement complaint with police but the video has not been taken down.

Three months of violence has helped fuel such sentiments. Hawkish Israelis accuse their dovish opponents of posing a threat by siding with the Palestinians, inviting what they see as deep-rooted and unwarranted hatred for the country.

Since mid-September, 19 Israelis have been killed in Palestinian attacks, mostly stabbings, while at least 115 Palestinians have died by Israeli fire in the same period, 78 of them assailants, according to Israel. The rest were killed in clashes with Israeli security forces.

The Palestinians say the violence, carried out mostly by young attackers in their 20s or teens, is the result of five decades of Israeli occupation, years of failed peace efforts and a lack of hope.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accused Palestinian leaders of inciting the violence with hostile rhetoric toward Israel.

Critics, however, say that Netanyahu and his hard-line allies are fostering a climate that is increasingly intolerant of dissent.

"The minute you have an incitement campaign against people and their opinions ... even if people have the legal right to express their opinions, they will be afraid to exercise it," said Yair Sheleg, a fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute, an independent, nonpartisan think tank.

Among the organizations particularly targeted by hard-liners is Breaking the Silence, a group of former Israeli combat soldiers who criticize the occupation of the West Bank, delivering workshops to Israeli soldiers and students as well as to audiences abroad about what they say is improper or illegal behavior by soldiers against Palestinians.

The group has touched a particularly raw nerve in Israel, where nearly everyone serves and the military is among the country's most sacred institutions.

Even Israeli President Reuven Rivlin came under

intense criticism for merely speaking at a conference in New York last week sponsored by the liberal daily Haaretz because Breaking the Silence also took part. At the gathering, Rivlin praised Israeli soldiers for maintaining "the highest possible moral standard, even under impossible conditions."

A discussion in Israel's parliament erupted into a shouting match this week as opposition leader Isaac Herzog blasted Netanyahu for "telling our people we are under siege," and demanded he denounce the attacks on Rivlin. Groups that express criticism of government policies, Herzog said, are "part of a thriving Israeli society."

Netanyahu refused to back down. "I want you to stand up at this podium and fully condemn the Breaking the Silence organization, which libels Israeli soldiers around the world," the Israeli leader demanded.

This week, Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon banned the group from working with soldiers, saying they were welcome to bring their griev-

ances to the military, where he says they will be investigated, but he draws the line at besmirching the army abroad.

Education Minister Naftali Bennett followed suit by saying the group was no longer welcome at Israeli schools.

Meanwhile, several bills are in the works that would raise scrutiny of foreign-funded advocacy groups.

Lawmaker Yoav Kisch of Netanyahu's Likud party has proposed legislation that would define organizations receiving grants from foreign governments as foreign agents and ban them from working with the government or army. Kisch says he supports "internal checks," but the dovish groups were crossing a line by taking their message abroad.

Another draft bill, circulated by Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, would require representatives of organizations who receive a majority of their funding from foreign governments to wear identification tags declaring their funding when addressing parliament or the public.

# Beijing's New Favorite Gadget Reads Pollution Levels

BY JULIE MAKINEN  
Los Angeles Times

BEIJING — For Beijing residents obsessed with air pollution, the stocking stuffer of the season is a smog-detecting gadget called the Laser Egg.

The device is the size of a large orange and can be used at home, in the car or anywhere air pollution is a concern — which in Beijing these days is basically everywhere.

It joins a booming market for devices that measure indoor air quality, which can vary widely between rooms in the same building. But its stylish design and \$79 price tag have made it more popular than wonky-looking, lab-style "particle counters."

Powered by a rechargeable battery, it sucks in air through a small vent, then through a laser beam that refracts when it hits pollution particles. A sensor measures the refractions. The result is a digital readout of 0 to 500 on the standard Air Quality Index, or AQI.

Users can install an app on their cellphones that can monitor multiple Eggs, track the data over time and send an alert if the air starts getting worse. The inventor, a 27-year-old Swiss expatriate named Liam Bates, envisions compiling data from thousands of Eggs online to tell people which restaurants and shops have the best air and which should be avoided.

Bates, who speaks Mandarin fluently and used to work in Chinese television, became interested in tracking pollution when his wife, Jessica Lam, relocated from Canada to Beijing and developed symptoms of asthma. The couple began researching air-purifying machines.

Unsatisfied with the available options, they started their own company, Origins Technology, in 2014. Their first products — the

Laser Egg and a \$700 air purifier called the OxyBox — went on sale this summer. Both are made in China but use components from around the world.

"Pollution is completely invisible, but if you have something telling you what the pollution levels are, then you really start to realize all these fascinating things that you didn't know before," Bates said.

For instance, he said, he found pollution in his home would rise every day around noon because his neighbors were cooking and the smoke was seeping into his kitchen through a shared vent.

Initial sales for the Egg, Bates said, were good enough, but demand started soaring in late November — just as Beijing's AQI went deep into hazardous territory.

After a few blustery days of relief brought by a blast of air sweeping south from Siberia, Beijing again found itself socked in by smog in the last week. That prompted city authorities to take the unprecedented step of issuing a "red alert," which shuttered schools for several days and imposed severe restrictions on traffic.

"In the past week of pollution, we've sold twice as many as we did the month before," Bates said. "There's been a substantial increase."

At company headquarters, a ramshackle old courtyard home in central Beijing, a hand-lettered cardboard sign on the red double doors reads, "Laser Egg Sold Out."

Bates said it would be early January before the company could start filling its back orders.

Marine Dronet is among those impatiently waiting. "I guess they didn't know it would be so popular," said the French expatriate, who has lived in China for seven years. "I hope before the end of the month I will get one."

Dronet has spent thousands



TOMMY YANG/LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

Liam Bates, Origins technology LTD, with the smog-detecting gadget called the Laser Egg.

of dollars on six air-purifying machines for her home. "I bought air purifiers like everyone else, but want to make sure they are performing well," she said.

Richard Saint Cyr, a Beijing-based physician who has long run an independent blog about air pollution in China, gave the Egg a thumbs-up after testing it for accuracy.

Some people who have bought the Egg have been shocked by its readings, discovering that the air quality in their homes is in the "unhealthy" range or worse despite their purifying machines. Bates said administrators at a few schools have been vexed by the Egg, as parents have brought their

devices to check their children's classrooms and found the air quality below their expectations.

Experts say doors and windows must be sealed to guard against seepage, and even opening a door for less than a minute can lead to a sharp increase in pollution levels.

Sarah Lim, a Singaporean who has lived in China for more than a decade, bought two Laser Eggs for herself and one for a friend who just had a baby. She wants another for her husband so that he can test the air at his office.

Lim said the Egg has given her some peace of mind that her extensive precautions against air pollution are doing something.

"On Tuesday, when the outside

AQI was over 300, my office reading was 7," she said.

At home, she had six purifiers running "full blast" and found her living room hovering between 40 and 60 while her bedroom was less than 30. (A reading of 50 or below is considered "good.")

Bates said he's received inquiries from around China and around the world, including India, Germany and even California. The company doesn't yet ship outside the mainland.

"When we were making this, we were like, 'This is clearly a product that is only useful in China,'" Bates said. "But apparently, that is totally not the case."

## Movies

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Poehler comedy "Sisters" earned an estimated \$13.4 million out of the gates. A whopping 79 percent of audiences were female for the R-rated comedy — a solid indicator that the counter-programming against "Star Wars" was in fact a wise choice.

"A healthy box office

needs something for everyone," said Nick Carpou, Universal's president of domestic distribution, who expects a solid performance for the comedy in the weeks to come.

Rounding out the top five were "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2," with \$5.7 million and "Creed," with \$5.1 million.

This is the biggest overall weekend in box office history with combined grosses north of \$300 million, putting 2015 in range of becoming

the first \$11 billion year in history.

"We're on the verge of a record-breaking year," Dergarabedian said. "I think we're going to do it."

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Rentrak. Where available, the latest international numbers for Friday through Sunday are also included. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Star Wars: The Force

Awakens," \$238 million (\$279 million international).

2. "Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip," \$14.4 million.

3. "Sisters," \$13.4 million (\$1.8 million international).

4. "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2," \$5.7 million (\$7.8 million international).

5. "Creed," \$5.1 million.

6. "The Good Dinosaur," \$4.2 million (\$9.2 million international).

7. "Krampus," \$3.8 million (\$1.8 million international).

8. "In the Heart of the Sea," \$3.5 million (\$3.9 million international).

9. "Diwale," \$1.9 million.

10. "Bajirao Mastani," \$1.7 million.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at international theaters (excluding the U.S. and Canada), according to Rentrak:

1. "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," \$279 million.

2. "Mojin: The Lost Legend," \$85 million.

3. "Surprise — Journey to

the West," \$24 million.

4. "The Good Dinosaur," \$9.2 million.

5. "The Himalayas," \$8.5 million.

6. "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2," \$7.8 million.

7. "Spectre," \$6.5 million.

8. "Bridge of Spies," \$4.5 million.

9. "In the Heart of the Sea" and "The Tiger: An Old Hunter's Tale," 3.9 million.

10. "Krampus" and "Sisters," \$1.8 million.

## Debate

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Clinton, a former secretary of state, calls for a no-fly zone in Syria, which is supported by some Republican presidential candidates and opposed by Obama and others who say the proposal is risky, costly and could lead to confrontations with Russia and Iran.

Sanders, an independent senator from Vermont, opposes a no-fly zone, which he said could get the United States more deeply involved in Syria's civil war.

Clinton supports Obama's recent decision to send a small contingent of special operations forces to Syria to fight Islamic State, even if the deployment grows.

Sanders has concerns that the decision could further draw the United States into a never-ending war.

Sanders also accused Clinton of supporting overthrowing dictators, only to leave vulnerable nations behind, including Iraq, Libya and Syria. He said he prefers putting together broad coali-

tions, having others lead the fight, so as to not leave a political vacuum that could be filled by terrorists, even if that takes time.

Clinton shot back at Sanders and a moderator who asked if she was partly responsible for the continued chaos in Libya after the United States helped topple dictator Moammar Gadhafi, saying the United States did as much as the Libyans would allow.

Clinton said it's important to combat both Islamic State, also known as ISIS, and Syrian leader Bashar Assad, who is bombing Syrians in the country's civil war.

"We will not get the support on the ground in Syria to dislodge ISIS if the fighters there who are not associated with ISIS but whose principal goal of getting rid of Assad don't believe there is a political, diplomatic channel that is ongoing," she said.

Sanders countered that Assad's fate should be secondary to fighting Islamic State. "We have got to get our foreign policies and priorities right," he said. "It is not Assad who is attacking the United States. It is ISIS."

John Podesta, Clinton's campaign chairman, said after the debate that Clinton's willingness to use all the tools at the U.S.'s disposal, including diplomacy, will help Clinton, not hurt her, in the primaries.

"The American public and primary voters are looking for someone who understands the world," he said. "I think she just demonstrated a much more expansive knowledge of the region, had much clearer ideas about what to do in the region. So I think it's a strength for us, not a weakness."



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