

Palestinian divisions help drive Gazans to the brink of despair

Violent protests against Israel's blockade are a new feature of daily life, Donald Macintyre writes from Gaza City

In an immaculate black abaya, and with a keffiyeh round her neck, Heba Banna stood out from the crowd of testosterone-charged young men advancing towards the Israel border.

As an ambulance, siren wailing, red lights flashing against the black smoke from burning tyres, bore away another protester injured by Israeli sniper fire, she said defiantly: "We will keep coming until there is no one left in Gaza."

The 32-year-old mother of five has been regularly attending border protests, during which at least 156 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier have been killed, since March 30. For her, the primary aim is to lift the 11-year Israeli blockade that has isolated Gaza and devastated its economy since Hamas seized full control of the Strip in 2007. "At first I was afraid, but not any more," she insisted. "We have no other option."

Working for a local children's charity, Ms Banna said she saw the daily effects of Gaza's battered economy. Unemployment is at a record 53 per cent, and at more than 70 per cent for the under-25s. Citing the example of electricity, of which most Gazans receive about four hours a day, she said: "The siege affects every aspect of life. We want a proper life. We are half alive."

The protests began as "The Great March of Return", demanding the right for millions of descendants of over 700,000

Hamas has refused to halt demonstrations until Israel takes steps to ease the blockade

refugees displaced in the 1948 war, which established the state of Israel, to go back to their ancestral homes. While not all Gazans are convinced it has been worth the casualties, Hamas, of which Ms Banna, like thousands of other protesters, is not a member, has refused to halt demonstrations until Israel takes steps to ease the blockade.

These steps would include admitting materials for UN-approved projects to rehabilitate the undrinkable mains water supply, electricity and health care; extending the permitted fishing zone; and easing border closures on exports and people, including for patients needing care outside Gaza. Meanwhile, Israel is determined to stop protesters breaching the border, planting explosives and launching fire bombs and kite-borne incendiary devices that have damaged Israeli farmland.

Israel and Hamas seemed close to war last week when a rocket, apparently fired by a smaller Palestinian faction, damaged a house in southern Israel. Though Israel retaliated with air strikes against Hamas targets, both sides pulled back from further escalation.

Believing there is no purely military solution in Gaza, and preoccupied by what they see as the greater threat from Iranian forces in Syria, Israeli army chiefs have argued for easing Gaza's humanitarian crisis. One complication is the hostility of Mahmoud Abbas, Fatah president of the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority (PA), to any Israel-Hamas deal that would bypass his organisation.

Bassem Naim, of Hamas's international bureau, told *The Times* that Mr Abbas was putting "a stick in the wheels" of a ceasefire deal. This month Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, accused the Palestinian president of "suffocating" Gaza. "I am trying to find a solution that will restore quiet and security," he said. "I am not interested in getting into needless wars."

Mr Abbas has imposed his own draconian sanc-

tions on Gaza, including slashing the salaries of 30,000 employees and refusing to pay for the electricity piped directly to Gaza from Israel, in an attempt to pressure Hamas to disarm and submit to PA control. While Egypt also wants the PA running Gaza and a Hamas-Fatah reconciliation, it is said to believe that only Hamas has forces capable of controlling Gaza.

Despite threats from both sides, Mkhaimer Abusada, a political scientist at Gaza's Al-Azhar University, said it was clear that neither Hamas nor Israel wanted a war. But he warned that Hamas could escalate the protests if Mr Abbas tightens sanctions further. After six months of casualties it would be difficult for Hamas to "market" stopping the protests without easing the blockade. Protests "will continue until there is a solution to the Gaza siege", he said.



Teeth and claw Lions clashing on the plains of the Maasai Mara in Kenya. Males,

whose manes start developing when they are about two years old, will fight each other for mates or to control territory

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Former defence minister held on money-laundering charges

Greece

Anthee Carassava Athens

A former Greek defence minister was detained pending trial yesterday on allegations that he accepted millions of euros in kickbacks from arms sales that racked up huge national debts.

Yannos Papanтониου, 69, was ordered to be held after a 12-hour preliminary hearing in Athens. The accusations concern about €2.4 million found in Swiss accounts.

The case is the latest high-profile prosecution as the government of Alexis Tsipras seeks to deliver on its promise to curb corruption and boost its ratings before elections next year.

Mr Papanтониου managed the defence ministry from 2001 to 2004, after steering Greece into the euro as finance

minister. His wife, Stavroula Kourakou, was also held in connection with the money-laundering charges. Both deny wrongdoing and Mr Papanтониου said that the case was "an outrageous fabrication". Yesterday the couple were taken to a maximum-security prison.

Pavlos Polakis, one of Mr Tsipras's close aides, told a party conference hours before the case opened that only the imprisonment of corrupt politicians could boost the ruling Syriza party's chances for re-election. The government denied that it was meddling in the works of justice.

Mr Tsipras and his radical left-wing Syriza party surged to power in 2015, promising to end years of austerity and to stamp out corruption. Polls show the party trailing rival conservatives by as much as ten points.

Migrant caravan continues on long road to America

Huixtla About 7,000 Central American migrants have resumed their march towards the United States, setting out before dawn with plans to travel another 45 miles. Five days of walking in southern Mexico after their arrival from Honduras and Guatemala were taking their toll. Local authorities said that about 500 people, many of whom were sick or had young children, had accepted an offer to be bussed back to their countries. The caravan has been discouraged by the United States and Mexico but has been helped by locals, who have offered food or rides in cars, trucks and even dump trucks. Maria del Carmen Mejia, from Honduras, was travelling with her daughters Sofia, three, and Miralia, seven.

Miralia had a fever but her mother pledged to go on. "I've walked a long way. I don't want to return. I want a better future for my children." (AP) Gerard Baker, page 27

Girls forced to marry soldiers in South Sudan civil war

Juba Hundreds of girls and women have been raped and forced into sexual slavery by warring factions in South Sudan, according to the United Nations. Girls as young as 12 have been abducted and paraded in front of soldiers to be chosen as their wives. The UN believes that the abductions may amount to war crimes. Spokesmen for the army and rebel forces have denied the

accusations. A peace deal signed last month could bring an end to the five-year civil war. Fighting between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and rebels backing Riek Machar, the former vice-president, broke out in 2013, two years after the country seceded from Sudan. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and at least four million have been displaced from their homes. (Reuters)

Farmers and fireworks to intensify Delhi's deadly smog

Delhi The Indian capital faces a "deadly cocktail" of pollution in coming weeks, a senior government official has said after air quality in the area plummeted to the "very poor" level at more than half of monitoring stations. The official, who spoke on



condition of anonymity, blamed seasonal changes in temperature and wind, and said that the air quality would worsen when people let off fireworks to mark the Hindu festival of Diwali on Nov 7 and farmers burn stubble to prepare for new planting. (Reuters)

France forces scooters off pavement

France

Charles Bremner Paris

A French craze for electric scooters will be curbed by a new law forcing riders off the pavement and on to cycle lanes or roads.

President Macron's government has intervened to stem injuries and deaths, as the trend of the electric-powered *trotinettes* has grown rapidly, with 100,000 having been sold last year.

There was a 23 per cent increase in scooter and skating accidents last year, with 284 people injured and five killed. The highest proportion of injuries are among older people who were unable to jump out of the way.

Elisabeth Borne, the transport minister, said that the highway code could include a "new vehicle category" that would allow local authorities to regulate the scooters, which have become a menace as they zip among pedestrians

and traffic on the crowded roads of Paris.

Some scooter owners have removed their 20 km/h speed limiters so they can travel at up to 40 km/h. The riders can be seen weaving through the city traffic, rarely wearing helmets or other protection.

"We cannot allow these machines, travelling at 20 or 30 km/h, to risk the lives of pedestrians," Ms Borne told parliament. "We are going to allow electric scooters to be ridden on bike lanes or in 30 km/h zones, but their place is not on the pavement."

The craze has also been fuelled by free-floating hire schemes, some of which are self-service programmes that require machines to be left at docking stations, which have prompted complaints from pedestrians unfortunately enough to have tripped over them. Two Californian operators, Lime and Bird, have put hundreds of the electric

scooters on the road. The machines are lightweight and easy to operate, with a hand throttle and brake, making them attractive to novice riders. Many commuters use them to get from home to the rail or Metro station.

Ms Borne said that these self-service programmes would also be regulated in the new law. Restrictions would also be applied to bicycle hire schemes, which have proliferated in France in competition with the municipal self-service schemes.

The minister said that France was keen to promote "alternative mobility" such as electric scooters and bicycles, but they could not be allowed to endanger the public or to litter the streets.

Last month, a 17-year-old youth was stabbed to death on the Paris Left Bank in a fight over an electric scooter. An 18-year-old man was arrested and charged with murder.

Alert after Obama and Clintons receive bombs in the post

United States

David Charter Washington

President Trump called on America yesterday to come together against political violence after postal bombs were sent to leading Democrats including Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama as well as to CNN.

Investigators said the same perpetrator was likely to be behind explosive devices sent to George Soros, the billionaire Democratic donor, and delivered to Debbie Wasserman Schultz, former head of the Democratic Party. They were also investigating a suspicious package addressed to Maxine Waters, a California congresswoman.

Mr Trump promised that no expense would be spared to find who was behind the "despicable acts". "In this time we have to unify, we have to come together and send one very clear, strong unmistakable message: all acts or threats of political violence have no place at any time in the United States of America."

Mr Trump said his statement was "bipartisan" because the attacks were "egregious conduct" against "everything we hold dear".

The mail bomb campaign comes two weeks before US midterm elections. Senior Democrats called on President Trump to tone down the aggressive rhetoric he uses at his rallies.

Mrs Clinton said: "It is a troubling time, isn't it? It's a time of deep divisions, and we have to do everything we can to bring our country together. We also have to elect candidates who will try to do the same."

Democratic leaders in Congress said that Mr Trump's calls for unity "ring hollow". "Time and time again, the president has condoned physical violence and divided Americans with his words and his actions," Chuck Schumer, the Senate Democratic leader, and Nancy Pelosi, the senior party figure in the House of Representatives, said.

Mr Trump often singles out CNN when he brands the "fake news media"

the "enemy of the people" and last week praised a congressman who attacked a journalist as "my kind of guy".

None of the devices had detonated, nor did they reach the hands of the intended recipients, but security officials treated them as genuine bombs rather than elaborate hoaxes.

The first, described as a small pipe bomb delivered by hand, was found on Monday in the postbox of Mr Soros at his home in New York state. Mr Soros, who has donated millions of dollars from his hedge fund fortune to the Democrats and to liberal causes, was not at home at the time.

The devices sent to the home of Mrs Clinton and her husband Bill in suburban New York and the Obamas'



This suspicious package was found in the mail room at Time Warner

home in Washington were suspected to be the work of the same person.

The package received by Ms Wasserman Schultz was intended for Eric Holder, the attorney-general under Mr Obama, but wrongly addressed so it was delivered to the congresswoman, who was the supposed sender.

The Time Warner Center building in Manhattan, which houses the CNN newsroom, was evacuated during the morning while presenters were on air. CNN reported that the package contained pipes and wires and was addressed to John Brennan, the former CIA chief who has become a vocal critic of Mr Trump. It also contained a white powder, which was being analysed.

Mystery small-town worker scoops \$1.5bn lotto jackpot

Will Pavia New York

In the flat countryside of South Carolina lies Simpsonville, described by its mayor as "a quiet little southern village where everybody looks out for their neighbour".

That neighbourliness is about to be put to the test after locals learnt that one of them had just become nearly a billion dollars richer by winning one of the largest lottery jackpots in history.

Janice Curtis, the mayor, said that the winner was a local factory worker who planned to remain anonymous. "I have relatives that actually work with them at a local manufacturing place in the area," she added, tantalisingly.

Mega Millions lottery officials said the winning ticket for \$1.5 billion was bought at a petrol station shop on the outskirts of Simpsonville. It entitles the winner to \$878 million, after state and federal taxes are deducted.

Yesterday officials were hastening to the shop at a junction bordered by woods, fields and a Baptist church. CJ Patel, the proprietor, will receive

\$50,000 for selling the winning ticket. "It's great for the customer, especially as it's my customer," Mr Patel, who was notified at 5am that he had sold the winning ticket, said. He added that he had worked at the store for 40 years and had previously sold a lottery ticket worth \$250,000. The latest prize was just shy of the \$1.586 billion jackpot from a rival lottery, the Powerball, which was won by three winning tickets in 2016.

The winner has the right to remain anonymous under state law and has 180 days to claim his or her winnings. Officials advised that they should "sign the back of the ticket, put it in a safe location, seek financial or legal advice from a trusted source".

Mrs Curtis said a near-billionaire, in a town where the median income is just shy of \$60,000, was one of the most exciting developments she could recall in its 100-year history. "I am happy for them, I'm elated," she said, adding that the town could do with some refurbishments to its arts centre. "I'm hoping that this particular person is very aware of the needs here in Simpsonville."