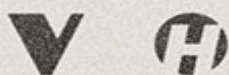


ESSAYS FOR A FREE PALESTINE
**FROM THE RIVER
TO THE SEA**



EDITED BY
SAI ENGLERT, MICHAL SCHATZ
AND ROSIE WARREN



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FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA

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Essays for a Free Palestine

Edited by

Sai Englert

Michal Schatz

Rosie Warren



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Verso

UK: 6 Meard Street, London, W1F 0EG

US: 388 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217

versobooks.com

Verso is the imprint of New Left Books.

Haymarket Books

haymarketbooks.org

ISBN: 978-1-80429-733-9

ver. 1.1

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Editors' foreword¹

In the final months of 2023, as we are writing this foreword, Israel is committing a genocide. Israeli officials have repeatedly made their intentions to do so extremely clear; talking of collective punishment, mass murder, and ethnic cleansing in newspapers, at press conferences and on television. One retired general and former national security advisor, Giora Eiland, celebrated the spread of epidemics in the strip as an effective accelerant of its depopulation. Yoav Gallant described Palestinians as “human animals” to be deprived of food, water, and fuel. Benjamin Netanyahu referred to them as “children of darkness.” Isaac Herzog explained that they were never innocent nor civilian. Israeli singers, such as Narkis and Rinat Bar, have visited soldier barracks to call for more death and destruction, and their bloodthirsty songs have been shared by thousands on social media. Plans for expulsion of Gaza’s inhabitants to Egypt or into the Mediterranean are presented and discussed at the highest levels of government.

All the while, European and American states have continued to support Israel, to claim its murderous campaign is justified self-defense, and to send weapons, troops, war boats and spy planes in support. Genocide is being knowingly armed and facilitated by our leaders, while ethnic cleansing—the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza into the Egyptian Sinai Desert—is presented as a valid humanitarian option. The narrative in Western media has continued to parrot Israel’s talking points. There is no genocide in Gaza but a

war between Israel and Hamas, they say. This is not part of a seventy-five-year-long settler colonial process of expulsion and dispossession of the Palestinian people by Israel, but a justified response to Hamas' 7 October attack. The latter is not the all-too-predictable outcome of eighteen years of the illegal blockade of Gaza, during which Israel has limited food, medicine, and construction materials (to name but a few) entering the strip, while regularly bombing its population held behind barbed wire—'mowing the grass', in Israeli military parlance. Instead, 7 October is presented as an example of Hamas' barbarity—worse than that of ISIS or even the Nazis—and of Palestinians' collective guilt.

The consequences have been predictably—and literally—unspeakable. As Samera Esmeir and Rana Barakat discuss in their pieces within this collection, it is impossible to capture the horror in language. At the time of writing, over 18,000 Palestinians have been murdered in Gaza. Almost 50,000 people have been wounded. Nearly 7,000 are missing. Over half of Gaza's homes have been destroyed or damaged. Twenty-six of the strip's thirty-five hospitals are no longer operational, either because of direct military attacks or due to the lack of basic supplies. Sixty-two journalists have been killed, as have over 100 UN staff and more than 200 health workers.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency estimates that 1.9 million Palestinians in Gaza have been expelled from their homes. Palestinians in Gaza are being pushed further and further south by the Israeli army's advance, towards the Egyptian border, while the entire strip has been divided into zones, which continue to be bombed by Israel's air force. Gaza's 2.3 million inhabitants, 77 percent of them refugees from other parts of Palestine—families violently expelled from their homes in 1948—are living through an indescribable hell of destruction, murder, hunger, and disease.

In the West Bank, nearly 300 Palestinians were killed between 7 October and 4 December alone, following the most murderous year in the area since the Second Intifada (2000–05). At least 10,000 firearms have been distributed by the state to settlers since 7 October, while requests by Israeli citizens for arms-permits have skyrocketed.

Palestinians in the West Bank have found flyers on their cars telling them to flee to Jordan, or else. Settlement construction and the green-lighting of new projects continues apace in both Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Horror. Unadulterated horror. Day after day. Broadcasted live for the whole world to see.

• • •

Ursula K. Le Guin famously wrote that: “No Darkness lasts forever. And even there, there are stars.” One source of light, however faint, in our moment has come from the people of the world. While our governments have supported the unjustifiable, or spoken inane words of condemnation while failing to take any concrete action, millions have poured into the streets to denounce their complicity, to demand a ceasefire and a free Palestine. Enormous demonstrations have taken place across the globe.

In the Middle East, millions have defied the repression of their authoritarian states to demand that they take action and end their complicity in Israel’s aggression. The Egyptian military and the crowns of Jordan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were all forced to break, even if often only rhetorically, with Washington, and speak out against Israel’s crimes. Meanwhile, Houthi military actions at the entrance of the Red Sea, targeting both Israeli and American boats, are disrupting global flows of goods and capital and raising the cost of the war a little more every day.

Protestors have also taken direct action: blocking and occupying arms factories in Britain, disrupting arms deliveries in Oakland. Train stations, politicians’ offices, bridges and roads have been occupied to disrupt everyday life, while civil servants, diplomats, and politicians’ staffers have broken their silence (or their imposed neutrality) to speak out and announce loudly that their superiors are not acting in their names. Trade unionists in Belgian airports and at Catalan ports have refused to handle weapon deliveries to Israel.

Years of criminalization and repression did not deter the solidarity movement. It burst onto the global stage bigger, stronger, and more

militant than ever. If, so far, its results have not been proportionate to the scale of the ravage, it points nonetheless to the depth of popular solidarity with Palestine and to the growing possibility of breaking our states' uncritical support of Israel. This would, in turn, increase the political space available for the Palestinian national liberation movement.

Across Europe and North America, there have been record-breaking numbers on the streets for Palestine. The entrance of thousands upon thousands of new activists into the movement is an incredibly positive development. It will need to be nurtured and sustained organizationally, so that the energy unleashed by the unfolding genocide does not dissipate once Palestine disappears from headlines and timelines.

If we are to stop further Israeli assaults on the people of Palestine—and there will be more, always more, until Palestine is free—we will need to maintain pressure on our local and national governments, on our employers, on our cultural and educational institutions. We will need to continue demanding that they break all ties with Israel and all those who benefit from its ongoing rule over the Palestinians—as outlined in the Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, which Omar Barghouti discusses within. People will need to join their local campaigns and groups and set them up where they do not yet exist, to carry the movement forward over the long term. In order to sustain this work, political debate and clarity is crucial: activists will need to be armed with the facts, the analyses, and the insights necessary both to confidently participate in strategic debates and to effectively organize campaigns.

Our hope is that this collection serves as a modest contribution to that process. It brings together essays, interviews and reflections published in a variety of publications—both before and after 7 October 2023—and a number of original contributions written for this ebook. It collects personal testimonies from within Gaza and the West Bank, along with essays and interviews that collectively address the questions: what is happening? How did we get to this point? And what will this mean for the future?

Taken together, these texts provide crucial histories and analyses to help us understand how we got to the nightmarish present. They place Israel's genocidal campaign within the longer history of settler colonialism in Palestine, and Hamas within the longer histories of Palestinian resistance and the so-called 'peace process'. They explore the complex history of Palestine's relationship to Jordan, Egypt, and the broader Middle East, the eruption of unprecedented anti-Zionist Jewish protest in the US, the alarming escalation in state repression of Palestine solidarity in Britain and Europe, and more.

This collection is a snapshot, meant to help in conceptualizing and making sense of the present horrors. It is also a record of our collective insistence: Hamas' operation on 7 October, the ongoing genocide in Gaza and related events across historic Palestine have not taken place somehow in isolation, out of space and time, as so many in the media and leading our governments would have it. Contemporary events in Palestine emerge from more than seventy-five years of violent attempts to dispossess Palestinians of their land and more than seventy-five years of Palestinian resistance to them. As the writers in this book demonstrate, this is a history of the critical and bloody linkages between Palestine, the wider region, and global systems of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Reckoning with these linkages and their wide-ranging consequences must be the concern of everyone committed to fighting for a free Palestine—from the river to the sea.

11 December 2023

A note on our contributors in Gaza

Since we began putting this book together in October 2023, two of the writers in Gaza included in this volume have been murdered in Israeli airstrikes: Dr. Hammam Alloh and Khalil Abu Yahia. Their words are a testament to their endurance in the face of genocide. They will not be erased. Palestine will be free.

Part 1

In this moment

1

In this moment

Noura Erakat

1 November 2023

On 1 November 2023, the Palestine Festival of Literature staged a free, public event at the Union Theological Seminary in New York titled: “But We Must Speak: On Palestine and the Mandates of Conscience”. This text was delivered as a speech at that event.

I did not know if I should speak to you as a teacher and tell you about Gaza.

Should I tell you that Gaza was once a city-district of historic Palestine that sits on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea? That its harbor and fertile land has made it a focal point of trade and empire for centuries, including for the Romans, Napoleon’s France, the Mongols. That prior to 1948, the Gaza district contained almost ninety towns and villages. It was thirty-eight times larger than the current 140 square-mile strip, making it the largest district in Mandatory Palestine until Zionist militias destroyed a majority of these towns.

Upon Israel’s establishment, a severely truncated Gaza absorbed nearly 25 percent of Palestinian refugees exiled from their former homes, increasing its population from 80,000 to 280,000. That number

has grown to 2.2 million today, who are predominantly refugees and children dependent on food aid for survival.

Do I explain to you that Israel began to circumscribe this Palestinian territory in 1993 as it was entering into the Oslo peace process? That it began a process of de-development, isolation, containment of Gaza with the intent to make it a Palestinian statelet and to instead focus on annexing the West Bank, whose lands it coveted and whose natives it also sought to remove?

In this context, I can tell you that Israel imposed a land siege and a naval blockade hermetically sealing this coastal enclave, placing it on a subsistence diet just above starvation—relegating its conditions to “bare life”—and then systematically pummeling it with advanced weapons technologies in a bid to take the land without the people. To achieve in Gaza by warfare, what it seeks to do in the West Bank through martial law, in East Jerusalem through administrative law, in historic Palestine through civil law.

Or should I speak to you as an attorney? And tell you that when Israel withdrew its settlers and military infrastructure in 2005, that it maintained its effective control over the population registry, the skies, the underground water sources, the electromagnetic spheres, all points of ingress and outgress and thus remains an Occupying Power with the duty to protect its civilians? That Israel has no right to self-defense against a territory that it occupies, no more than Portugal had it to maintain its hold on Mozambique and Angola? That it must end its occupation?

Should I explain that as a people fighting against colonial domination, alien occupation, and racist regimes, Palestinians have a right to use armed force so long as it is regulated by laws of war? Would it be helpful to tell you that any use of force must be bound by principles of distinction and proportionality—and that Israel has promised to disavow both? Its top military and political brass have made clear their purpose is destruction, not accuracy. That there are no Palestinian civilians, that hospitals and schools and sources of electricity and fuel are not afforded the presumption of civilian infrastructure? Or that they have expressed a specific intent to

destroy, in whole or in part, a people based on racial, national, ethnic, or religious grounds and demonstrated the specific underlying acts to deliberately inflict conditions of life to bring about such physical destruction? That intent and incitement are sufficient to trigger the convention without a single killing? And also the number of the dead in twenty-six days exceeds the lives stolen in the Bosnian genocide?

Do I tell you that for the past two decades Israel has not gotten away with murder but has changed international law to make its grotesque violence permissible? That it says Gaza is not occupied or sovereign but a hostile entity; that this is not a civil war or an international armed conflict but an armed conflict short of war; that Palestinians participating in hostilities are not merely targets when they pick up arms but even as they sleep idly with their families; that the lives of their soldiers are worth more than the lives of enemy civilians and proportionality is forward looking so untold destruction is reasonable and recommended? Do I remind the world that what happens to Palestinians sets new precedents to be applied globally, meaning sacrificing Palestinians to this brutality now means no one is safe in the future?

No, no, I should speak to you plainly as a mother. I should tell you that every day my heart breaks over and over at the images of wailing babies—their faces covered in dust from the remains of what was once their homes. That I cannot bear the desperate cries of a little girl begging her mama's corpse to get up—*qoumi yamma, qoumi*. Or of the young boy asking for a strand of his baby brother's hair before he is buried to have something to remember him by. Or of the father who emerged from the crater that was once Jabaliya searching for his three children—asking for help to find his three babies somewhere beneath the weight of concrete and cruelty? Do I admit to you my sheer awe at the image of Wael al-Dahdouh who one day after the murder of his wife, his son and his daughter—who both sought to be journalists like him—returns to reporting a genocide of his people? Shall I describe my acute stress imagining 130 newborns in NICU at risk of death because of a lack of fuel and electricity only to look up and hear anchors opine that this is a price worth paying because

some civilian life is sacred? Or that when I ask my cousin in Ramallah how are her children faring, she says they have learned a painful lesson these past weeks that world powers agree their lives are not worthy.

Do I speak to you as a Palestinian and tell you that we are a remarkable people fighting a noble cause for freedom? That we understand clearly this is a genocidal campaign intended to complete the Nakba, to fulfill the Zionist fantasy of a land without a people despite a valiant people that refuse to disappear, who vow to stay in their homes rather than become refugees again. *Lan narhal min hunna, lan narhal min hunna, lan narhal*. Whose pride and love and rootedness and tradition and song and prayer and belonging will forever haunt settlers who build nuclear weapons, marshal global superpowers, and still tremble before the truth of our existence?

We existed before Zionist colonial invasion, we exist now even among the rubbles of humanity's remains, we will exist when Zionism is dismantled, bit by every racist, colonial bit.

Let me speak to you as a comrade and tell you that we must fight on. That we must rest and breathe so we do not tire. That our efforts are causing global vibrations and generational change—filling streets from London to Cairo, Amman to Beirut, Istanbul to Sanaa, shutting down Congress, shutting down Grand Central Station, shutting down highway 101 in San Francisco, a state department official has resigned, a UN OHCHR official has resigned, Chile and Colombia rescinded their ambassadors, Bolivia cut its diplomatic ties, 2000+ Black allies have signed onto a letter for Palestine, 3 million Belgian unionized workers refuse to transport Israeli weapons, activists disrupted a Senate appropriations hearing to fund more war crimes, hundreds of artists have called for a ceasefire, 66 percent of all Americans demand a ceasefire, that number is growing every day. Do not stop, we must keep fighting.

And yet as it happens—repression grows, reminding us to be vigilant. Palestine Legal has recorded over 400 complaints of harassment, doxxing, abuse in the past three weeks alone, when on average it receives 2–300 complaints a year. Law students have had

offers revoked, medical residents are being fired, the Editor-in-Chief of a cultural art magazine was fired, a top entertainment executive was removed for opposing genocide. And while a racist, war mongering media and political establishment has resulted in the stabbing of six-year-old Walid Fayoumie twenty-six times in his home in Illinois and the murder of a Muslim woman in Texas, the Biden administration is mobilizing law enforcement to surveil social media of university students struggling for Palestinian freedom. The White House press secretary—in absolute disregard for intellectual honesty and journalistic integrity—has compared our calls for ceasefire and an end to genocide to tiki torch marches in Charlottesville.

These are incredibly scary times. The point is to make us cower in fear, and we can only win if we stand up, fight back. Do not be silenced, but speak with vigilance. And here if I can humbly ask for your support I ask you to support Palestine Legal—doing all its work with only six staff attorneys. Palestinians have long told us, they do not want your charity, they want your solidarity. So begin here by supporting Palestine Legal in defending our front line so that you all and many, many, thousands more can stand up and fight back.

Until a free Palestine, until all our kin are freed from cages, until these lands are free, until all our siblings can live in safety and dignity, until freedom, until freedom for all. May we be triumphant.

2

Testimonies from Gaza Youth

22 October 2023

Both these testimonies were video testimonies published on the Institute for Middle East Understanding's Instagram page. They were transcribed by the Institute for Palestine Studies, first published on their blog and are republished here with permission.

Dunia Aburahma

I'm twenty-two years old. I'm an architecture student in the Islamic University of Gaza, and I'm living here in Gaza City. We've been experiencing some terrifying moments. We don't know if we're [going to] live in the next moment or not. We are praying, every second, to be alive. This is not a new thing for us. This moment and what happened in the last few days, this is not a new thing, but it [is] super terrifying, and we [are] super terrified.

We evacuated from our home to our friend's, and now we're evacuating again. At 3am on 14 October, we were informed that we have to evacuate again, [Israel] is [going to] bomb every house in the city and destroy the streets, the buildings, and our houses. We're not [going to have] a home anymore. We've been experiencing this for years, but this time it [is] miserable and terrifying. And, we hope that we will have our simple rights to at least have a home and be safe one day.

Sara Besaiso

I live in Gaza, Palestine. Let me tell you about [what] it is like from a Palestinian's point of view that's living in Gaza right now. These past [few] days, we've had no rest. We barely slept through the night, and the kids in our family don't know what to do. They don't know what to expect. They barely understand what's going on. We had to evacuate —leave from house to house—three times. My neighborhood was bombed with white phosphorus, and it is known to be illegal, but apparently nothing is too illegal for it to be used on us. On 13 October, [Israel] asked 1.1 million of us, people from Gaza, to go South. But the question is, where should [we] go? They're asking [us] to leave [our] houses, [our] homes, [our] neighborhood, the people that [we] love, and [our] friends to go evacuate to the South. We don't have anywhere to go. They told us to go South because it's [going to be] be safer, then they started bombing us [in the] South.

I don't know what you guys want, or expect me to do, but we have faced—[Israel has] been [committing] war crimes. They cut off electricity, water, and all life resources that a human being needs to live. They're breaking international law again and again. But who cares? It's just some kids in Palestine, right? No one cares about us! How are we supposed to get our voice out?

What we're asking for is peace. We want this to stop. What is our fault—being civilians? Was it my only fault that I have been born in this city, or in this country? Is that the only fault of those kids that have been killed? Most of the people that have been bombed and killed were civilians, babies, children, they don't understand what's going on. I can tell you, half of the people right here with me, half of those kids don't understand why this is happening to them. They're asking why. Could you tell us why this is happening?

3

I couldn't bid my apartment farewell

Tawfiq Abu Shomer

11 Oct 2023

This article was first published in Arabic on the website of the Palestine News Network. It was translated by Meriam Mabrouk, first published in English by the Institute for Palestine Studies on their blog and republished here with permission.

I apologize to my library, filled with the memories of many years, because the Apache pilot only gave me a few minutes' warning to save myself before they sentenced my small apartment to death. My heart aches for my apartment, which I built brick by brick with my own hands. I painstakingly selected each material, each tile, treating them as companions that would accompany me through life. I carried the packages of tiles with tenderness, just as I carried my firstborn child in his cradle. The joy I felt as each tile was laid and dried was immeasurable. I even distributed sweets around Gaza when I completed the row of tiles! Yet, the pilot decided to unleash their hatred upon my cherished tiles, dimming their brightness that I loved so deeply.

I had thought my son's apartment next door would be a refuge when mine was destroyed. I had built it too, and another for my daughter. I reveled in the thought of having three independent

apartments, all adjacent to each other. But a single bomb from a murderous occupier stole this happiness in mere seconds. The bomb obliterated the memories of choosing my bedroom furniture, which I had bought in installments. I regret not bidding it a final farewell.

I yearned to stand in the middle of the living room, filled with stories and memories, and salute this sanctuary of memories one last time. But all that remained were torn pieces after the bomb's destruction.

Stepping on the fragments of my kitchen brings me immense pain. The pilot of the warplane took away my taste for traditional food, leaving me longing for my favorite flavors. How do I regain the flavor of my ceramic coffee cup, which had been a close friend to my writing projects? This cup was with me when I published four books, drops of bitter coffee seeping onto my pages. Now, I leave my traditional kitchen without seeing this cup because a bomb covered it in ashes and scattered its fragments among the rubble. My hands trembled as I collected its broken pieces.

Can I ever rid my two favorite plates of the smell of gunpowder? One plate was adorned by an image of a small black rose in the middle of white marble, the second was made out of polished metal. How can I get used to tasting food in my new shelter and forget the taste of these plates?

What caused my loss of appetite? At first, I thought it was due to losing everything and becoming homeless. But then I realized it was the absence of my two favorite plates. I can't imagine ever adjusting to life without them. I never anticipated that the destruction of my apartment, and those of my son and daughter, would resurrect memories of my first cradle, seized by the Israeli occupier. Today, I feel closer to that first cradle than ever before.

Despite everything, I will continue to echo the words of renowned poet Pablo Neruda: "You can cut all the flowers, you can kill all the birds, but you cannot keep Spring from coming."

4

A Gaza daughter in exile

Reema Saleh

25 October 2023

Translated by Rasha Moumneh, first published by the Institute for Palestine Studies on their blog and republished with permission.

I called my father at 10am on Saturday 7 October after hearing the news my mind could barely comprehend: the Qassam Brigades had broken through the siege of Gaza and captured scores of Israelis. He spoke to me in a tone I had not heard before, a combination of joy and dread of what awaits the people of Gaza.

I could not contain my tears when he told me that no words could describe what Israel was going to do to our bereaved people. He went silent for a moment as if he was holding back tears and trying to project strength. “Rima, I need you to be strong, even if you come to visit Gaza and none of us are left.”

It has been one year, one month, and seven days since I left Gaza. I clearly remember the moment I realized that this was the first time I was going to experience a war on Gaza far from the barbarity of missiles and body parts strewn everywhere. I did not know it would be the most ferocious war yet, and I did not know that those missiles were less powerful than the hallucinations that would haunt

me through the night. I did not know that remorse and fear for my family would so utterly destroy me.

I called my friend, gripped with shame at having left that great city. I was ashamed to ask her how she is. I could not recall any words in the entire Arabic language that might have helped me in that moment. "Tell me everything in detail, no matter how inconsequential," I said. "I want to cool the fire of helplessness inside me."

She told me that they left their house, and then saw it on the news, completely destroyed. They fled to her brother's house in the middle of the Jabalia refugee camp, only for Israel to blindly rain down a barrage of missiles that destroyed dozens of houses and killed scores of people. One of those killed was her uncle's wife, who was nine months pregnant. They still have not found her body. I wonder, how can a child be born under the rubble of this destruction? How can a child greet life amongst all this death? I picture her uncle looking for his family members in the hospitals of Gaza and writing down: "This one has been martyred, this one injured, and that one missing." They are not numbers. I ask her to talk at length. Listening was the least I could offer.

I had never seen my close friends this powerless. My heart broke when she told me, "Pray for us, Rima, we've been humiliated." My tears betray me every time I try to feign strength when I hear those wails. My friend likened fleeing to the south, as the Israeli Occupation authorities instructed them, to the horrors of Judgement Day. When they arrived at the UNRWA schools on caravans, they found nothing that could possibly sustain life there. They had to wait long hours just for a few loaves of bread if they were even lucky to get any at all. She tells me of a night she spent sleeping on a chair because there were no mattresses, and that she had to perform her prayer ablutions with damp tissues. "There was no drinking water, and I had to stop drinking so as not to use the bathroom. I had to wait long hours to even go in."

My family lives in the Jabalia refugee camp in the north of Gaza. The enemy's warnings to leave to the south mattered little to them.

My mother said, “How can I leave my house while our relatives are seeking shelter with us? How can I leave it and repeat the mistakes your grandparents made when they fled the 1948 Nakba?” My father told me the same thing, as do my siblings. I told them, “I am ashamed to tell you what to do, I am with you in my heart and in my prayers. Just be okay, please stay with each other even if you decide to leave for the south.”

At noon, the sound of an F-16 bomb interrupted a phone call with my mother. I couldn't remember what she was even telling me. I knew exactly what that sound was from experience. I was cut off from my family for the rest of that day. My neighbor's house was bombed and collapsed on its residents. “They bombed Alaa's house without warning,” my sister Nour told me. It is the house adjacent to my family's, as is the case with all houses in the camp. I asked her to tell me what happened in detail, and she was terrified at the horror of the scene. I remember the number of family members there. “It's been six hours, and they haven't been able to recover a single body. They found a leg and a hand that might be Alaa's wife's.” I shuddered and found no answers to my questions. What are these missiles they are using that cause such devastation? I kept trying to call my father so he could tell me something. He finally answered me at 9pm and said: “Mohammad's wife, his four children, his mother, his brother Hamza and his wife, his brother Ra'afat and his wife and child, his sisters Ghida and Haifa and Diyaa, all were martyred. The rescue workers worked really hard, and they're still unable to recover Ghida's body.” How will Mohammad and his father—the only two survivors of the entire family—bear this calamity? How?

My four-year-old cousin Jad tells me, “Don't cry, Rima. I'm not afraid of the bombs because we're going to go to heaven like Uncle who died.” I collapsed into tears. How could a child so young speak about death and bombardment and heaven? How can they be so strong as to reassure me, when it should be me reassuring them?

My mother tried to minimize the danger of the situation and pretend they were okay. “What did you have for lunch, darling? How was university today?” I told her that her words wracked me with guilt

and pleaded with her to tell me how the rest of the family and our neighbors were doing. "How is my cousin Lama, the child who has kidney failure? How is she able to undergo dialysis three times a week in this tragic situation?" I was stunned when she replied, "Her older sister Haneen does it with some basic materials, so if she doesn't die from the bombs, she'll die from lack of proper health care." My mother is afraid to tell me that my cousin Joury's medication is about to run out, knowing that without it, she will be paralyzed. But I know and feel everything my family is facing, because I left my heart in Gaza when I came to Lebanon.

On 16 October, my older brother Tamer told me that my father had decided to evacuate them to the south. For a moment, I thought they would offer them rooms inside the college, but then I learned that my dad had pitched a tent made of bedsheets and blankets to shelter them while they slept. It doesn't protect them from the heat or the cold. They found a grocery store that still had some canned goods and water. That is not sufficient for them by any means, but they have no choice.

I asked my little brother for details about their daily lives, about their feelings, about everything. He said, "Rima, I lost six kilograms in less than two weeks. We eat one meal a day because there is not enough food. But that's probably best because then we won't have to go to the bathroom and wait hours in line. Our cat, Bees, got depressed and died. Don't worry, I made her a coffin and buried her. I take advantage of any lull in the bombing to sleep. I wake up, I wait for night to come, and then I sleep again. I don't know what to do. There's no school, no internet, no football. We're broken, we're living the most primitive life. I walked under the bombs for about forty-five minutes to find the internet to speak to you. I know it's late, 1am, but I know you can't sleep, and I know how your heart aches for us."

My loves, how I wish I were there with you.

5

It seems like things can't get worse

Khalil Abu Yahia
16 October 2023

This interview with Khalil Abu Yahia, a Gaza-based student, teacher, and activist for the Palestinian right of return, was conducted by Maya Rosen for the Institute for Palestine Studies via WhatsApp voice messages, on 16 October. It was first published by the Institute for Palestine Studies on their blog and is republished with permission.

MAYA ROSEN: *How are you doing? What are you seeing and experiencing around you?*

KHALIL: I'm physically fine, but I've lost a lot of family, friends, and neighbors. My surviving family members are disconnected from each other. Some of us are in the north of Gaza, others are in the south. My sister was injured last night in an Israeli airstrike that targeted a civilian building. People are being killed every minute, thousands of people are injured, tens of thousands are mourning. For many, there is no water, no electricity, no access to food, no access to medicine—a shortage of everything. It seems like things can't get worse—but when we reach the bottom, it turns out there is another bottom. It's an abyss. We are experiencing genocide. Systematic, appalling. An apocalypse.

Does this moment feel different from other Israeli attacks on Gaza?

This is the first war I've experienced where a vast majority of people are searching for water, bread, medicine. We are being treated like animals. But in other ways, it feels no different: in previous wars, we have lost beloved friends, neighbors, relatives. We've been deprived of our rights, blamed for our own suffering, failed by the international community.

As a student of postcolonial studies, how has your study of other colonial contexts influenced your thinking about the future of Gaza?

It helps me to better see the tools at our disposal. We can say to the world: "You divested from apartheid South Africa. Why are you not boycotting Israel?" The context of other colonial experiences teaches us that liberation is possible—not only for the colonized people, but also for the oppressor, who is controlled by this ideology they wield to control us.

Are there particular writers you find yourself turning to?

Writers writing under colonialism: Ghassan Kanafani, Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Steve Biko. They all contribute to my understanding of my own experience.

What was 7 October like for you?

When I heard that the fence had been breached, I felt hope. It felt like a first step toward liberating Palestine. Contrary to Israeli propaganda and Western media narratives, it's not impossible. When you have resistance, colonialism can be defeated.

What do you fear?

I fear that I will die without achieving my dreams. I want to complete my PhD. I want to rebuild my family's house, which has been destroyed. And I want—and this, for me, is the biggest dream—to meet my friends in person, to shake hands, to hug them. It sounds very simple, but colonialism disconnects a people from the rest of the world. I dream of a future where people are treated equally, where there is no occupation, no colonialism, no genocide, no ethnic cleansing.

What is your message for the world?

Don't leave us alone. We are making history now. What would you like your children to read about you? That you justified this oppression? Or that you stood on the side of the oppressed people? Every single action counts. Don't forget us. We are human beings who are losing our family members and our neighbors and our friends. If you believe in the equality and freedom of the Palestinian people, exert the maximum effort to ensure that your government stops supporting the colonial government. When every government boycotts this colonial system, it will be isolated. And that's how it will end.

On 30 October, Khalil was killed in an Israeli airstrike.

6

We have lost the ability to provide true care

Three doctors' testimonies from Gaza

These testimonies were first published by Jewish Currents and are republished here with permission.

Dr Hammam Alloh

26 October 2023

I became a doctor to treat people in Gaza. I had to leave for fourteen years to get the degrees and certification necessary to become a nephrologist [a kidney specialist]—a specialty I chose because there was a need for it. When I returned, I was shocked by the lack of resources available to me for treating my patients. Even before this war, those of us providing medical care in Gaza were operating in far-from-optimal conditions. We regularly suffered from a dearth of vital medications, essential labs, and instruments critical to our work. In my field, this meant we had trouble administering dialysis to patients; we were also frequently unable to obtain immunosuppressants and antifungal medications, as well as medications used to treat bone disease, anemia, and advanced kidney disease. Patients undergoing dialysis usually receive medicinal injections [to stimulate the bone marrow to produce red blood cells], but when we were unable to access that medication, which was often, we had to administer blood transfusions instead.

Since the war, things have become [increasingly dire](#). We are dialyzing more and more patients—including those who've come [to us in the center of the Gaza Strip] from the north, some of whom have suffered kidney injuries from the bombardments. We are cutting the duration of dialysis sessions in half. Many medications are completely unavailable. Doctors make decisions based on hunches because we don't always have access to labs. Yesterday, I had to stop the resuscitation of a patient who went into cardiac arrest in the dialysis unit, because if she made it back to life, we had no ventilator to offer her. We have to prioritize patients who are younger, healthier. We have lost the ability to provide true care.

This is not the medicine I thought I would be practicing. I always wanted to progress in my field—to learn more, to teach more. In Gaza, I haven't been able to do that. I hope to raise my kids to be ambitious—not to think about war, missiles, rockets. Every day, I see a fear in their eyes that I can't do much about. It's very painful. If you have kids, you know how horrible it is not to be able to comfort them, to ensure they are alright, to make them hope for anything beyond living one more day. We want to live freely like other people—to grow scientifically and economically, to walk in the street without fearing bombardments, to make plans. We want to be able to learn, think, grow, travel, dream—to feel like we are really human. Not to think only about meeting our basic needs. This is what life has always been about for us, and now—I want the world to know—we are being eradicated en masse. This is not what life should look like.

On 11 November, Dr. Hammam Alloh was killed in an Israeli airstrike.

Dr. Yousef Al-Akkad
27 October 2023

The Gaza Strip has been under Israeli siege since 2007. This means that for the past 16 years, doctors have lacked the drugs and medical supplies necessary for our work. For instance, we've had a lot of trouble getting new radiology equipment like MRI machines and CT

scanners. And when these machines are out of order, we've sometimes had to wait over a year for a replacement part. I am the director of the European Gaza Hospital, which is one of the biggest hospitals in the Gaza Strip. At one point, we had no CT scanner for more than eight months because we lacked a simple replacement part.

Such delays are avoidable. It is easy to get these parts from Europe to Jordan within, say, 48 hours. And then it takes only a few more days to get them from Jordan to the West Bank. But to get them from the West Bank to Gaza takes months and months, because the Israeli authorities do not allow such replacement parts and equipment to enter. So even if I had the money, it would take me a year or two to receive any new radiology equipment. We have the same problem with generators. Whenever there is not enough electricity in Gaza, we run the hospital on a generator, but when a generator breaks, we struggle to get replacement parts. And then there is the fact that even before the war, fuel was not always available, and when it was, it was expensive. For these reasons, we have always struggled to provide good and safe medical services.

These problems multiplied after 7 October, when our electricity and water were shut off. In such circumstances, we have hardly managed to run the hospital, let alone run it as we would like. For instance, we have been forced to use water from a local well, which is not safe at all.

In the past weeks we have received tens, hundreds, thousands of injured patients. We have also received dead bodies, and if you imagine what happens when a house is bombed, you can understand why some of the bodies come to us in parts. The patients, too, come with many injuries, sometimes needing as many as four specialists to treat them simultaneously. For example, if a patient comes in with head trauma, chest trauma, and orthopedic injuries—broken arms or legs—the orthopedic surgeon, the general surgeon, the vascular surgeon, and the neurosurgeon will all be working on them at once. So each patient ends up requiring a great deal of time and resources. But we increasingly lack the necessary resources to handle such

cases. We desperately need fuel, water, electricity, and equipment—such as screws and nails to set the spinal cord—as well as all the drugs necessary for surgery. Meanwhile, we have a long waitlist of patients who need surgery, especially orthopedic surgery and neurosurgery. These patients need to go to Egypt or somewhere else to be able to find treatment, but the authorities have not allowed that yet.

In addition to the thousands of patients we have received since the war started, there are also thousands who fled their homes who are now inside the hospital because they think that the hospital is safe. This really makes things difficult because they are inside the rooms, inside the corridors, roaming the hospital. They need water, they need food, they need electricity, and this puts a lot of pressure on the medical services.

The most important shortage we face is one of ICU beds. Even before the war, we had only twelve ICU beds in the European Gaza Hospital because such beds are expensive and require a lot of equipment. But once we started receiving so many seriously injured people, we opened another department so that we could increase the bed occupancy in the ICU. Soon there were even more such patients, so we opened a third department, then a fourth, a fifth, a sixth. Now we have fifty-four ICU beds, which we have never had before—and every single bed is occupied.

The ICU situation has become so dire that we have been forced to prioritize: to assess which patient might benefit most from each bed. Now, when a patient is seriously injured and we think that they have no chance to live, we unfortunately have to leave them to die so that another injured person can occupy that ICU bed. There are likewise patients who, in normal circumstances, we would resuscitate, but now we don't because we don't have enough beds. It's disgusting. It's such a hard decision to make.

What I want for Gaza is simply freedom. We have been under occupation for seventy-five years. It is time to end this conflict. Everybody talks about two states living side by side peacefully and freely, but unfortunately, nobody feels pressure to make it happen.

We want to live in peace, and we want a good future for our children. I think we need a free Palestine to be able to live peacefully.

Dr. Reda Abu Assi

29 October 2023

We have lived through seven wars. In each war, we lost co-workers with whom we had memories. In each war, the medical services we were able to provide to patients deteriorated.

Since this war began, our situation has become even more difficult. When Al Dora Hospital in eastern Gaza was targeted, all of their patients were transferred to our hospital, including patients in pediatric intensive care. With so many patients, we now have shortages of most medications and are trying to reduce the use of IV fluids. We have run out of many life-saving drugs; we live on medical aid from abroad, and if it runs out, we have nothing to offer. We also have a shortage of medical personnel because many of our staff headed south in the hopes of finding safety for their families. We have insufficient electricity as well, and even the fuel for generators will be gone soon. Most of our patients are connected to devices that need this electricity.

I am currently treating a two-month-old patient from Beit Lahia [in the north of Gaza]. He was admitted to the pediatric intensive care unit by members of the community because all of his family was martyred. We cannot discharge him because there is no member of his family left.

Choosing the medical profession is an expression of love for my country. We serve the people of our country in different ways, but it is especially important to serve our children, who have been deprived of all the pleasures of normal life. These children have a right to be cared for, and to lead healthy lives. For now, we are suffering, and we are fighting, but we do not know how long we can last.

7

Dispatches from the West Bank

Five testimonies from the West Bank

These testimonies were first published by Jewish Currents and are republished here with permission.

Mustafa (pseudonym), as told to Maya Rosen; South Hebron Hills

17 October 2023

These are hard days. We are really scared. All the areas here in the South Hebron Hills are connected; the people are really close to the settlements. It has been bad for a long time, but now it's a completely different level. So many of the entrances and roads are closed. There are no hospitals or clinics here, no big shops. Yatta, where the hospital is, is usually forty minutes away, but now it could take you five to six hours. Since the war started, if you call the police or army to report a settler attack, they mostly don't respond. We used to film [settler violence]; now, if they see you doing that, they will shoot you. The settlers and soldiers shoot at people on the highway and injure people in the villages. No one is safe.

I have a relative who was disabled in a settler attack years ago. He always sits in a specific spot next to his family's tent, which is close to the settlement. Before the war, the settlers and soldiers knew him. But in the past weeks, the army has attacked him twice. The

soldiers, who are different than the usual ones because of the war in Gaza, were shouting “Move!” and “Put your hands up!” and he didn’t understand. They were about to shoot him until the people in the village started to shout; they explained the situation to the soldiers and they left. The people called the police, and the police said they would talk with the army. But two days ago, soldiers came back and did the same thing again. When two guys from the village tried to explain that my relative couldn’t understand, the soldiers said, “If you say even one more word, we will kill you.”

In our village, we believe in nonviolent resistance, and we have been resisting the occupation for years. Things are different now: The soldiers and settlers are just waiting for a chance to kill you. But we have a long tradition of *sumud* [steadfastness]. We have been steadfast on our land for generations. Our ancestors taught us to stay on our land, to take care of everyone in our community. We will keep steadfast. We will not leave. Inshallah one day, we will get our justice.

Luna (pseudonym), as told to Amos; Tuwani
17 October 2023

Since the war started, there have been more and more daily attacks by settlers against the people living in Masafer Yatta [a region of rural hamlets in the south of the occupied West Bank]. We are just farmers, many of us living in caves and tents. I am eighteen years old, and I have lived here all my life. We have no way to defend ourselves from the settlers, who are **fully armed** thanks to [National Security Minister Itamar] Ben-Gvir. They feel that now is their chance. The war is happening, and they have the green light to kill any Palestinian they see. They feel that no one is going to care about these people in Masafer Yatta.

They come with the army’s protection from the settlement of Havat Ma’on, just five minutes from my village of Tuwani. They attack people’s sheep and demolish their tents and raid their homes. They attacked my family in our house: They came in and shot at my dad. Luckily he survived, but they broke his hand by hitting him with the

butt of a gun. On Friday, they shot my cousin, who is still in the hospital. The settlers come wearing soldiers' clothes, which is a new strategy; my dad only recognized them as settlers because they were the same people who attacked him last year.

The settlers and the army are now controlling all the land around Tuwani. They planted an Israeli flag in the high mountains nearby, and they have blocked all the routes in and out of the area. They don't even allow us to access our donkeys, or to give them food or water. They're saying this is state land and it's a war. It's dangerous to leave the town. Some people are trying to travel through the mountains, because they need to reach hospitals, or to reach markets to get food and water. But the way through the mountains is bumpy, and they get shot at. No one can sleep at night; we are afraid that the settlers will come and burn down our homes.

**Mariam (pseudonym), as told to Shira Wolkenfeld; Tuwani
18 October 2023**

When the war began on Saturday, 7 October, the soldiers set up a checkpoint and closed almost all of the roads out of my village of Tuwani. They shut down the roads leading to the fields and to the nearby city of Yatta, but at first, they didn't close the small, agricultural road to the neighboring village of Jawaya, where my parents and siblings live. For the next few days, the people of Tuwani used this road to get to Yatta for their shopping and other essential needs.

On Wednesday, I took my four children to visit my family in Jawaya, intending to return that evening. But before we could get back home to Tuwani, where my husband Zakariyah was waiting for us, settlers and soldiers used a bulldozer to close off this road as well. They parked by the road and attacked any cars that tried to pass, shooting at them with live bullets. We could hear the sounds of gunshots from my family's home on the main street. So we stayed in Jawaya for the next few days, unable to return to Tuwani.

On Friday afternoon, I received a panicked call from one of Zakariyah's sisters: He had been shot by a settler, she said. My fear

set in immediately.

With an injury like this, every minute, every second, is critical. I learned later that young men from Tuwani immediately loaded Zakariyah into a car and set off in search of a road that wasn't blocked so that they could race him to Yatta. It took them ten minutes to find a bumpy agricultural entrance to the city. It was another 20 minutes before they arrived at the hospital, where a doctor immediately ordered that Zakariyah be transferred to the larger hospital in Hebron because his condition was critical. But soldiers stopped the ambulance on the way out of Yatta, shooting bullets into the air. The ambulance turned around and returned to the Yatta hospital.

Meanwhile, I rushed to the hospital with my father. I was getting information bit by bit. Zakariyah had been taken to the operating room. The doctors had started asking people to donate blood, because he had lost a lot of blood in transport. The injury was to his abdomen.

I sat there, in the hospital waiting room, trying to take in what I was learning. He was in critical condition. The concern for his life was increasing.

Only later did I learn that one of my husband's cousins had taken a video of the shooting. I'll never be able to wipe the image from my mind. As my husband was leaving the mosque after Friday prayers, an armed settler approached him on the main street of Tuwani. He pushed his rifle into Zakariyah's chest. Then he took a step back and fired one bullet into his stomach.

For the next two days, Zakariyah was kept in a medically induced coma, his life hanging in the balance. He is still in the hospital a week later. It is still impossible to transfer him to the hospital in Hebron for further care. My children and I pray for his safe recovery and return to us.

**Ghassan Najjar, as told to Maya Rosen; Burin
19 October 2023**

The olive harvest in Burin [a village south of Nablus] usually starts around 10 October. It is the most important harvest. Most people in Burin rely on this harvest to make the money they need to live. The days of the olive harvest are holy days for the Palestinian farmer. Usually, the people come together, have breakfast and cook and pick olives together. But this year, they are not letting us pick olives, even between the houses inside the village.

I am the director of the land and farming cooperative in Burin, and I document settler attacks in the Nablus area. The last attack on farmers trying to pick olives was just half an hour ago. Settlers and soldiers came into the village and tried to make the people leave their land. When they refused to go, a soldier made a phone call, and just ten minutes later, around fifteen settlers came with guns. They started shooting live bullets while the soldiers stood there. Last night, around 100 settlers and soldiers came and attacked the village together. We don't have guns; we don't have anything with which to protect ourselves. In the village of Madama, just a five-minute walk from Burin, the settlers tried to kill a thirteen-year-old girl. They broke down the door of her house and came inside and attacked her. Now the girl is in the hospital.

Burin is surrounded by three settlements: Yitzhar, Givat Ronen, and Har Bracha. Since the war started, you never know who you are fighting—whether they are settlers or soldiers. The soldiers work with the settlers; the soldiers *are* settlers. Most of the soldiers from this area were sent to Gaza, so now the settlers have been given soldiers' uniforms. Before the war, when we went to pick olives, the settlers would often attack us. Then the soldiers would come, and even though they would side with the settlers, sometimes they would try to divide the area between us and them. The army would coordinate with farmers to have soldiers present on the land at certain times, to try to avoid problems with the settlers. But now there is no coordination, no permission. Now the soldiers and the settlers attack us together.

Yesterday, when my cousin went to the hills to try to pick olives, seven soldiers came to him and said, "You're not allowed to come

here because there is a war”—even though he was far away from the settlement. They told him: “After the war ends, we will decide if you can come here or not.” But they will not succeed in kicking us off our land. The plan now is to go to our land every day. Even if we don’t need to pick olives, we will go to drink tea. When we go, the settlers and soldiers attack us with live bullets, rubber bullets, sound bombs, tear gas. We never know if we will come home safely from harvesting olives, or if we will die on our land. But we still go every day. Because if we don’t, the land will become a military area, and after that, the settlers will come and take it.

We are under attack every day, every minute, every hour. And yet no one cares about us. All the journalists, all the international people, all the media are focusing on the war in Gaza. They don’t see how the war in Gaza is also being used as a cover for the soldiers and settlers to attack freely in the West Bank. It’s a chance for them to do what they want.

Anyone who believes in freedom needs to stand with the Palestinian people. Because today it is Palestine, but tomorrow it will be another country. This is not just about Zionism or about Palestine. This is about capitalism and colonialism. That is why we have to stay on our land and fight until our last breath. We have two choices: to give up and leave the land, or save our dignity. We choose to die standing upright.

Sabri (pseudonym), as told to Amos; Ein Rashash
17 October 2023

My community arrived here in 1990. I was born here, in Ein Rashash, a village of eighty-five people from eighteen families. There have always been problems, but things got worse in 2018, when settlers established the “[Angels of Peace](#)” outpost. They began to drive away the sheep. Once we had 3,000 goats, but now we have only 600 left because the settlers and the army forbade us from reaching all the grazing areas. There was intimidation from the army and the police.

Since the current government was formed [in December 2022], things have very seriously deteriorated. And four months ago, there was another escalation. The settlers started attacking us near our houses. My eighty-five-year-old grandfather got a stone to the head. They beat him with sticks and pepper-sprayed his eyes. The settlers tried to burn down a house; luckily only a small part burned. They scare us so we will leave. The army never protects us. They help the settlers, firing tear gas at us and into the air. The police are almost as bad as the army—maybe 3 percent better. They never arrest the settlers, but they arrest us if we try to defend ourselves.

Nothing has actually happened here since the beginning of the war, but we have heard about what is happening in several places nearby. In Wadi Siq [a Bedouin community east of Ramallah], for example, settlers came and scared the Palestinians. The settlers stole all their vehicles. We could not sleep; we could barely even breathe. We saw the settlers up there [at the army base] all the time, firing bullets [at shooting ranges], and we heard the gunshots. All the settlers have weapons. Because of the war in Gaza, the settlers think they are allowed to kill every Palestinian. We were afraid that they would come and kill a whole family, and we would have no means to protect ourselves. We have called the army and the police many times, but every time they say “we are at war” and hang up the phone. We cannot protect ourselves and our children, and no one will protect us. So we decided to move our families elsewhere. But we are maintaining a presence here. We hope to return soon.

Many Palestinian communities are leaving. In Nassariya [north of Ein Rashash] settlers came and threatened the residents and told them that if they did not leave the next day they would come and kill them. People in Ein Samya and Kabun [both south of Ein Rashash] are also leaving. They don't want Palestinians east of [Allon Road](#). It is another [Nakba](#), seventy-five years after the first.

I used to want peace. I don't want peace anymore. Even in twenty years I will not want peace—the anger will remain. I used to like the Israelis. Whenever anyone was passing through, I would give him

Bedouin tea; I would milk my goats and give him milk. But if someone came today and asked me for milk, I would not give him milk.

Israel just closes in on us more and more. And it is the same in the [occupied Palestinian] territories as it is in Gaza. You close in on the people more and more and more and in the end it will explode.

8

On why we still hold onto our phones and keep recording

Asmaa Abu Mezied
2022

Excerpted from Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire, edited by Jehad Abusalim, Jennifer Bing and Michael Merryman-Lotze, republished here with permission.

Why would someone running from falling Israeli missiles or huddled together with their family next to the rubble of a neighbor's destroyed home, surrounded by artillery shelling, be holding their phones to record the horror around them? (I have often seen these questions on social media, which displays an utter disregard for Palestinian suffering.)

I am writing this for us, not for them.

We hold onto our phones for dear life because we have learned the hard way that documenting what we are going through is very important to ensure that our narrative remains alive and remains ours. Our stories, our struggle and pain, and the atrocities committed against us for more than seven decades are being erased. The Israeli journalist Hagar Shezaf explained how Israeli Defense Ministry teams systematically removed historic documents from Israeli archives, which describe the killing of Palestinians, the demolition of their

villages and the expulsion of entire Palestinian communities. This is part of Israel's attempt to constantly rewrite history in its favor. So, we hold tight to our phones and record.

We record to resist the labeling of our people as unworthy, if not inhuman, by the so-called "objective" Western media, which can barely say our names and tell our stories. We are always portrayed as terrorists, violent people—or as numbers, abstract and formless. We are repeatedly asked to prove our humanity so media channels can give us a few seconds of airtime.

So, we record to document not for their sake but for ours. We have been systematically brainwashed by the media to apologize for demanding justice. There is no gray area in calls for freedom or equality.

We hold onto our phones and leave the camera rolling, recording our tears, our screams at losing our fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and children, our anguish, our attempts to run for our lives, our crippling fears, our powerlessness to calm our children when our houses shake with the deafening sound of death delivered by F-35 missiles sent with love from the US government.

We hold onto that phone and leave the camera rolling to preserve our tormented calls to our mothers to stay alive under the rubble of our destroyed homes, our voices crying goodbye to our loved ones at their graves, trying to sound strong but failing, betrayed by our trembling lips and tear-filled eyes.

We must record our prayers to survive, our children's joy when they find their toys intact and their pets alive. We record our strength and our vulnerability, our disappointment in our leadership, and our rage at the silence of the world. We record the smoke, the blood, the lost homes, the olive trees targeted, and livelihoods stolen. We record how much we aged and how much we continue to love life even though life doesn't love us back.

We record for future generations, to tell them this is what truly happened. That we stood here, demanded our rights, fought for them, and were annihilated. We record not to humanize ourselves for others, but so that future generations will remember who we were

and what we did ... to warn them against all attempts at erasing our existence.

We record our plea for humanity's help to end this horror, which is more than our cameras can bear.

9

Is the sky crying?

Rana Barakat

11 December 2023

Is 2023 the year of the apocalypse in Palestine?¹ The historiography of Palestine is marked by numbers. If our history is one of numbers, then their function is to represent political rupture. We have 1919, 1948, 1967, 1994 ... and so on. Now we have the number: 2023. The numbers are not just dates, numbers also represent the counting of days, bodies, martyrs ... the unspoken, yet counted, devastation of the violence of elimination.

I have been thinking about history a lot lately. How will history record this genocide? A strange question in the midst of the indescribable violence of the Israeli settler state, a violence that has, in 2023, become so intense it is unimaginable. But perhaps now—however banal it may seem as our people literally struggle to survive—we must also record history or provide the means for us to be recorded in history. In asking, am I succumbing to the intent of settler violence?

Twenty-two days in, I called my fifteen-year-old nephew, Omar, to find a way around numbers and all of these unanswerable questions. How, I was wondering, can someone so young experience or even try to understand genocidal violence in the ongoing Nakba? Does his youth allow him the space to navigate words that can carry us

through and beyond counting? Maybe Omar could help me find the words—how can we write while the fires are burning and the bombs are falling? Is recording this moment a desperate act or a necessary duty?

Omar and I have great stories about memory-making. I suppose I wanted him to bring up memory-making, always a source of laughter for him because that is how he understood his aunt as a historian. Even as a toddler, he would find laughter in how a historian sees time as a form of memory-making. The laughter was a playful product of his perception that I had to try hard to be present because I saw the present as a past being formed. As he grew older, his laughter about memory-making grew into his own active participation. And so, we found hope in story-telling and we named it the practice of memory. Now, I needed help not in remembering, but in forgetting. I did not want to hold onto the nightmare scenes rolling across the screens. I wanted to hear his thoughts about his memory to counter the nightmares.

Omar lives in Chicago and is, as he described it, “far away from Palestine.” But he tells me that he is trying to follow every detail of what is happening. “Palestine is inside of me,” he says. He wants to make sure, he told me, that 2023 is a turning point in his consciousness. Maybe he is not far away at all.

It was wild to hear Omar explain this sentiment and his practice of memory over the phone. His practice, that of nurturing the potential of memory in the present, reignited in me some belief in the vitality of memory, even in, or perhaps, especially in, the midst of a genocide. He reminded me to think differently of the endless task of Palestinian historians: to remember, to challenge, and to disrupt timelines. As Palestinian historians, our work is a methodological challenge. Many of us collectively know that stories cannot be shared through numbers and our stories *need* to be shared. Stories—as ongoing memory-making—are a tricky part of our work because every part of our labor is accountable to our people and our cause.

Omar said, “I know my anger turns into optimism. I want to stay angry so that I can stay hopeful.” Counting time is an act performed in

retrospect, recounting disasters, ruptures, revolts—the ongoing relationship between the past and the present. Omar is looking to the future ... he is looking forward. And so, he reminded me that all of the work in memory is as much about the future as it is about the past and present.

Thirty-two days in and as October turned to November and the genocidal bombardment grew in size and devastation, it is not a coincidence that children have dominated the images planted into our minds, souls and hearts. Perhaps in the landscape of ruins, the young voices, their precious young souls and their bodies as targets are hardest to digest. From an open-air prison into a graveyard of children, throughout Gaza and throughout Palestine, the analogies as metaphors have somehow horrifically become commonplace. If the past is present, then maybe I wanted to hear from Omar about how memory-making is about a future that can counter all the fears that these analogies have produced in the present.

Split screen

This is not new. History matters. The Nakba is ongoing. Settler-colonial invasion did not begin on the seventh of October of 2023. But those lines we repeat over and over again do not suffice. This has been distinctly different in a long sequence of the same. While elimination has always had an existential element, the intensification of genocidal violence carries with it a very bloody reality. Every day has new and unprecedented forms of violence, the ongoing realization and ongoing implementation of a century of settler violence. We have moved far beyond heartbreak, this is mind breaking. *What is memory when the mind breaks?*

Erasure is a constant concern, in real time under the brutal weight of settler colonial violence and in the annals of history where presence/absence carries the weight of the confirmation or denial of our ongoing sense of peoplehood. This is a long-rehearsed song about memory in Palestine. I have learned that we do not forget as much as we are compelled to not remember. Remembering is not

simple. It is not a parade nor an empty rhetoric, it is an ongoing political, ethical and rigorous praxis. The question, then, is not about whether we remember, but rather, how and why do we remember?

Omar's lesson has to remain in my mind, even as it might be breaking. The past is present to nurture the very hope for a future, even now, especially now. To think about the future while the present and the past are targeted directly by bombs from the sky, shelling from the sea, and then the added horrors of ground invasions after denying power and water and food to more than two million people ... to think about tomorrow is itself an act of resistance and a testament to the power of imagination. *What can it mean to dream in the midst of these nightmares?*

On the twentieth day, the mind broke again as nightmares won over dreams. A split screen on the television: on the right is the US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, addressing the General Assembly about a simple resolution with the slightest of demands—a pause to the non-stop and unyielding war on Gaza. I could not understand a word of what she said. What is this imperial nonsense in the midst of genocide? Was she even talking about Gaza? On the other side of the split screen, as the sun set over the sea, the sounds and scenes of huge bombs exploding in a parade of unimaginable violence dominated the scene. Was the sky over Gaza crying? Words spoken on the lofty stage of the UN and events unfolding in Gaza do not fit together, even on a simple split screen.

By the morning after the dark night of the thirty-fifth day, nothing remained untouched. Not a body, not a road, not a bakery, not a school, not even a hospital—especially the hospitals, after a night of pure unadulterated war on the structure and meaning of *healing* in Gaza. Even more numbers invade, babies in incubators killed by proxy—hospitals as a battlefield.

Gaza has become the very landscape of inescapable and unimaginable violence. Not one human across the landscape of Gaza has escaped the bombing of this massive settler air force. Gaza—its people and land under inhuman siege for over sixteen years, another horrific number. Gaza—the city lying on the beautiful shores of the

sea. Gaza—where three generations across three quarters of the population are displaced and dispossessed Palestinians. I cannot even compose legible sentences anymore—Gaza.

Gaza Strip, the name, is an invention of settler colonialism. (The people of this land never needed to divide into strips.) It is, as everyone now knows, the most densely populated place in the world. On the eighteenth day, two days before one of the failed discussions for an unfulfilled UN resolution, Haider Eid, a professor at the Islamic University in Gaza, sent out a note from the bombed out ruins of his home and through the rubble of his non-sanctuary. The note was simple: “We are being annihilated.”

I stopped for a moment, transfixed in front of the split screen. This split screen can split the mind, if we let it. What is memory when the mind breaks? What can it mean to dream in the midst of these nightmares? I was perplexed by the lies at the UN on the right side of the screen, but devastated at the sky crying on the left side of the screen. What have we done to the sun? Is she bearing witness to this nightmare? Or, like our minds, is she breaking?

The majestic sun in the divine sky was crying, her tears seemed to transform into bombs over this small shore of Palestine. The sky with the sun and the moon and the stars, once a place of solace for a people on land poisoned by settlers, has now turned on us. Is the setting sun crying? Was I imagining this ... is my mind breaking or has the nightmare become reality? In the darkness of night has the moon taken over the role of the sun in shedding tears of fire on my people? Has the sky betrayed us?

Reem Masri, *Untitled* (2023) Acrylic on Canvas (60 × 80 cm).



Super/natural

Unimaginable violence, the philosophers have long said, seems impossible to put to words. To that which our minds cannot comprehend, words will fail. Conceptualization, after all, is putting words to ideas. Perhaps a broken heart and a broken mind—mere casualties of unimaginable violence—guides the mind's eye into the world of the supernatural. Theorists of violence and pontificators on war notwithstanding, unimaginable violence exists in the world of mythologies—the fury of God/s who unleash supernatural rage onto humans. Across time and cultures, these myths have a common denominator: humans have gone astray and deserve divine violence of the sort only the Gods in the skies can produce. Divine vengeance seems most often to come from the sky. Or at least that is how I remember the sources of myths and magic. After all, in its vast

endless beauty, the sky can hold everything—from the fury of the divine to the hope of mortals.

What is happening in Palestine? Judgement Day? The end of times? Apocalypse? Not a Palestinian I know has known how to sleep for weeks. Palestinians no longer sleep. Though we are collectively sleepless, we are not without nightmares. In stolen moments or seconds conjured up in the fleeting space between subconscious and conscience; the four horsemen of the apocalypse ride through my mind. Where did the seeds of my knowledge of these four men come from? I do not know. I do not want to know. But as I watch the incomprehensible devastation in Gaza, as I witness first-hand the settler army and armies of settlers in the West Bank; all I can think about are these four horsemen of conquest, war, famine and death.

The violence all around us is so atmospheric, so hysterical, so devastating and bloody, it seems that I have escaped into the supernatural. How can humans do unto humans this level of inhumanity, this level of violence—the unimaginable violence that has rendered Gaza a scorched earth of ruins. Unimaginable violence that has broken the already-broken between our villages and towns throughout the West Bank ... unimaginable violence that has made every Palestinian a target—bombs, raids, arrests, massacres—the dictionary of terms no longer holds what this is. Though unimaginable, the material results of the violence are mounting and ever-growing. The horsemen of the apocalypse translate the recounting of the numbers and days. But people are not just numbers, but the numbers, ever-climbing, become even more incomprehensible as the days pass. When the mind breaks, perhaps a human need for comprehension lingers. How can this barbaric level of violence even be possible in 2023?

But this is not supernatural. This is not the vengeance of God/s. Though it may seem like the sky is raining bombs and the sun, moon and stars are crying tears of rage, this is man-made. This is settler colonialism. This is Zionism. This is genocide. This is our ongoing Nakba. The settlers have stolen land with their violence and have made a claim on the skies with their bombs. They wanted to define

time to control the end of time. This unimaginable violence has no name but the apocalypse, but these crimes on the land and in skies are not mythology, this is the settler colonial vengeance of those pretending to be God/s.

“We cannot await,” Sherene Seikaly [recently wrote](#), “a secular salvation or messianic apocalypse. We are in the apocalypse.” This piece, “Nakba in the Age of Catastrophe” was, in part, an inventory of catastrophe, written months before this month. Writing these words today, I realized I remember her words differently. Memory in the time of broken minds and broken hearts, the time of nightmares that prevent and lay siege to the very notion of dreams, still, the imagination can work its magic. “We are the apocalypse,” I remembered Sherene saying. If we are the apocalypse, then we are also the new world struggling to be born. We are neither saviors of civilization nor saviors of humanity, these concepts destroyed under the rubble of broken bodies that have been denied the simple dignity of burial and obliterated buildings in Gaza. But this explosion—if at the cost of our backs and with our blood—shall bear forth a world where such unimaginable violence is regulated forever to the renderings of mythology.

As thirty-five turned to thirty-six in the dark of the evening of Gaza and Palestine, I called Omar again. After mythology and beyond the supernatural, I needed his help. I asked him: “how do you contend with grief?” Without intention or forethought, I had reversed our roles: now I was asking him for intellectual and emotional guidance. In spite of, or because of, the intentional targeting of an entire generation, it is this generation who will help guide us. He took a deep, audible breath on the phone, breathing with bold intention, and responded, “well, Rana, you taught me about your rage, now I need to explain to you: My anger is less hesitant and I am more sure that Palestine will be free. This is hard. This is sad. But this is how Palestinians get free. I know you like to teach me, Rana, but maybe you can also learn from me.” Bold move, sweet Omar. Challenge accepted.

Reem Masri, *Untitled* (2023) Acrylic on Canvas (60 × 80 cm).



10

Western journalists have blood on their hands

Mohammed El-Kurd

20 October 2023

On 9 October, the Palestine Authority's ambassador to the UK, Husam Zomlot, [gave an interview](#) to BBC host Kirsty Wark. "They were simply bombarded. Their entire building was brought down," he told her. Just hours before the interview, six of his family members had fallen victim to the Israeli military operation that has [dropped more bombs](#) on the tiny, densely populated Gaza Strip in less than one week than the United States dropped on Afghanistan in an entire year. The latter is 1,800 times bigger than [Gaza](#).

"My cousin Ayah, her two children, her husband, her mother-in-law, and two other relatives were killed instantly, and two of their youngest children, a twin, two years old, are now in intensive care," Zomlot told her. His family members are among the thousands who have been killed in the assault on the world's largest open-air prison, where 2.2 million lives are besieged. Wark [replied](#), "Sorry for your own personal loss. I mean, can I just be clear, though, you cannot condone the killing of civilians in Israel, can you?"

Wark's response to Zomlot's horrifying loss isn't merely callous. It reveals a troubling phenomenon in the mainstream media: The industry standard is to dehumanize Palestinians. Our grief is

negligible; our rage is unwarranted. Our death is so quotidian that journalists report it as though they're reporting the weather. Cloudy skies, light showers, and 3,000 Palestinians dead in the past ten days. And much like the weather, only God is responsible: not armed settlers, not targeted drone strikes.

I and a few other Palestinians have been hopping between TV channels and radio stations to talk about the atrocities unfolding in Gaza, most of which are absent from headlines, and we have encountered similar hostility. Producers invite us, it seems, not to interview us for our experiences or analysis or the context we can provide, but to interrogate us. They test our answers against the viewer's inherent bias—a bias well-fed through years of Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian rhetoric. The bombs raining down on the besieged Gaza Strip become secondary, if not entirely irrelevant, to our televised trials.

While I don't expect pleasantries on air, I want accurate reporting. On the UK's LBC radio, last week, host Rachel Johnson (sister of the former prime minister) took a break from repeatedly interrupting to question me—in fact, indict me—about unverified, word-of-mouth reports of Palestinian fighters “decapitating and raping” Israelis. She didn't mention the various videos of Israelis mutilating, stomping, and urinating on Palestinian corpses, many of which are readily available to 83,000 subscribers of an Israeli Telegram channel named “Terrorists_are_dying.”

Such unsubstantiated claims were—and still are—all over the news. The *Independent* (UK) plastered its Chief International Correspondent Bel Trew's “impossible to verify” reports of “decapitated women and babies” on its front page. *Los Angeles Times* columnist Jonah Goldberg reported then redacted “rapes.” On CNN, a teary-eyed Sara Sidner confirmed live, based on Israeli official sources, that “babies and toddlers were found with their heads decapitated,” then apologized on Twitter (now X) that she was “misled,” following a statement, again, from Israeli official sources admitting there is no information confirming the claim that “ Hamas beheaded babies.”

This is a familiar playbook. A claim is circulated without evidence; Western journalists spread it like wildfire; diplomats and politicians parrot it; a narrative is built; the general public believes it, and the damage is done.

It may seem trivial to place such weight on the manner of killing, given the fact of killing, but such language isn't without consequences. On Monday, an Illinois landlord attacked his Palestinian American tenants, seriously injuring a woman and [killing](#) her six-year-old child. "You Muslims must die," he yelled as he stabbed them each over a dozen times. Joe Biden said he was "shocked and sickened" by the attack, as if he could divorce himself from a claim he had made days before that he'd seen "pictures of terrorists beheading children" (a claim he quietly [retracted](#) hours later).

Conjuring rape and decapitation feeds on Islamophobic tropes. Simultaneously, it works hand in hand with the Israeli regime's PR strategy, which has sought to equate Hamas with ISIS in the audience's imagination, resurrecting the culture that brought forth the "War on Terror." It may be the fog of war causing reporters to repeat fabrications (or, at a minimum, report unverified claims as fact), or perhaps it's a lapse in judgment that drives them to compare Hamas's assault to 9/11 without considering the ramifications of such analogies. Or, one could argue, it's [journalistic malpractice](#). Regardless, by abandoning the ethics of their profession, journalists are ushering in the brutality approaching the Palestinian people in Gaza: a possible genocide.

This isn't some wild conspiracy theory. On 13 October, the Center for Constitutional Rights [asserted](#) that the Israeli regime, by taking actions "to destroy a group in whole or in part, including by killing or by creating conditions of life to bring about the group's destruction," is committing genocide in the Gaza Strip. A day later, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention issued a SOS alert warning "that without immediate peacemaking efforts, the international community will oversee and be complicit in Genocide in Gaza." Raz Segal, a

professor of Holocaust and genocide studies, has **called** it a “textbook case of genocide unfolding in front of our eyes.”

If that sounds outrageous, it is precisely because establishment media has been shielding—or blocking—readers and viewers from the countless statements made by Israeli officials that suggest genocide is in the works. When *The New York Times* reported the Israeli defense minister’s instructions to tighten the siege on Gaza by cutting off water, electricity, and food to the enclave, the article conveniently **omitted** his description of Palestinians as “human animals.” When Israeli President Isaac Herzog attempted to justify the bludgeoning assault on Gaza with the genocidal argument that “an entire nation is responsible,” the *Financial Times* did initially report his saying, “It is not true this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved.” But the broadsheet quickly **removed** those words and the rest of his revealing statement from the article.

Meanwhile, an Israeli soldier “**corrected**” CNN anchor Abby D. Phillip, telling her the “war is not just with Hamas” but “with all the civilians,” but there were no headlines. A celebrated Israeli reservist who participated in the 1948 Deir Yassin massacre **told** troops that Palestinians are “animals” whose “families, mothers and children” must be erased; “If you have an Arab neighbor, don’t wait, go to his home and shoot him,” he said—still, no headlines. And in the busiest street in Tel Aviv, Israelis hung up signs that read, “Genocide Gaza.” No headlines.

Even more critical than genocidal declarations are the genocidal acts, which have also received very little coverage: threatening to bomb aid envoys should they attempt to enter Gaza; actually bombing ambulances; killing (and, **many argue**, targeting) medics and journalists; bombing the Rafah crossing repeatedly; and wiping out entire families from the public registry.

There was little reporting of charges that the Israeli military **used white phosphorus bombs** in Gaza and the south of Lebanon, despite international prohibitions against using it in densely populated areas. And there were no headlines about the Israeli municipalities in the occupied West Bank that have begun arming (often already-armed)

Israeli settlers with thousands of rifles or the fact that the number of West Bank Palestinians killed by settlers or soldiers since 7 October has gone well above fifty. And who knows what more is coming?

I sincerely doubt that the average American knows that the Israeli military ordered twenty-two Palestinian hospitals to be evacuated, or that it struck Al-Durrah Children's Hospital in eastern Gaza with white phosphorus, or that it ordered the expulsion of over 1 million Palestinians from northern Gaza within twenty-four hours, [in violation of international humanitarian law](#) (I include this here only because the politicians cheering on this assault love to cite it). When thousands attempted to relocate from north to south, the Israelis bombed them as they fled. And when MSNBC reported their massacre, the channel cast doubt on their innocence, calling them "what appear to be evacuees."

Over the past few weeks, newspapers like the *Daily Telegraph* have [paired](#) images of Palestinian residential towers destroyed by Israeli warplanes with headlines that would seem to suggest they were Israeli buildings, while the *Times* (UK) published an [image](#) of wounded Palestinian children with a headline suggesting they were Israeli (only a close look at the fine print of the caption revealed that they were Palestinian).

And just today, the Associated Press published an article with several astonishing paragraphs—which the news site then cut—describing how American diplomats "became increasingly alarmed" by the genocidal comments made by their Israeli "counterparts." These comments pertained to "their intention to deny water, food, medicine, electricity and fuel into Gaza, as well as inevitability of civilian casualties," and included remarks to the effect that "the eradication of Hamas would require methods used in the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II."

Covering a "war" without introducing its roots to readers is inaccurate. Ignoring the seventeen-year Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip or pretending that the Israeli regime has no control over its borders and resources (as evidenced by the Israeli capability to block water, food, and electricity) is insidious. Omitting decades of colonial

violence is duplicitous. As for the refusal to acknowledge that 70 percent of the Palestinians in Gaza hail from the lands where many Israeli settlements now stand—lands from which Zionist militias dispossessed them—I have no adjectives for that erasure.

Unfortunately, when it comes to Palestine, obfuscation and fabrication are permissible. The passive voice is king. The commitment to truth disappears, as does due diligence. I once believed journalism to be the industry of “doing no harm” and “speaking truth to power.” But reporters all too often resemble stenographers and state secretaries, mindlessly (or intentionally) amplifying Israeli propaganda.

And their hands are bloody as hell.

Part 2

No human being can exist

11

No human being can exist

Saree Makdisi

25 October 2023

Recently, an Australian-Palestinian friend of mine was invited to appear on Australia's national television network to discuss the situation in and around Gaza. His white interviewers **posed** all the usual questions: *Can you defend what we've seen from Hamas militants? How has the Palestinian cause been helped by this violence? How can anyone defend the slaughter of young music lovers at a music festival? Do you defend Hamas?* They probably expected a defensive reaction from him, but calmly, in his smooth Australian-accented English, my friend had already turned the interview on its head. "I want to know why I'm here today, and why I haven't been here for the past year," he said gently. By the eve of 7 October, he pointed out, Israeli forces had already killed more than 200 Palestinians in 2023. The siege in Gaza was more than sixteen years old, and Israel had been operating outside international law for seventy-five years. "Normal" in Palestine was a killing a day—yet a killing a day in a decades-old occupation was hardly news; it certainly wasn't justification for a live interview on a national television network. Palestinians were being given the opportunity to speak now because the Western media suddenly cared, and they cared ("as we should care," my friend added) because, this time, the victims

included Israeli civilians. In the days after 7 October, Australia made a strong show of support for Israel: Parliament and the Sydney Opera House were lit up in the colors of the Israeli flag; the Prime Minister said pro-Palestinian rallies should be called off out of respect for the Israeli dead; the foreign minister was lambasted for saying Israel should endeavor to minimize civilian deaths in Gaza. “Well, what about our lives?” my friend asked.

What about lighting up a building for us? When our government lights up every building blue and white, how are we [Australian Palestinians] supposed to feel? Are we not Australian? Should nobody care about us? A fourteen-year-old boy was set *on fire* in the West Bank by Israeli settlers. What about us?

The news anchors were caught off guard. This isn’t how these interviews are supposed to go.

Those of us, like my friend, who are summoned by Western media outlets to provide a Palestinian perspective on the disaster unfolding in Gaza are well aware of the condition on which we are allowed to speak, which is the tacit assumption that our people’s lives don’t matter as much as the lives of the people who do. Questions are framed by the initial Hamas attack on Israeli civilians (the Hamas attack on Israeli military targets and Israel’s belt of fortifications, watchtowers, and prison gates surrounding Gaza goes unnoticed), and any attempt to place it in a wider historical framework gets diverted back to the attack itself: *How can you justify it? Why are you trying to explain it instead of condemning it? Why can’t you just denounce the attack?* If Palestinian commentators want to be asked about Israeli violence against Palestinian civilians—about the history of ethnic cleansing and apartheid that produced the contemporary Gaza Strip and the violence we are witnessing today; about the structural violence of decades of Israeli occupation that cuts farmers off from their fields, teachers from their classrooms, doctors from their patients, and children from their parents—we have to ask to be asked. And even then, the questions don’t come.

I’ve spoken to a lot of journalists from a lot of different media organizations over the past two weeks. With rare exceptions, the

pattern is consistent, as it has been for years. A recent appearance on a major US cable news channel was canceled at the last minute, immediately after I sent in the talking points the producer requested I submit; they clearly weren't the talking points they had in mind. For years, I was on the list of regular guests for BBC radio and television interviews concerning Palestine—until, during a previous Israeli bombardment of Gaza, I told the interviewer he was asking the wrong questions and that the questions that mattered had to do with history and context, not just what was happening right now. That was my last appearance on the BBC.

How can a person make up for seven decades of misrepresentation and willful distortion in the time allotted to a sound bite? How can you explain that the Israeli occupation doesn't have to resort to explosions—or even bullets and machine-guns—to kill? That occupation and apartheid structure and saturate the everyday life of every Palestinian? That the results are literally murderous even when no shots are fired? Cancer patients in Gaza are [cut off from life-saving treatments](#). Babies whose mothers are denied passage by Israeli troops are born in the mud by the side of the road at Israeli military checkpoints. Between 2000 and 2004, at the peak of the Israeli roadblock-and-checkpoint regime in the West Bank (which has been reimposed with a vengeance), sixty-one Palestinian women gave birth this way; [thirty-six of those babies died](#) as a result. That never constituted news in the Western world. Those weren't losses to be mourned. They were, at most, statistics.

What we are not allowed to say, as Palestinians speaking to the Western media, is that all life is equally valuable. That no event takes place in a vacuum. That history didn't start on 7 October, 2023, and if you place what's happening in the wider historical context of colonialism and anticolonial resistance, what's most remarkable is that anyone in 2023 should be still surprised that conditions of absolute violence, domination, suffocation, and control produce appalling violence in turn. During the Haitian revolution in the early nineteenth century, formerly enslaved people massacred white settler men, women, and children. During Nat Turner's revolt in 1831,

insurgent enslaved people massacred white men, women, and children. During the Indian uprising of 1857, Indian rebels massacred English men, women, and children. During the Mau Mau uprising of the 1950s, Kenyan rebels massacred settler men, women, and children. At Oran in 1962, Algerian revolutionaries massacred French men, women, and children. Why should anyone expect Palestinians—or anyone else—to be different? To point these things out is not to justify them; it is to understand them. Every single one of these massacres was the result of decades or centuries of colonial violence and oppression, a structure of violence Frantz Fanon explained decades ago in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

What we are not allowed to say, in other words, is that if you want the violence to stop, you must stop the conditions that produced it. You must stop the hideous system of racial segregation, dispossession, occupation, and apartheid that has disfigured and tormented Palestine since 1948, consequent upon the violent project to transform a land that has always been home to many cultures, faiths, and languages into a state with a monolithic identity that requires the marginalization or outright removal of anyone who doesn't fit. And that while what's happening in Gaza today is a consequence of decades of settler-colonial violence and must be placed in the broader history of that violence to be understood, it has taken us to places to which the entire history of colonialism has never taken us before.

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At any moment, without warning, at any time of the day or night, any apartment building in the densely populated Gaza Strip can be struck by an Israeli bomb or missile. Some of the stricken buildings simply collapse into layers of concrete pancakes, the dead and the living alike entombed in the shattered ruins. Often, rescuers shouting "*hadan sami'ana?*" ("can anyone hear us?") hear calls for help from survivors deep in the rubble, but without heavy lifting equipment all they can do is helplessly scrabble at the concrete slabs with crowbars or their bare hands, hoping against hope to pry open gaps wide

enough to get survivors or the injured out. Some buildings are struck with such heavy bombs that the ensuing fireballs shower body parts and sometimes whole charred bodies—usually, because of their small size, those of children—over surrounding neighborhoods. Phosphorus shells, primed by Israeli gunners to detonate with airburst proximity fuses so that incendiary particles rain down over as wide an area as possible, set fire to anything flammable, including furniture, clothing, and human bodies. Phosphorus is pyrophoric—it will burn as long as it has access to air and basically can't be extinguished. If it makes contact with a human body it has to be dug out by scalpel and will keep burning into the flesh until it's extracted.

“We live,” one of *Al Jazeera's* Arabic correspondents said, talking over the ubiquitous buzz of Israel's lethal drones, “enveloped in the smell of smoke and death.” Entire families—twenty, thirty people at a time—have been wiped out. Friends and relatives desperately checking on each other often find smoking ruins where close relations once lived, their fate unknown, vanished either under the concrete or scattered in the remnants of other increasingly unrecognizable areas. Survivors find themselves in one of the most crowded areas on earth with crumbling telecommunications, faltering electricity, failing medical systems, a looming internet outage, and an uncertain future.

In 2018, the United Nations [warned](#) that Gaza—its basic infrastructure of electricity, water, and sewage systems smashed over years of Israeli incursions and bombings, leaving 95 percent of the population [without ready access to fresh drinking water](#)—would be “unlivable” by 2020. It's now 2023, and the entire territory, cut off from the outside world, is without any access to food, water, medical supplies, fuel and electricity, all while under continuous bombardment from land, sea, and air. “Attacks against civilian infrastructure, especially electricity, are war crimes,” pointed out Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission. “Cutting off men, women, children [from] water, electricity and heating with winter coming,” she continued—“these are acts of pure terror.” Von der Leyen is right, of course, but in this instance she was referring to

Russia's attacks on Ukraine's infrastructure. As for Israel's attacks on Gaza's infrastructure, Von der Leyen says that Israel has the right to defend itself.

900, 1000, 1500, 1800, 2600, 3500, 4600, 5000, 5900, 6500. The fatality figures, with which no one can keep up, are augmented every few hours with another twenty here and thirty there as this building or that is brought down in a cataclysmic burst of fire, smoke, and rubble. Three or four hundred people—or more—are being killed every day. At one point, health sources in Gaza reported 100 fatalities in a single hour. For every person killed there are two or three or more wounded, often severely. Almost half the dead and wounded are young children; some of the most painful images coming out of the current bombardment of Gaza, as in the ones past, are those of dead children, battered, ashen, covered in soot and dust, wrapped in the final embrace of parents who were killed trying to protect them. So far, with no end in sight, Israel has killed almost three thousand children. The dead and wounded or often simply recovered body parts—charred legs, trunks, heads—are taken to hospitals overflowing with casualties, running out of medical supplies and fuel for their emergency generators. Hospital beds have long since been fully occupied; new arrivals to Gaza's hospitals crowd together in their own blood in hallways or on the pavements outside; doctors report napping on operating tables on which they now have to operate without anesthetic by the light of mobile phones, using household vinegar to clean wounds because [they've run out of everything else](#).

With morgues full to capacity and cemeteries running out of space, health authorities in Gaza have [started storing bodies in ice cream trucks](#), with blood dripping slowly from doors emblazoned with the bright childish colors of ice cream brands. In alleys, courtyards, and makeshift mosques, those who are able gather in silent tears and prayers over arrays of bodies, large and often pitifully small, wrapped in blood-soaked shrouds in preparation for burial. Relatives sob over each bundle, give a bobbing forehead one last kiss as it is taken away for the last time, leaving only weeping mothers, fathers,

brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins in each other's arms, their own turn in their shrouds surely not far away. Sometimes there are no relatives; they're all gone, too. The scale of the death and destruction is so massive, so unrelenting, there's often no time to mourn, and every day, every hour, the Israelis shower more death on Gaza. One hospital has [begun burying the anonymous dead in mass graves](#) for lack of any other option.

In the first week of the round-the-clock bombardment, the Israelis said they had [dropped 6,000 bombs on Gaza](#), a number equivalent to about a month of bombing at the peak of the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—countries many, many times larger than the Gaza Strip. (Iraq is over a thousand times the size of Gaza.) They also claimed to have dropped over [1,000 tons of high explosives](#); by the end of week one, we were, in other words, already into the kiloton measurements of nuclear weapons, and weeks two and three are upon us. In the first week of bombing, 1,700 entire buildings in Gaza were destroyed. Many times that number were damaged, often beyond repair. Each building includes seven, eight, nine, or more separate apartments, each one the former home of some family now either homeless once more or dead. As ever, the Israelis claim that they are targeting “the terror infrastructure.” As ever, the bodies (or body parts) actually pulled from the rubble or picked up from the neighboring streets are mostly of women and children, unlikely constituents of the phantom “terror infrastructure” from which the occupying power—with the blessing and benediction of its superpower patron—claims to be defending itself.

It is obvious from the harrowing footage coming out of Gaza that the Israelis, unable to locate any clear military targets—no guerrilla fighters in the history of anticolonial struggle have ever stood around waving their hands and making themselves obvious targets—are indiscriminately striking civilian targets instead, systematically destroying one concrete building after another, often annihilating entire neighborhoods at a time; the UN [estimates](#) that Israel's bombing campaign has already damaged or destroyed 40 percent of all of the housing units in Gaza. On its websites and social media

accounts, the Israeli state proudly boasts of the success of its campaign against Hamas, but the evidence it musters generally amounts to photographs of urban ruin, and the result is the carefully calculated infliction of mass homelessness on an entire population.

On October 12, the Israelis **told** one million people in the northern part of Gaza to flee for their lives. But there is nowhere for them to flee to, and those who attempt flight compound risk upon risk. The Gaza Strip is all of 140 square miles; it is already one of the most densely populated areas in the entire world. If the United States had the population density of Gaza, it would have 60,000,000,000 inhabitants. That's sixty *billion*. And now the Israelis are bellowing that they want the tiny territory's population to somehow squeeze into half the remaining area—and anyway they are bombing the south of Gaza as well as the north and the center. Nowhere in Gaza is safe.

Already refugees once or sometimes twice over (80 percent of Gaza's **population** are refugees, survivors or descendants of survivors of the ethnic cleansing of the rest of southwestern Palestine in 1948), new refugees find themselves in search of refuge once more, even as the Israelis warn darkly that there is far, far more to come. On 14 October, a column of terrified refugees making their way north to south down Salah al Din Street in Gaza City—specifically singled out by Israeli leaflets as a safe corridor—were bombed, and seventy survivors of other bombings were killed and scores more injured. Doctors in clinics and hospitals in northern Gaza refused to move altogether, saying that it would be impossible primarily because there's nowhere to move their patients to. All the other hospitals are full, said Dr. Yousef Abu al-Rish of the Shifa Hospital in northern Gaza. "And the other thing," he added, "most of the cases are unstable. And if we want to even transfer them, even if there [are] extra beds in the other hospitals, which is not true, they will die because they are too unstable to be transported." Patients in the ICU, newborns in incubators, people on ventilators—they would all just die if they were moved. Of course they might die if they stay put too, especially once the last drops of diesel run out and the lights go off. Or if the Israelis continue to bomb hospitals and ambulances as they

have been doing. Already, a third of the hospitals and clinics in Gaza have had to [shut down](#) due to a lack of resources.

“The specter of death is hanging over Gaza,” warned Martin Griffiths, UN Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs. “With no water, no power, no food and no medicine, thousands will die. Plain and simple.”

A few days ago the Israelis [said](#) that it would be best, on the whole, for the entire population of the territory—over two million people, half of them children—to leave, either to Egypt or to the Gulf. We aim, the Israeli analyst Giora Eiland said approvingly, “to create conditions where life in Gaza becomes unsustainable.” As a result, he added, “Gaza will become a place where no human being can exist.” Major-General Ghassan Alian of the Israeli army, echoing the Defense Minister’s recent reference to Palestinians as “human animals,” [said](#), “human animals must be treated as such. There will be no electricity and no water [in Gaza], there will only be destruction. You wanted hell, you will get hell.”

What kind of people talk like this, with a godlike sense of their power over literally millions of people? What mindset produces such genocidal proclamations on the disposition of entire populations?

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What we are witnessing before our eyes is, I think, unprecedented in the history of colonial warfare. Ethnic cleansing, in itself, is unfortunately not as rare an occasion as one would like; only a few weeks ago, 130,000 Armenians were driven in terror from their homes in Artsakh by (not coincidentally Israeli-armed) Azerbaijan. In the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, thousands of people of the “wrong” religion or ethnicity were expelled at a time from their communities in Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia. Almost all—90 percent—of the Christian and Muslim population of Palestine itself was ethnically cleansed by Zionist forces in 1948. And we can go back to the nineteenth, eighteenth, and seventeenth centuries and recall the sordid history of genocide, extermination, and slavery with which Western civilization made its enlightened presence felt all around the planet.

But in no instance that I know of has ethnic cleansing been accomplished through the use of massive ordnance and heavy bombardment with ultra-modern weapons systems, including the one-ton bombs (and even heavier bunker-buster munitions) used by Israelis flying the latest American jets. Such matters are normally conducted in person, with rifles or at the point of the bayonet. The ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948 was carried out almost entirely with small arms, for instance; the Palestinian civilians massacred at Deir Yassin, Tantura, and other sites to inspire others into terrified flight were shot with pistols, rifles, or machine-guns at close range, not struck by thousand-pound bombs dropped from F-35s flying at 10,000 feet or higher.

What we are witnessing, in other words, is perhaps the first fusion of old-school colonial and genocidal violence with advanced state-of-the-art heavy weapons; a twisted amalgamation of the seventeenth century and the twenty-first, packaged and wrapped up in language that harks back to primitive times and thunderous biblical scenes involving the smiting of whole peoples—the Jebusites, the Amelikites, the Canaanites, and of course the Philistines.

What's worse, if anything could be worse, is the near total indifference on display by so many in and out of government in the Western world. Given the shock and outrage over the Palestinian massacre of Israeli civilians expressed by journalists, politicians, governments, and university presidents, the nearly blanket silence concerning the fate of Palestinian civilians at the hands of Israel is deafening: an earth-shattering, bellowing silence. We who live in Western countries didn't support or pay for any Palestinian to kill Israeli civilians, but every bomb dropped on Gaza from aircraft the US provided is added to a bill that *we* pay for. *Our* officials are falling over themselves to join in the encouragement of the bombing and to rush the delivery of new bombs.

State Department officials [issued](#) internal briefings calling on spokespeople not to use phrases such as “end to violence/bloodshed,” “restoring calm,” or “de-escalation/ceasefire.” The Biden Administration actually *wants* the bombing and killing to

continue. Asked about the tiny handful of more or less progressive congressional voices calling for a ceasefire and a cessation of hostilities, White House Spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre [said](#), “we believe they’re wrong. We believe they’re repugnant, and we believe they’re disgraceful.” There are “not two sides here,” Jean-Pierre added. “There are not two sides.”

Government spokespeople are calculating and insincere; the ultimate nihilists, they don’t actually believe in anything, least of all anything they say themselves. But the same cannot be said of the people all around us who, so desperately moved by the images and narratives of Israeli suffering, have nothing to say about Palestinian suffering on a far greater scale. How can anyone be so heartless? I’m not talking about overt racists who explicitly call for the destruction of Gaza and the expulsion of the Palestinians. I’m talking about ordinary people, many—maybe even most—of them solid liberals when it comes to politics: advocates of gender and racial equality, anxious about climate change, concerned for the unhoused, insistent on wearing face masks out of humane consideration for others, voters for the most progressive of Democrats. Their indifference is not personal, but a manifestation of a broader [culture of denial](#). Such people *seem* not to see or to recognize Palestinian suffering because they literally do *not* see or recognize it. They are far too intent, far too focused, on the suffering of people with whom they can more readily identify, people they understand to be just like themselves.

Of course, the corporate media know how to encourage such forms of identification, how to construct protagonists, and how to make viewers sympathize with a subject, to imagine themselves in her shoes. In throttling information, Western media outlets cut off access to identification with Palestinians, and reaffirm the perception that there is only one side. Meanwhile on Al Jazeera Arabic—whose team of correspondents in Gaza and elsewhere in Palestine and Lebanon have been providing gripping and unflinching coverage of the catastrophe in Gaza—tragedy unfolds in real time. On 25 October, the Gaza bureau chief Wael Dahdouh was on air when he received news that his wife, son, and daughter were [killed](#) in an

Israeli airstrike nearby. [Footage](#) shows him on his knees as he weeps and places a hand on his teenage son's chest. "They're taking their revenge on us through children?" Dahdouh says. For those of us glued to Arabic Jazeera these days, to whom Dahdouh is a familiar face, the loss feels personal.

Some lives are to be grieved and given names and life stories, their narratives and photographs printed out in the *New York Times* or the *Guardian* along with photos of mourning parents. Other lives are just numbers, statistics coming out of an accounting machine that doesn't seem to stop adding new digits, twenty or thirty at a time.

Hamas and a century of resistance

Khaled Hroub

2 December 2023

Throughout the last century, regardless of the dominant movement, leader or ideology, Palestinian resistance has been designated as terrorism. This followed an established Western colonial pattern in throwing terror-designation on all national liberation movements and leaders, from the Emir Abd Al-Qadir in Algeria against the French in 1830s, and the Indian mutiny and its leaders against the British in 1857, all the way to Nelson Mandela and Yasir Arafat in 1980s. In every case, the designation ‘terrorists’ attempts to close down discussion of any explanation, erasing the political character of anti-colonial resistance and historical contexts of resistance movements and their tactics. The West’s treatment of the Palestinian resistance in October 2023 continues this long tradition, refusing any context and insisting on a ‘snapshot’ narrative wherein nothing that happened prior to 7 October, or indeed after, can be allowed to enter the conversation.¹

Questions about why Hamas undertook the attacks, what were the root causes, and how has the long brutality of the Israeli occupation fuelled this, were simply ignored. Any slightest deflection from the snapshot hegemonizing discourse or any attempt to include context was attacked immediately and ferociously. When the UN

Secretary General dared to suggest that Hamas' attacks didn't happen in a vacuum, Israel launched a defaming campaign against him, demanding his resignation. It is crucial that these decontextualized narratives are challenged. In what follows I try to contextualize Hamas' emergence, rise, popularity and resistance within the century-long broader struggle of the Palestinians.

Before doing so however, there is a need to examine a dominant aspect in the Israeli and American propaganda that Hamas targets civilians. This is the central justification of Israel and America's war on Hamas including the most recent 2023 genocide. The facts and figures by the UN and the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, show that Israel has always been targeting and killing Palestinian civilians at an extraordinary rate. Starting, at least, from the late 1980s, the death toll of the first Palestinian Intifada, 1987–93, **was** 1,376 Palestinians and 94 Israelis; at a ratio of 1:14. During the second Intifada, 2000–5, the respective figures **were** 10,559 killed Palestinians and 881 killed Israelis; at a ratio of 1:12. Since the first Israeli war on Gaza Strip in 2008 up until September 2023, the Palestinians killed by Israel, according to UN reporting, were 6,665 while Israeli fatalities were 314; a ratio of 1:21. The injured Palestinians in the same period **were** 156,803 while injured Israelis were 6346; a ratio of 1:24. Removing Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters from these figures, wouldn't change these ratios and general trends.

Not only have Palestinians always been killed at much higher rate (ranging between 1 to 12–24), but Hamas was the party that called to stop the mutual killing of civilians. In 1994, Hamas called upon Israel to stop killing Palestinian civilians in return of Hamas' commitment to the same policy regarding Israeli civilians. In several announcements, Hamas offered to neutralize civilians from both sides, but Israel refused to deal with the offer. Early and recent statements of the movement repeatedly stressed that Hamas' attacks were only directed to military targets. In a document entitled "Important Statement by the Political Bureau [of Hamas]", the movement stated that its policy was to only attack military targets, and any killing of civilians was unintended. It is worth quoting what Hamas said in that

early statement, as it remained the movement's policy in the following years:

The latest operations at Afula and Hadera [in retaliation of Hebron massacre in February 1994 where an Israeli fanatic settler opened fire in the Abraham Mosque and killed twenty-seven Palestinians in injured dozens more], targeted troops and settlers but did injure some civilians. The purpose was deterring the barbaric Zionist aggression against our people. They [the attacks] were also a legitimate retaliation for the blood of martyrs in the criminal Hebron massacre. Nonetheless, *this is not the immutable policy of the Qassam Brigades, but the extraordinary policy imposed on us by the government of the enemy* (emphasis added). Yet, Hamas stands ready to reconsider this extraordinary policy on condition that the prime minister of the enemy, his government, and his army pledge finally and irrevocably to cease killing unarmed Palestinian civilians.²

The West accepts Israel's claim that its killing of Palestinian civilians is unintended, but rejects the same claim when presented by Hamas, despite the massive scale of Israeli killing. Accusing Palestinian resistance movements of being aimless groups that only target civilians has been a decades-long Israeli and American approach aimed at defaming the Palestinians and blocking their rights. The chronology of the Palestinian struggle has always attested to this.

The PLO

Since the British military colonization and betrayal of Palestine in the early 1920s, the idea of resistance has been at the heart of the Palestinian collective psyche, national identity, yearning for liberation. It has also been the lever for political legitimacy and leadership. The rise and decline of Palestinian political movements, leaders and ideologies has vacillated in tandem with their commitment to and practice of resistance against the Western-backed Zionist colonial project in Palestine.

The early episodes of Palestinian resistance started against the British occupation of Palestine after WWI. The British claimed to

operate under a system of 'mandate' designed by the League of Nations that intended to prepare and qualify the peoples under mandates to rule themselves. When the British were mandated to rule Palestine, Jews represented no more than 11 percent of the population.

Facing the wrath of one of the greatest powers of the time, Palestinian resistance to both British colonialism and the Zionist organisations charted the future of the Palestinian struggle for the coming decades. Part of the Palestinian national movement adopted a diplomatic approach, deceived by countless British promises and policies of containment. But by the mid 1930s it was clear to many Palestinians that the British occupation and the Zionist rising forces and their growing state within a state represented the same project. This state of affairs led to the Great Arab Revolt of 1936. First as a general strike, then through a generalised uprising which laid claim to most Palestinian cities at its height, Palestinians rose up and demanded their liberation from both colonial presences. Efforts by nationalist, leftist and Islamist Palestinian parties and leaders were frustrated not only by the British crackdowns and ruthless police and army, but also by the Arab British puppet leaders of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Egypt who advocated trust in Britain's 'good intentions.'

In the years following 1948, against all odds, Palestinians started re-organising themselves and efforts around the notion of resistance. Dozens of small Palestinian groups with various leanings started to take shape. In the early 1950s, the Arab Nationalist Movement was founded in Beirut by mostly left-leaning pan-Arab Palestinians under the leadership of George Habash. By the late 1950s, Fatah had arrived on the scene. It would go on to become the leading organisation of the Palestinian national liberation movement. Differing in ideological underpinnings and political platforms, the new cohort of Palestinian organizations shared a strong conviction that armed struggle was the only strategy for the liberation of Palestine.

During the 1950s and 1960s three major trends dominated the Palestinian national movement. The first, promoted by the Arab

Nationalist Movement, advocated for Arab Unity as a prerequisite for the liberation of Palestine. The second, advanced by Marxist groups, married the goal of Palestine's liberation with the international revolution against imperialism and capitalism. The third, advocated by Fatah, reversed the previous two approaches: calling for the priority of fighting the Zionist project, while pushing everything else to the back seat. This prioritization of the immediate fight against Israel won the hearts and minds of most Palestinians, giving Fatah strong support, wide membership and immanent leadership.

In the second half of the 1960s, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), an umbrella of Palestinian groups including Fatah, under the leadership of Yasir Arafat, was founded. After the 1967 war and the occupation by the Zionist project of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip (along with Egypt's Sinai and Syria's Golan Heights), the PLO—which had originally been set up by the Arab league as a fig leaf for its own inaction, was taken over by Palestinian organisations themselves to serve as a coordination between the different factions of the national movement. From this period, the PLO leadership operated from Jordan and then in Lebanon. Inside Palestine, mass associations, students' and workers' unions, military operations and most expressions of popular protest against the Israeli occupation including rejecting any Israeli attempt to create local collaborative leadership, were mostly organized or loyal to the PLO and its factions.

The Palestinian Islamists

Until 1987, the Islamist Palestinians functioned separately in social, political and religious spheres. Their origin goes back to mid-1940s when a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (as a Palestinian chapter of the Egyptian organization) was founded in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, in Jerusalem. Their ideology was based on the notion of Islamization of the Palestinian society as a prerequisite for any struggle against foreign domination. Without preparing generations of good Palestinian Muslims, they argued, facing the

Zionist project would be a futile endeavour. The 'preparation' phase took them away from engaging in direct military confrontation against Israel, to the point where secular military Palestinian groups accused them of indirect collaboration with the occupation. Despite their growing presence in Palestine, the non-confrontationist Islamists in 1970s and most of the 1980s lagged in popular support behind Fatah and leftist parties, and suffered negative public perception. Their success in social and religious networks was overshadowed by the lack of resistance in their approach.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the Palestinian Brothers faced a crisis. Islamist movements in the region were very much impacted by the model offered by the 1979 Iranian revolution, which was confrontation and revolutionary, and which toppled America's strongest man in the Middle East, the Shah. In 1981, frustrated with the non-confrontational and gradual Islamisation approach, some Palestinian Brothers left and formed the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine

The Islamic Jihad broke the Brotherhood's long-standing monopoly over "Palestinian Islamism." The group disassociated itself from the gradualism of the Brotherhood and presented a novel alternative of "revolutionary Islam," combining the "Quran and the Kalashnikov," by emphasising resistance and battle against Israel.³

The rise of the Islamic Jihad intensified internal discussions within the Brotherhood, the possibility of engaging in active confrontation lingered in the air.

By 1985, they were convinced that a change of strategy was necessary, but the actual execution date remained undecided.⁴ That pivotal moment came in December 1987 with the First Intifada. On December 11, 1987, a few days after the eruption of the popular uprising, a statement announcing the creation of the new organization—or, more accurately, the conversion of the pre-existing Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood into a new movement: Hamas.⁵ Over the next few years, Hamas strengthened its position on several fronts, including student and professional associations, mosques,

social networks, but equally and most notably the resistance strategy against Israel.

Hamas' political and ideological stances about Palestine and the fight against Israel were outlined in numerous documents and declarations. It stated, first and foremost, that its ultimate goal: the liberation of Palestine between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. It outlined that the only way to accomplish this was by armed resistance and Jihad. Any peace proposals—including the two-state solution—were to be rejected because they jeopardize the territorial integrity of historic Palestine, a “Islamic endowment” that no one has the right to cede.⁶ Nearly all of these stances were at odds with the PLO's, which—faced with geographical isolation after it had been expelled to Tunisia and growing political isolation as the Arab nationalist movements and regimes declined or collapsed—openly endorsed the two-state solution in 1988 and stated that it would be achieved through diplomacy and peace negotiations.

Oslo

The PLO was further weakened when the first American war against Iraq ended with the destruction of the only remaining military power on the Arab side that could challenge Israel. In 1991, the PLO joined the so-called peace process initiated in Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, on the condition of “renouncing terrorism” (aka, armed struggle). The PLO signed the Oslo Accords in September 1993, leaving behind its armed struggle strategy and hoping that peace talks would lead to a Palestinian state. In accordance to Oslo Accords “interim” five-year period, a Palestinian Authority (PA) was established in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, that was supposed to be the nucleus of a Palestinian state established in 1999 marking the “permanent” part of the Accords.

Hamas rejected the Oslo process, stressing that the Accords represented a capitulation to the Zionist project by recognizing Israel on 78 percent of the historic land of Palestine. Next to Hamas there were other Palestinian factions that also rejected the Oslo Accords,

including the Islamic Jihad Movement and the main leftist groups. All formed an alliance against Oslo that was known then as “The Ten Faction,” principally under Hamas’ leadership. This alliance that combined Islamists, Marxist and nationalist Palestinian faction reflected a new chapter in the political life of the Islamists, where Hamas’ growing standing and leading position was acknowledged by almost all Palestinian factions. Equally important, the real and perceived dangers that Oslo Accords had brought lead the Ten Factions to prioritize shared political positions over ideological differences.

Instead of bringing about a Palestinian state, the Oslo Accords gave Israel the time and political cover to deepen and expand its occupation and settlements. Internationally, Israel exploited the new “peace” atmosphere and established relations with many countries under the claim that the Palestine cause was on its way to resolution. On the ground however, the Palestinian Authority (PA) grew into a paralyzed and limited body that was seen by many Palestinians as a functionary of the Israeli occupation. Between 1993 and 2006, the continuous failure on the side of the PLO and the PA to break with the infrastructure imposed by the Oslo process, despite the failure of the state-building process, where resistance was abandoned ran in tandem with Hamas’ and its resistance continued amassing more support and standing among the Palestinians.

In 2005, the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decided, unilaterally, to dismantle the Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and withdraw his army, partly in response to the intensified military attacks from Hamas and other resistance groups. But largely, the withdrawal was driven by bigger strategic goals, the first was to consolidate Israel’s control over settlements in the West Bank, as part of the so-called Land of Israel. The withdrawal aimed to gain in return pledges from the American president George W. Bush on rejecting the right of return to the Palestinians. Then comes the idea of generating potential conditions that would push the Gaza Strip (and Hamas) to break away from the West Bank. By that time, Hamas’ military force had become stronger while the PA security forces were

disorganized and competed against each other. By leaving the Gaza Strip without enabling the PA to competently control the security there, the seeds for chaos and future divide were sowed. If such a divide was created and well fed well, it would prevent the emergence of a Palestinian contagious state, with the blame for failure placed on the Palestinians and their division.

Hamas' election victory

The year 2006 brought about another dramatic turning point for Hamas and the Palestinians at large, as Hamas ran for the Legislative Council's elections and won them. It was a surprising decision and a more surprising victory. Participating in elections for a body that was an integral part of the Oslo system that Hamas rejected all along, raised questions and criticism of Hamas.

Hamas ran for those elections to achieve two main objectives. The first was to strategically circumvent the targeting of the movement by the so-called "war on terror" campaign led by former US President George W. Bush. This campaign began with the direct invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11, followed by the invasion of Iraq in 2003. It expanded to include a list of countries and organizations that the United States (and Israel) would pursue, including Hamas. In those times, the Palestinian Authority, under American and Israeli pressure, declared that it would join the American war on terror, potentially sparking further conflict between the PA and Hamas.

Simultaneously, and to legitimize America's wars in the region and globally, Bush launched what was known as the Middle East Partnership Initiative with the claim of democratizing the region, stressing that the war on terror was part of a bigger project that aimed to bring democracy to Arab countries. Within this context, Hamas' participation in the Palestinian elections intended to protect the movement from the looming crackdown and present itself as a democratic political entity integrated within the Palestinian system, and as such would undermine its terrorist designation and be grouped with other extremist organizations. Thus, Hamas used the

“campaign to promote democracy” to dodge the other campaign on terror.

Hamas went into the elections confident they would secure a strong position in the Palestinian legislature that would allow it to influence Palestinian decision-making by gaining a significant number of seats. It had no intention of taking on the burden of the executive authority that functions in accordance with the Oslo Accords. Of course, Hamas won the elections and found itself in an undesirable position: a resistance force as the ruling party of the PA within a framework it fundamentally rejects. In the immediate aftermath of the election, Fatah refused to concede defeat and launched a coup—with the sometimes tacit, sometimes direct support of Israel, the EU, and the US. The ensuing military clashes between Fatah and Hamas led to the current split of the occupied territory, where Fatah managed to remain in control of the West Bank and Hamas held on to its democratic mandate in the Gaza Strip alone.

Once Hamas assumed power, it found itself toothless as the Palestinian security forces remained under the control of President Mahmoud Abbas, effectively creating a two-headed power structure. American [efforts](#) at the time supported some security leaders of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza to weaken Hamas’ government, aiming to create the impression that the movement was incapable of governance. Hamas decided to strike preemptively and hit the PA security force at the center of the plan. Hamas fighters expanded their operation across the entirety of the Strip, dismissing all the security forces and imposing their military control instead.

Immediately after Hamas’ takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007, Israel intensified its military control over the Strip that continued to remain in place despite its withdrawal in 2005. Surrounding the Strip from all sides, Israel upgraded its control into a full land, air and sea blockade. Since then, the conditions of the more than two million Palestinians in the largest open-air prison on earth have continued to deteriorate. Israel’s strategies against Hamas combined suffocating the population economically to provoke internal strife against Hamas, and successive wars to weaken Hamas under the notion of “mowing

the lawn.” Those wars, in 2008/9, 2012, 2014, 2018, 2021 and 2023 (except the genocidal war after October 7), killed thousands of Palestinians, wounded and maimed tens of thousands, and rendered the Strip as unlivable place. Keeping Hamas, along with the Gaza Strip, squeezed between multiple internal and external pressures paved the road for the coming explosion. During the long years of the blockade, Hamas kept attempting to offer overtures that could bring the siege to an end. Ten years into its besieged rule, Hamas issued its “new Charter” in May 2017, where the movement stated it would accept the notion of a Palestinian state in 1967 for it seemed to attract a Palestinian consensus around it. The Israeli response to what was seen as a milestone compromise by Hamas was total rejection. The Americans and Europeans also paid no attention.

We do not have to wonder what caused the attack on 7 October. On the day of the attack, the leader of the Hamas’ military wing, al-Qassam Brigades, Mohammad al-Dhaif, gave a speech. It was mostly ignored by Western politicians and media. In the speech, he outlined the long list of Palestinians sufferings under occupation and placing those attacks in the wider context.

The Zionist entity occupied our land, expelled our people, destroyed our cities, villages and towns, and committed hundreds of massacres against the innocents. It thrashed all world conventions, human rights, international law. We warned the [Israeli] occupation leaders about the continuation of their crimes, and called upon world leaders to act and stop the crimes of the occupation, yet they didn’t move. Rather, the crimes of the occupation increased and transcends all limits, particularly in Jerusalem and against the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The incursions of the occupation troops into Al-Aqsa increased, and they desecrated the holiness of the Mosque, dragged praying women, the elderly, the children and the youth and prevented them from arriving to the mosque.

He indicated that the liberation of the Palestinian people was the ultimate goal, and the aspirations of the Palestinians of independent state lay at the top of the agenda. He also referred to the backing of UN resolutions and international law to such aspirations.

Every day they attack our people in Jerusalem, steal their houses and land. At the same time, the occupation authorities still imprison thousands of our heroes and practice against them the most brutal methods of humiliation and torture. There are hundreds of our prisoners who spent more than twenty years, and dozens from them, males and females, whose bodies were eaten by cancer and illnesses, and many of them died because of lack of medical treatment, and deliberate slow death. All our offers to undertake exchange of prisoners based on human reasons were rejected and stubbornness.

Every day, the occupation troops attack our cities, villages and towns in the West Bank and incurs damage. They attack houses of innocent people, killing and wounding and arresting. Hundreds of martyrs were killed, and more injured in this year only because of these crimes. At the same time, they confiscate thousands of donums of land, expel its owners and build in their place settlements and protect settlers letting them ransack, burn and steal ... [along with this] the crime of occupation continues in imposing the brutal blockade on our beloved [Gaza] Strip.

To this detailed outlining of the aspects of the Israeli occupation, the speech links Hamas' attacks on 7 October, justifying them as only option left after Israel's dismissal of international laws and resolutions:

Considering these relentless crimes against our people ... and its rejection to international resolutions and laws, enjoying American and Western support and international silence, we have decided to put an end to all of that.

In conclusion, it is essential to emphasize two key points. Firstly, for most Palestinians, Hamas is an integral part of their century-long national struggle for liberation and self-determination. Originating in Palestine, it emerged organically within the Palestinian context and operated within the historical boundaries of Palestine. The Palestinians support and criticize Hamas based on its performance in advancing the national cause. While many endorse its anti-Zionist and anti-colonial stance, others voice objections or criticisms, particularly concerning its religious and social-religious agenda. Hamas garners broader support during periods when its resistance efforts take precedence over other aspects. However, when the

movement overly emphasizes or imposes excessive elements of religiosity, it loses appeal within certain constituencies, notably among the national and secular segments of the Palestinian population.

Secondly, labeling Hamas as a “terrorist organization” holds little relevance for the Palestinians. Those who assert such categorizations simply lack the moral standing to apply such labels. The extensive brutal history of the US, Israel, and Europe is marked by the terrorizing of peoples, countries, and at times, entire continents. Throughout its political existence, Hamas has refrained from engaging in military activities beyond the borders of Palestine or directing its resistance towards targets other than Israeli ones, in contrast to its designation as a terrorist organization. While Hamas, like other liberation movements, have surely made mistakes, these shortcomings are unlikely to displace its firmly established position among Palestinians as a resistance movement.

What was Hamas thinking?

Tareq Baconi

22 November 2023

This article was originally published on ForeignPolicy.com on November 22, 2023 and is republished here with permission.

Hamas's 7 October attack on Israel has initiated an unpredictable chain of events, and it is too early to determine how the attack might shape the future course of the struggle for Palestinian liberation. The vast destruction of the Gaza Strip and the horrifying loss of civilian life are a painful blow to Palestinians, reminiscent of the Nakba of 1948. Yet, simultaneously, the illusion that the Palestinian question can be swept aside while Israeli apartheid persists has been shattered, and Palestine is back at the top of the global agenda—with growing recognition that it must be addressed, even if the brutal massacres of 7 October have polarized the debate around it.

Since 2007, Hamas's presence in the occupied territories has been restricted to the Gaza Strip, where the movement has been effectively contained through the use of a hermetic blockade that collectively imprisoned Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians. In its containment, Hamas was stuck in what I have termed a "violent equilibrium," whereby military force emerged as a means for negotiating concessions between Hamas and Israel. The former uses

missiles and other tactics to compel Israel to ease restrictions on the blockade, while the latter responds with overwhelming force to build deterrence and secure “calm” in the areas around the Gaza Strip. Through this violence, both entities operated within a framework whereby Hamas could maintain its role as a governing authority in Gaza even under a blockade that enacts daily structural violence against Palestinians.

Beginning in 2018, Hamas began experimenting with different means of changing this equilibrium. One was through its decision to allow for popular protests against Israel’s domination to take place. The Great March of Return in 2018 was one of the most extensive examples of Palestinian popular mobilization. The protest emerged as a civil society-led effort that was given permission, supported, and ultimately managed by a committee comprising the various political parties in Gaza, including Hamas. As a governing authority, Hamas provided much of the infrastructure necessary for the mobilization, such as buses to transport activists. This was a stark departure from the means with which Hamas traditionally challenged the blockade.

Another shift in the equilibrium came a few years later, in 2021, when Hamas leveraged its military arsenal to retaliate against Israeli aggression in Jerusalem. In the lead-up to Hamas’s rocket fire, Israel had been actively working to expel families in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood from their homes to make room for Jewish settlers. This initiated widespread mobilization of Palestinians across the land of historic Palestine. The Israeli state responded with force and mass arrests against protests that were peaceful and included prayers around Al-Aqsa Mosque. Israel’s efforts to disrupt the protests and push forward with its colonization of East Jerusalem triggered Hamas to respond with rocket fire.

These examples demonstrate efforts by Hamas to go on the offensive and expand its resistance to encompass demands that extend beyond the lifting of the blockade. Such positioning implies an objective to act as a military power that comes to the defense of Palestinians against Israeli colonial violence beyond the Gaza Strip. Underpinning these tactics was a clear strategic shift by the

movement to transition away from acquiescence to its containment to a more explicit challenge of Israeli domination—and thereby overturn the equilibrium that had become entrenched over the course of sixteen years.

This shift is in keeping with Hamas's historical evolution as a movement that has relied on both armed and unarmed resistance, in ebbs and flows, to challenge Israel's occupation and to push for core demands of the Palestinian struggle, including the right of return, which was central in the 2018 protests. (Hamas's history is replete with [examples](#) in which it read the political context around it and, on the level of the movement's leadership, altered the strategic direction of the organization, with clear instructions for the military wing to either escalate or de-escalate.)

The recent shift to all-out violence is also in keeping with the movement's understanding of the role of armed resistance as a negotiating tactic—one that the movement has historically relied on to force concessions from Israel.

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The 7 October attack can be seen as the next logical step for a movement chafing against its containment. Some analysts have described Hamas's move as suicidal, given Israel's reaction, or irresponsible, given the death toll it has led to among Palestinians. Whether or not either of these characterizations is accurate depends on an analysis of what options Hamas had and on how the dust settles. There is no doubt, however, that the attack itself was a decisive rupture—one that is, in retrospect, clearly the culmination of all the changes that the movement had been experimenting with.

The strategic shift entailed moving from the limited use of rocket fire to negotiate with Israel into a full-throttled military offensive aimed at disrupting its containment, specifically, and the Israeli assumption that it could maintain an apartheid system with impunity.

There is little doubt that the bloody 7 October attack exceeded Hamas's expectations and that the scale of the massacres in Israel has galvanized Israeli and international opinion in ways that Hamas

may not have entirely anticipated. Any significant military operation that Hamas conducted with any degree of success—targeting military bases near the Gaza-Israel fence area and securing a significant number of Israeli combatants—would have similarly shattered the paradigm of the blockade and elicited a devastating Israeli response.

Yet the killing of civilians on this scale—whether or not Hamas’s leadership had actively pushed and prepared for this level of bloodshed—has galvanized a ferocious Israeli response in Gaza, enabled by the *carte blanche* granted to the Israeli government by most Western leaders. Some [scholars](#) of genocide have [argued that](#) the Israeli campaign [amounts](#) to ethnic cleansing and intent to commit genocide.

It is counterfactual to argue whether or not these responses would have taken place had no civilians been killed or kidnapped. Either way, Hamas’s military offensive and the mass violence that followed have irreversibly shaped the nature of the response against Palestinians in Gaza.

From a strictly military-strategic perspective, prior to the attack the only option other than the use of force available to Hamas was to remain constricted within the framework of the blockade, while Israeli settlers expanded their rampaging violence in the West Bank, Israeli politicians disrupted the status quo around Jerusalem’s Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount complex, and Israel got rewarded with U.S. visa waiver programs and regional normalization agreements.

Within this climate, the options Hamas had were to acquiesce to the continued assumption that Palestinians had been effectively defeated and to remain confined and strangulated within their various Bantustans—parcels of discontinuous land resembling the apartheid-era South African “homelands” of the same name, where many disenfranchised urban Black people were relocated and governed by supposedly independent local puppet regimes while a white supremacist government continued to exert military control.

The choice, as Hamas saw it, was between dying a slow death—as many in Gaza say—and fundamentally disrupting the entire equation.

It is certainly the case that cornering Hamas—and Palestinians more broadly—into a situation whereby only a powerful military attack of this form emerges as the preferred option for the movement could have been avoided. Even prior to Hamas’s containment, and specifically since the Second Intifada, there were many opportunities for diplomatic and political engagement with it.

Hamas had de facto acquiesced between 2005 and 2007 to a political program that may, if leveraged correctly, have led to the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel and the dismantling of the occupation. This was a position that the movement put forward as part of its election victory in 2006 and subsequent entry into the Palestinian Authority. Later, this position was formalized in 2017 in the movement’s amended charter, which called for the creation of a Palestinian state on the 1967 line, without offering formal recognition to the state of Israel.

The Israeli and American refusal to engage with any of the movement’s political concessions since then, while Israel was consistently given a free pass to maintain its violent occupation and ongoing colonization of Palestinian land, undermined any faith Hamas may have harbored regarding the international community’s interest in holding Israel to account or enabling Palestinians to establish a state on a portion of historic Palestine.

Much has been written on the lost opportunities of dealing with Hamas diplomatically. The events that followed the movement’s democratic election in 2006 were premised on a refusal to engage with Hamas’s political platform, with Israel and the US government preferring to pursue [regime change](#) and to deal with Hamas militarily, choosing to limit their engagement on the Palestinian file with the PA.

Since then, Israel has supported and enabled Hamas to exist as a governing authority while simultaneously demonizing the movement as a terrorist organization, a paradox that enabled the state to justify the collective punishment inherent in the blockade of the Gaza Strip. This was explicitly the chosen strategy of successive governments under Benjamin Netanyahu, who openly spoke about the benefits to Israel of pursuing a [“separation policy”](#) between the West Bank and

the Gaza Strip as a means of [undermining prospects](#) for Palestinian statehood.

In the absence of any real diplomatic prospects for Hamas, its choices were either slow strangulation as the governing authority of the Gaza Strip, while Israel became ingratiated with Arab regimes that had all but abandoned the Palestinian cause, or a decisive blow that could fundamentally disrupt the assumption that Palestinians were defeated and subservient and that Israel could maintain its apartheid regime cost-free.

That Hamas opted for the latter suggests that it is behaving strategically and remains committed to the belief that it is playing a long game. By this logic, even if Hamas's military wing were entirely destroyed or expelled, the movement has already secured a victory in revealing the weakness and fragility of Israel's military, which can be exploited in the future through a reconstituted Hamas or through another future military formation equally committed to armed resistance as a means of liberation. In other words, the disruption itself becomes a space for alternative possibilities to emerge, whereas, prior to that, there was only the calcified certainty of continued Palestinian oppression.

This belief in a long game means that regardless of what happens in the short- to medium-term future, even with the horrifying loss of civilian life in Gaza, Hamas has disrupted not only the structure of its containment but the entire notion that Palestinians can be siloed into Bantustans and forgotten without Israelis incurring any cost. That disruption is existential for Israel, and, supported by Western allies, the state believes that the only way to survive this blow is through decimating Hamas.

Israel will fail—and is already failing—in attaining that objective. Regardless of how the battles against Hamas in Gaza unfold now, the movement can already claim to have emerged victorious in the long term because it irreversibly shattered the false sense of security Israelis had cloaked themselves in, despite all attempts to present Israel as invincible and impenetrable.

But even in the immediate battle taking place in Gaza now, prospects for an Israeli victory are slim. As in any asymmetric struggle, the guerrilla fighters merely have to not lose to emerge victorious, whereas the powerful state will lose if it does not achieve its overarching goals. And the goal of decimating Hamas as a movement is as vague as it is unachievable. For one thing, the movement is much bigger than its military wing. It is a movement with a vast social infrastructure, connected to many Palestinians who are unaffiliated with either the movement's political or military platforms.

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At its core, Hamas is an Islamist movement that has its roots in the regional branches of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is [connected](#) to health care infrastructure and educational facilities and charities. If, by decimating Hamas, Western and Israeli leaders are calling for the killing of any Palestinian who espouses any form of Islamist ideology, then that is nothing less than a genocidal call against the Palestinian people, and it should be understood as such.

If, however, the goal is to destroy the movement's military infrastructure, then this goal is likely to fail in one key way. The breaking apart of Hamas's military wing will set the stage for the emergence of other forms of organized resistance—whether within Hamas's ideological garb or otherwise—that are similarly committed to the use of armed force against Israel.

History has already taught us this much. Hamas emerged in 1987 from the embers of the PLO's historic concession, whereby throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s the PLO shifted toward conceding on the partition of Palestine by recognizing the state of Israel and renouncing the use of armed resistance in pursuit of a Palestinian state. Coinciding with that transition was the establishment of Hamas as a party that held on to the same principles the PLO had before it, couched in an Islamist ideology instead of the secular nationalist one that dominated the 1960s and 1970s.

There is a continuum of Palestinian political demands that stretch back to 1948 and before. Whether or not Hamas survives in its current incarnation is a red herring: Palestinian resistance against Israeli apartheid, armed and otherwise, will persist as long as the regime of domination continues.

At its core, this is a regime that provides more rights for Jews than Palestinians throughout the land of historic Palestine, stratifying Palestinians into different legal categories and fragmenting them geographically in order to sustain an overarching regime of domination. All the while, it prevents the internationally recognized right of allowing Palestinian refugees to return to their homes.

Israel's model of apartheid is committed to Jewish supremacy from the river to the sea—a recently maligned phrase that has [long been used](#) unapologetically by the [Israeli right](#)—while Palestinians remain as a dominated people living within the confines of that state and governed in the occupied territories through illegitimate authorities that are collaborationist in nature with the Israeli state.

To overturn this dynamic, and to undo Israel's conviction that Hamas—through its containment—could be pacified as the PA had been in the West Bank, the movement took a calculated risk with its operation, given that it realistically expected its military infrastructure would be severely weakened in the anticipated retaliation. But in the absence of any willingness by the international community to engage with Palestinians outside of such armed tactics, and given Israel's ongoing and increasingly violent colonialism, this shift toward an expansive military operation on Hamas's part was ultimately inevitable.

There is another reason underpinning Hamas's calculus, and that is its ambivalence toward governance. Hamas was shackled by its role as a governing authority in the Gaza Strip. When the party ran for elections in 2006, it was with no small degree of organizational conflict about taking on a governing role or even participating in the PA.

Hamas leaders articulated that rather than accepting the limitations of governance under occupation, as Fatah had done through the Oslo Accords, the movement was intent on using its

election victory to revolutionize the Palestinian political establishment. It asserted its capacity to do that by noting that, through its response to the Second Intifada, Israel had decimated the Palestinian body politic and rendered both the PA and the Oslo Accords obsolete.

Hamas spoke about the need to build a society of resistance, an economy of resistance, an ideology of resistance, through the very body of the PA—and to use this body as a steppingstone into the PLO, from where it could lead alongside other political factions on setting a vision for the liberation of Palestine, and for representing Palestinians in their entirety, beyond those in the occupied territories.

Its election victory, as I argue in [my book](#), *Hamas Contained*, was meant to be revolutionary toward, rather than accepting of, the status quo. With no real prospects for statehood, Hamas understood that focus on governance and administration meant beautifying a Bantustan within Israel's apartheid system, that there would be no real prospect for liberation or sovereignty, and that the only path forward was enhancing quality of life while remaining subservient to the occupation. That is indeed the PA's model in the West Bank, and it would have been a more extreme version of that in the Gaza Strip.

With the successful Western-backed coup against Hamas—which began shortly after Hamas's election victory and culminated in a civil war between Hamas and Fatah in 2007—for some time it looked as if the movement's governance in Gaza had pacified it to the extent that its revolutionary ideals had been lost. The lengthy period of containment suggested that the movement may have become entrapped in its own electoral success and shackled by its governance responsibilities—or, in other words, pacified. The violent attack on 7 October has clearly shown that the movement, rather, had been using this time precisely to revolutionize the political body, as it had always intended to do.

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All this still does not mean that Hamas's strategic shift will be deemed successful in the long run. Hamas's violent disruption of the status

quo might well have provided Israel with an opportunity to carry out another Nakba. This might result in a regional conflagration or deal Palestinians a blow that could take a generation to recover from.

What is certain, however, is that there is no return to what existed before. Yet this is precisely what Israeli, US, and other Western leaders and diplomats are preparing for. Already, the discussion has turned to the [day after](#), even in the absence of a cease-fire having been formalized.

All indications point to a US-Israeli decision to try to replicate in the Gaza Strip the successful model—in their view—of Palestinian collaborationist rule that exists in the West Bank. Rather than engaging in a process whereby Palestinians have the opportunity to choose representative leaders who could govern them, Israel and the United States are replaying an age-old approach of choosing compliant leaders who can do their bidding and subdue the Palestinians under Israeli hegemony.

This is being done under the banner of supposedly unifying the Palestinian territories, with both parties conveniently erasing their own complicity in facilitating this disunity until now. The goal for both is not reunification but the pursuit of acquiescent rule: the creation of a governing structure in which a pliant leadership governs civil needs under an overarching structure of Israeli military domination.

Such a goal has to contend with Gaza's historic reality as a hotbed of resistance to Israeli apartheid, given that the majority of Gaza's inhabitants are refugees seeking the return to their homes in what is now Israel. To facilitate the installation of an authority chosen by Israel and the United States requires nothing less than razing Gaza and killing its inhabitants—the policy that is now unfolding.

Aside from the moral and legal implications of this are the practical ones. It is difficult to envision any Palestinian leader or governing structure that will take over responsibility for the Gaza Strip after Israel destroys it, as they will be seen as having been ushered there on the backs of Israeli tanks. Such leaders will have even less legitimacy than the PA has in the West Bank today, which is hard to imagine.

Such an approach might buy some time. It might produce the semblance of a status quo and a degree of stabilization. But if any lesson must be garnered from Oct. 7, it is that this will not be lasting or sustainable. Any chosen governing entity will not be able to guarantee security for any Israeli as long as apartheid exists and any Palestinian government installed in Gaza will rightly be seen as illegitimate and collaborationist.

However the “day after” is packaged, it will fail unless it comes with holding Israel accountable and dismantling its regime of apartheid, and it will be clear to all Palestinians that it is just another Bantustan solution, cloaked either as humanitarianism or a renewed commitment to a two-state solution.

In this sense, Hamas has indeed dealt a fatal blow to Israel’s fantasy that it could continue its occupation and blockade indefinitely. It is yet unclear, however, if Israeli political leaders—beyond their vengeful violence—have managed to heed this lesson. But grassroots organizers, Hamas’s allies, and other political and military formations have.

Whatever comes next, and however Hamas’s legacy will be written, it’s clear that it is the movement that burst the delusion that Israel and its allies have held on to for far too long.

Exchange rate

Eyal Weizman

2 November 2023

This article was first published by the London Review of Books and is republished here with permission.

In the spring of 1956, eight years into the Nakba, a group of Palestinian fedayeen crossed the plowed ditch that was all that separated Gaza from the state of Israel. On one side of the ditch were 300,000 Palestinians, 200,000 of them refugees expelled from the surrounding area; on the other were a handful of new Israeli settlements. The Palestinian fighters attempted to enter the kibbutz of Nahal Oz, killing Roi Rotberg, a security officer. They took his body back with them to Gaza, but returned it after the UN intervened. Moshe Dayan, then Israel's chief of the general staff, happened to be in the settlement for a wedding and asked to give the eulogy at Rotberg's funeral the following evening. Speaking of the men who killed Rotberg he asked: "Why should we complain of their hatred for us? Eight years they sat in the refugee camps of Gaza, and saw in front of their eyes how we turned the lands and the villages in which they and their forefathers once dwelled into our homeland." It was a recognition of what Palestinians had lost that contemporary Israeli politicians can no longer afford to express. But Dayan wasn't

advocating the right of return: he ended his speech by arguing that Israelis had to prepare themselves for a permanent and bitter war, which would have a major role for what Israel called “frontier settlements.”

Over the years, the plowed ditch turned into a complex system of fortifications—a 300-meter buffer zone, where more than 200 Palestinian demonstrators were shot and killed in 2018–19 and thousands more injured, several layers of razor-wire fences, concrete walls extending underground, remote-control machine guns—and surveillance equipment including watchtowers, CCTV, radar sensors and spy balloons. Beyond this are a series of military bases, some of them near or inside the civilian settlements that form what’s known as the Gaza Envelope. On 7 October, in a coordinated attack, Hamas struck at all the elements of this interlinked system. Nahal Oz, the closest settlement to the fence, was one of the attack’s focal points. The term “Nahal” refers to the military unit that established the frontier settlements. Nahal settlements started life as military outposts and were supposed to turn into civilian villages, mostly of the kibbutz type. But the transformation is never complete, and some residents are expected to double as defenders when the time comes.

“Absentee land” was the tabula rasa on which Israeli planners drafted the blueprint of the Zionist settler project after the expulsions of 1948. Its chief architect was Arie Sharon, a graduate of the Bauhaus, who studied under Walter Gropius and Hannes Meyer before moving to Palestine in 1931, where he built housing estates, workers’ co-operatives, hospitals and cinemas. When the state of Israel was established, David Ben-Gurion made him head of the Government Planning Department. In *The Object of Zionism* (2018) the architectural historian Zvi Efrat explained that, though Sharon’s master plan was based on the latest principles of modernist design, it had several other aims: to provide homes for the waves of immigrants who had arrived after the Second World War, to move Jewish populations from the center to the periphery, to secure the frontier and to occupy territory in order to make the return of refugees more difficult.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Sharon's master plan and its successors led to the building in the 'frontier zones', then defined as roughly 40 percent of the country, of regional hubs or 'development towns' which served a constellation of agrarian settlements. These development towns were meant to house Jewish immigrants from North Africa—the Arab Jews—who would be proletarianised into factory workers. The agrarian settlements of the kibbutz and moshav type were meant for the pioneering members of the labor movement, mainly Eastern Europeans. The land belonging to the Palestinian villages of Dayr Sunayd, Simsim, Najd, Huj, Al Huhrraqa, Al Zurai'y, Abu Sitta, Wuhaidat, and to the Tarabin and Hanajre Bedouin tribes, was built over by the development towns Sderot and Ofakim and the kibbutzim of Be'eri, Re'im, Mefalsim, Kissufim and Erez. All of these settlements were targeted on 7 October.

Following Israel's occupation in 1967, the government established settlements between the main Palestinian population centers in Gaza itself. The largest was Gush Katif, near Rafah on the Egyptian border; in total, Israeli colonies covered 20 percent of Gaza's territory. In the early 1980s the area in and around Gaza also absorbed many Israeli settlers evacuated from Sinai after the peace accord with Egypt. The first fence around the territory was built between 1994 and 1996—a time seen as the height of the 'peace process'. Gaza was now being isolated from the rest of the world. When, in response to Palestinian resistance, Israel's Gaza colonies were dismantled in 2005, some of the evacuees chose to relocate to settlements close to Gaza's borders. A second, more advanced fencing system was completed shortly after. In 2007, a year after Hamas took power in Gaza, Israel began its full-scale siege, controlling and limiting incoming flows of life-sustaining provisions such as food, medicine, electricity and petrol. The Israeli army calibrates the privation to a level that brings life in Gaza to an almost complete standstill. Together with a series of bombing campaigns, which according to the UN resulted in 3500 Palestinian deaths between 2008 and September this year, the siege has brought humanitarian disaster on an unprecedented scale: civil institutions, hospitals, water and hygiene systems are barely able to

function, with electricity available for only around half the day. Almost half of Gaza's population is unemployed and more than 80 percent rely on aid to meet basic needs.

The Israeli government offers generous tax breaks (a 20 percent reduction in income tax, for example) to residents of the settlements around Gaza, many of which are strung along a road a few kilometers from the fence line and running parallel to it. The Gaza Envelope contains fifty-eight settlements within 10km of the border, with 70,000 inhabitants. In the seventeen years since Hamas took power, despite sporadic Palestinian rocket and mortar fire, as well as Israeli bombardment of the territory a few miles away, the number of settlers has kept growing. Rising property prices in the Tel Aviv area, and the region's open hills (real estate agents call it the 'Tuscany of the Northern Negev'), have led to an influx of middle-class settlers. Conditions on the other side of the fence have deteriorated in inverse proportion to the region's growing prosperity. The settlements are a central part of the system of enclosure imposed on Gaza, but their inhabitants tend to differ from the religious settlers of the West Bank. Demonstrating the partial blindness of the Israeli left, some settlers in the Negev are involved in the peace movement.

On 7 October, Hamas fighters broke through the interlinked elements of the siege network. Snipers shot at the cameras that overlook the no-go zone. They dropped grenades on the communication towers. Barrages of rockets saturated the radar space. Rather than tunneling under the fences, the fighters approached on the ground. The Israeli observers either failed to see them, or couldn't quickly communicate what they saw. The fighters blew or cut open a few dozen holes in the fence. Palestinian bulldozers widened the breaches. Some Hamas fighters used paragliders to cross the border. More than a thousand stormed the military bases. The Israeli army, blinded and muted, was left without a clear picture of the battlefield and detachments took hours to arrive. Unbelievable images appeared online. Palestinian teenagers followed the fighters on bikes or horses into land they may have

heard about from their grandparents but was now transformed beyond recognition.

After the bases came the settlements, and the massacres that no previous violence can justify. Families were burned or shot in their homes. In total, the fighters killed about 1200 civilians and soldiers. Two hundred people were captured and taken to Gaza. Israel has spent decades blurring the line between the civilian and military functions of the settlements, but now the line has been blurred in ways never intended by the Israeli government. The civilian inhabitants co-opted into becoming part of the living wall of the Gaza Envelope got the worst of both worlds. They couldn't defend themselves like soldiers, and they weren't protected like civilians.

The images of the devastated settlements provided the Israeli army with a free pass from the international community, and lifted whatever restraint may have held it back in previous rounds. Israeli politicians called for revenge in explicit, annihilationist language. Commentators said Gaza should be "wiped off the face of the Earth," and "It's time for Nakba 2." Revital Gottlieb, a Likud member of the Knesset, tweeted: "Bring down buildings!! Bomb without distinction!! Stop with this impotence. You have ability. There is worldwide legitimacy! Flatten Gaza. Without mercy!"

However the conflict ends, with or without Hamas in power (and I bet on the former), Israel won't be able to avoid negotiating over the exchange of prisoners. For Hamas, the starting point will be the six thousand Palestinians currently in Israeli prisons, many of them held in administrative detention without trial. The capture of Israelis has had a central place in the Palestinian armed struggle throughout the seventy-five years of conflict. By obtaining hostages the PLO and other groups aimed to force Israel into an implicit recognition of Palestinian nationhood. The Israeli position in the 1960s was to deny that there was such a thing as a Palestinian people, which meant that it was logically impossible to recognize the PLO as their legitimate representative. The denial also meant that there was no need to recognize Palestinian fighters as legitimate combatants under international law, and therefore no need to grant them POW status in

line with the Geneva Conventions. Captured Palestinians were held in a legal limbo, much like the 'unlawful combatants' of the post-9/11 era.

In July 1968, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked an El-Al flight and landed it in Algeria, inaugurating a series of hijackings whose explicit aim was the release of Palestinian prisoners. The Algeria incident led to twenty-two Israeli hostages being exchanged for sixteen Palestinian prisoners, though the Israeli government denied that there had been a deal at all. Sixteen for twenty-two: such an exchange rate would not hold for long. In September 1982, after Israel's invasion of Lebanon, Ahmed Jibril's PFLP-General Command captured three IDF soldiers; three years later, in what was known as the Jibril agreement, Israel and the PFLP-GC finally reached a prisoner-swap deal: three soldiers for 1150 Palestinian prisoners. In the 2011 deal to release Gilad Shalit, captured by Hamas in 2006, the exchange rate was even more favorable to the Palestinians: 1027 prisoners for a single Israeli soldier. In anticipation of being forced to make many more such deals, Israel began arbitrarily to arrest more Palestinians, including minors, to increase its assets for future exchange. It also kept the bodies of Palestinian fighters, to be returned as part of any exchange. All of this reinforces the perception that the life of one of the colonizers is worth a thousand times more than the lives of the colonized. This calculation inevitably brings to mind the history of human trading. But here the exchange rate is mobilized by the Palestinian resistance to invert the deep structural colonial asymmetry.

Different states deal with the capture of their soldiers and citizens in different ways. The Europeans and Japanese usually engage in secret prisoner exchanges or negotiate ransoms. The US and UK claim in public that they don't negotiate or comply with captors' demands, and although they haven't always strictly adhered to this, they have favored inaction and silence when a rescue operation has seemed impossible. This is seen as the 'lesser evil' and is part of what military game theorists call the "repeated game": every action is

evaluated in relation to its possible long-term consequences, with the benefits of securing a prisoner's release weighed against the chance that the exchange will result in more soldiers or civilians being captured in future.

When any Israeli is captured, their family, friends and supporters take to the streets to campaign for their release. Most often, the government acquiesces and makes a deal. The Israeli army usually advises the government against exchange deals, pointing to the security risk posed by released captives, especially senior commanders, and to the likelihood that it will encourage more hostage-taking by Palestinian fighters. Yahya Sinwar, who is now the leader of Hamas, was released in the Shalit deal. A significant civil campaign against such exchanges was led by the religious settler movement Gush Emunim, which saw them as a manifestation of the fragility of Israel's "secular-liberal" society.

In 1986, in the wake of the Jibril deal, the Israeli army issued the controversial Hannibal Directive, a secret operational order designed to be invoked on the capture of an Israeli soldier by an irregular armed force. The military has denied this interpretation, but it was understood by Israeli soldiers as a license to kill a comrade before they were taken prisoner. In 1999, Shaul Mofaz, the then chief of the general staff, explained the policy: "With all the pain that saying this entails, an abducted soldier, in contrast to a soldier who has been killed, is a national problem." Although the military claimed that the directive's name was randomly selected by a computer program, it is an apt one. The Carthaginian general Hannibal Barca killed himself in 181bc in order not to fall into Roman hands. The Romans had shown similar resolve thirty years earlier: when Hannibal tried to secure a ransom for the soldiers he had captured in his victory at Cannae, the Senate, after a heated debate, refused and the prisoners were executed.

On 1 August 2014, during the offensive on Gaza known as Operation Protective Edge, Palestinian fighters captured an IDF soldier near Rafah, and the Hannibal Directive came into effect. The air force bombed the tunnel system into which the soldier had been

taken and 135 Palestinian civilians, including entire families, were killed in the bombardment. The army has since canceled the directive. But with the current indiscriminate bombing of Gaza, the government seems not only to be bringing unprecedented destruction on the people of Gaza but to be returning to the principle of preferring dead captives to a deal. Bezalel Smotrich, Israel's finance minister, has called for Hamas to be hit 'mercilessly, without taking into serious consideration the matter of the captives'. Gilad Erdan, Israel's ambassador to the UN, has said that the hostages 'would not prevent us from doing what we need to do'. But in this war the fate of the civilians in Gaza and the captured Israelis is closely entangled, as is that of both peoples.

15

The end of colonial government

Samera Esmeir

9 December 2023

Danger looms heavy over Palestine. Israel's production of the end times in Gaza is an enactment and a rehearsal, an attempted prefiguration of another end to come¹. If it is to be resisted, this danger must be diagnosed and named. What to say of this settler-colonial drive to incessantly start from scratch, to repeatedly empty the land of its Palestinian inhabitants, to insistently wish them out of existence, to tenaciously preempt the revolts of the colonized, nay, to prevent the thought of the thought of revolt? What does this relentless destruction disclose about the present and the future danger facing Palestinians from the river to the sea? And how does one mark this danger without reproducing its terms, affirming its destruction, indeed, taking on the position of the genocided?

The news media designation "the Israel-Gaza war" does not allow for comprehending this danger, but neither do the more critical formulations pointing to state violence, apartheid, and even genocide. These are all attempts, laudable and significant, at describing and opposing Israel's subjugating and exterminating drive unleashed against the Palestinians. But even these formulations fall short of diagnosing the repetitive violation of an already violated land and people, the ongoing destruction of a life fashioned from the ruins of

earlier colonial desolations, the reprise of military raids in the hospitals that house the wounded from the same raids, and the insistence on transforming the largest open-air prison in the world into an open-air death camp. By centering the colonial mass killing of civilians and the apartheid-based government of the remaining living, these formulations do not catch up with the repetitive, cyclical rhythm of Israel's obliteration machinery. Attention to this rhythm reveals Israel's desire to wish Palestinians out of political and historical existence, to eradicate their historically cultivated way of life, to render them soulless bodies, to obliterate the conditions of the Palestinian inhabitation of the land—in short, the desire *not to govern Palestinians*.

The looming danger is most explicit, accelerated, and condensed in Gaza. There, Israel's slaughter and carnage are rampant. But there, too, it is futile to invoke (however repeatedly) ideals of humanity, legal norms, and peace. These ideals aggressively unmarked by any trace of catastrophe—neither the ongoing catastrophe since 1948 nor its current spiraling—can only offer distant declarations. Beautiful, pristine, untainted, and moralizing, they are too removed from the reality of the catastrophe to sense, diagnose, respond, and resist its ongoing cruelty and current intensification. Their removal further contributes to the catastrophe's unchecked augmentation: the more excessive the calamity, the more horrible the horror, the more the values of humanity are breached—and the more this humanity distances itself from obliteration. Humanity's inoculation from the catastrophe undergirds the logic of the recent “humanitarian pause” (24 November to 1 December 2023). Humanity interrupted the avalanche of suffering in Gaza to nourish the Palestinian inhabitants, only to withdraw so that obliteration could resume. The pause keeps the calendars of humanitarianism and obliteration separate; the former is unrelated to the latter and incapable of resisting it.

To diagnose the looming danger, a sense, however intricate, of the details of the catastrophe in Gaza is necessary. These details fade when the images and reports from Gaza have become indistinguishable, even consistent and totalizing. But this totalization

is not the outcome of the catastrophe as much as its *modus operandi*: catastrophizing totalizes to paralyze. Against this totalization, we may wish to find political instruction not in the hallowed ideals of an international order but in the details of the catastrophe: children who have no surviving family members, mothers who have lost their children, men who have ceased to be reliable witnesses and victims, elders reliving past forced displacements, injured girls dying from pain, bodies wrapped in bags, schools turned shelters and then death quarters, mass graves, dismembered limbs, disintegrated buildings, emptied neighborhoods, leveled streets, wrecked schools, fallen trees, squashed (infra)structures, flattened surfaces, banished shades, ubiquitous debris, blood that springs from the dust—land and limbs saturated with the two primary colors of destruction, gray and red. There are also the 1.7 million uprooted. Forced to move south to a yet smaller territorial stretch, many of them are murdered along routes of supposed safety while others are forced to leave behind loved ones unburied. Then there are the teachers, doctors, bakers, cooks, journalists, nurses, morticians, civil servants, volunteers, workers, and so many others; in their steadfastness and commitment to others, they have an intimate knowledge of the disaster in its collective, yet detailed, manifestations. These details tell of a danger not restricted to the killing of civilians but to the colonial desire to obliterate a place and its history, to evacuate the souls of the living, and to diminish the number of the governed. They also tell of formations of anticolonial steadfastness and resistance from the rubble.

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Distinguished legal experts call the obliteration in Gaza genocide, which is the gravest of all crimes under international law. They note that Israeli officials stated their genocidal intentions and acted upon them. If technologies of artificial intelligence have availed civilians, *en masse*, of the means for collective annihilations, advanced weaponry and military systems provided by Western states have executed the genocide of the Palestinian hostage population in Gaza.

As a legal category, [the crime of genocide](#) names actions calculated to bring about the destruction of a group as a whole or in part. It refers to the killing of members of a group, causing an injury to them, and “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.” Acts of genocide target the physical life of group members in the present. But the crime also describes attempts at exterminating or minimizing the biological future of the targeted group. Genocide includes “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group” and “forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.” Understood legally, then, acts of genocide target the life of the group in the present as well as in the future. The child is the figure extending the extermination in the present into the future. Eliminate children in the targeted group now, and you eliminate the future of this group.

Genocide is a clarifying frame for the unfolding Israeli extermination of the Palestinians. But what genocide in a restricted, legal meaning cannot fully frame are all those colonial obliterating acts that target not only the biological and physical life of a people but also houses, neighborhoods, mosques, churches, schools, streets, and finally, land—all those spaces that are not only the infrastructure of life in the present, but also the sites in which memory dwells, in which one can tell a story about her life, in which one inherits a collective life and can participate in it, in which one can perceive herself as a part of a more extended history, a past that exceeds her, and a struggle that marks her. Put differently, in centering the targeting of physical and biological life, present and future, genocide cannot frame the other target of the Israeli obliterating machine: the collective expansive existence of a resistant, resisting people, in short, its way of life, as it has been cultivated in struggle over time. Genocide as a frame is not sufficient to capture how Israel has been forcing Palestinians in Gaza, time and again, to start over and again, as though they did not exist before. The crime of genocide, despite its attention to physical, not only biological destruction, does not frame the destruction of the historicity of the Palestinians. This latter cruelty

exceeds the gravest of all crimes under international law. It is what animates the repetitive, cyclical rhythm of Israel's machinery of obliteration.

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Israel seeks to eradicate a political collective existence cultivated historically through a bond with the land. This desire is expressed through the manifold efforts to terminate whatever protections the land offers Palestinians. Lacking a state to affirm their peoplehood, and in an international order that does not recognize non-peoples and whose constitutive unit is the state, the Palestinians have cultivated their sense of collective being, including their peoplehood, through their bond to the land they inhabit and from which Israel, through military and legal means, has repeatedly expelled them. The land has provided Palestinians with a collective existence in the world. As it maintains them in the world, the land protects them from vanishing into anonymity and endows them with historicity. The danger of vanishment was confronted in 1948 when the Zionist forces conquered most of Palestine and uprooted the Palestinians to make space for Israel. In Arabic, this vanishment from the land was named the *Nakba*, the Catastrophe. It indexes a double loss: of the land of Palestine and, consequently, of Palestinians. This is why the *Nakba*, or the severing from the land, was never accepted. Acquiescing to it would have been equivalent to consenting to self-destruction. Hence, the dual position of the Palestinian subject: she is at once marked by the catastrophe and cannot but struggle against it.

It is not a coincidence, therefore, that the targets of Israel's war of obliteration include the landscape of Gaza: its natural and built environment. This project seeks to wipe out a place to which the uprooted and the displaced may return; or to disfigure it to such an extent that its inhabitants will neither recognize nor imagine it. The rubble and the dust everywhere are, therefore, not only the outcome of bombardment; they are the means by which the colonizer seeks to turn the land uninhabitable. In military jargon, the flattening of everything in North Gaza is described as the making of a "buffer

zone.” But this jargon is also misleading; it confuses means and ends. The making of an empty buffer zone is not the end of the obliterating war waged on the inhabitants of the land but the means of eliminating the bond between the people and the land. Hence, everything Palestinians managed to fashion and build, including from the ruins of previous rounds of destruction, is subject to more destruction. The obliterating desire is totalizing. Such is the horrible toll of Israel’s existence: it must not only eradicate the Palestinians from the land—by genocide or uprooting—but must also destroy the land to be able to claim it as its own securitized territory. Hence its ambition to flood the land with seawater, turning the tunnels into catacombs and contaminating the groundwater for generations.

To name this destruction “ethnic cleansing,” then, is also insufficient. It is the Palestinians’ bond with the land and the collective existence it affords them, not their ethnicity or given group identity, that fuels settler-colonial cruelty toward them. Rather than either “genocide” or “ethnic cleansing,” a return to the Arabic vocabulary used to describe the *Nakba* and the colonial acts that maintained it offer a closer sense of the ongoing catastrophe. This vocabulary centers on verbs that describe the many layers of severing the Palestinians from the land and their removal: *iqtila’* (uprooting), *tarhil* (deportation), *tahjir* (exiling), and *tashrid* (banishment). These are all also verbs that point to the colonial project to not govern Palestinians.

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The machinery dedicated to obliterating the historicity of the people and their bond with the land is not limited to Gaza. It is also at work in the West Bank. There, settlers and soldiers have been uprooting Palestinians from their agricultural land and olive orchards. In Hebron, hundreds of families have been living under lockdown, which is to say, forcibly removed from the land that gives them a horizon for inhabiting a lifeworld. None of these amputations are new or dated to 7 October, 2023. They are only now accelerated and more rampant.

Throughout the rest of the land in the West Bank, checkpoints are materializing new effects. If their conventional function had been to

militarize and hinder the free movement of Palestinians on the land and break the flow of their existence, checkpoints now are manifesting as gates that confine and enclose. Sometimes, for hours nonstop, no one is allowed to enter or leave. The checkpoint has morphed into an instrument of a mini-blockade, resonating with the deadlier siege of Gaza. Despite the stark differences, common to both is the colonial ambition to imprison the native and the assumption of a superior master guard who opens the gate and closes it at his will. As instruments of a proliferating blockade, which confine Palestinians to ever-smaller stretches of territory, checkpoints facilitate the dismemberment of the land and the people. An Israeli attempt is underway to copy the blueprint of the West Bank to Gaza by gridding an already dismembered Strip and partitioning it into a grid. Against this spatial order, in Gaza and the West Bank, and against the technologies of the blockade and the mini blockade, resistances will inevitably multiply.

The Oslo Accords divided the West Bank into three administrative zones: Area A (18 percent of the West Bank), the cities where the Palestinian Authority (PA) administers civil and security matters; Area B (22 percent), the villages where the PA administers only civil matters; and Area C (60 percent) where Israel maintains complete control. Areas A and B are enclaves; Area C is the only contiguous territory in the West Bank. Some 300,000 Palestinians live in [a restricted existence](#) in Area C, next to 400,000 Israeli settlers who roam and settle freely. In a reenactment of the 1948 Zionist depopulation of more than four hundred Palestinian villages, settlers and soldiers have, during the past two months, depopulated tens of villages from Area C. As of 2015, Israel had begun to [de facto](#) target this area for annexation to further enclose Palestinians into the A and B enclaves. Since the annexation of land requires its emptying, these recent forced displacements aim to materialize the colonial fantasy of a land without a people, to generate more land with fewer Palestinians to govern.

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Inside Israel (that is, on the land occupied in 1948, where about 17 percent of the population is Palestinian), Israel's oblitative machinery is no longer satisfied with targeting the Palestinian inhabitation of the land, which the same machinery juridically classified as Israeli territory decades ago. Instead, the colonial attack is waged against the Palestinian-in-struggle. If the catastrophe marks a Palestinian subject who cannot but struggle against it, the colonial injunction, commanded by the fascist government, seeks to repress not only the necessity of struggle but any affiliation with it. The target is the Palestinian way of life. Everywhere, there is a crackdown on any critical speech or protest. Students are suspended or expelled from their academic institutions because of their opinions. Reports about job terminations, suspensions, and demotion of workers abound. The Israeli Bar Association has threatened to take disciplinary action against lawyers who publish content on social media perceived as "incitement to violence." There is now a law that criminalizes the consumption of "terrorist publications" on social media. And there is much more. Notably, other Western democracies have deployed similar measures to suppress the Palestinian struggle. But Israel's measures against Palestinian citizens (which also extend to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem) have a distinct quality. These measures do not only violate Palestinians' freedom of expression; they also, demand that Palestinians withdraw from their place in the world by retreating to their private spaces. There, and only there, they may speak about Gaza and the necessary struggle. By contrast, in public spaces, they may only murmur and whisper.

The oblitative machinery is also evident in the effort to arm Israeli civilians and extend the state's monopoly of legitimate violence to them. New regulations drastically expand the number of Israeli citizens eligible to bear arms by relaxing requirements. Introduced by the Ministry of National Security, [the new regulations](#), says Minister Itamar Bin Gvir, will result in the short term in arming 400,000 Israeli citizens. The online application for firearms is described in [animated video](#) as friendly, accessible, and efficient. The last scene of the animated video is of Israeli civilians in what seems like an urban

setting, strolling with their firearms holstered to their waists. Since the beginning of the war of obliteration, the number of applications is in the [hundreds of thousands](#).

Arming some civilians was a [practice](#) of previous fascist governments. In Israel, fascism does not constitute a recent departure from liberal politics but is [rooted in and enabled](#) by liberal settler-colonialism. Loosening gun control assigns the task of injuring and killing Palestinians to Israeli civilians, a task currently assumed by the settlers in the West Bank. This armament of Israeli Jewish civilians gestures to a colonial regime of power no longer only based on institutional discrimination, systemic oppression, and domination of one racial group against another, or abuse of fundamental rights (all features of [the crime of apartheid](#)), but the elimination of a way of life. Gaza now condenses and announces this eliminatory desire, the West Bank experiences its excesses, and Palestinian citizens of Israel receive it as their harrowing horizon.

Killing a Palestinian does not only eliminate her immediate and singular life. It also announces her removal from the land and communicates the threat of removing others who follow in her way. The revocation of her citizenship, which belongs to the history of fascism as well, accomplishes a similar removal. Two legal tracks for the revocation of citizenship were already introduced in 2016 and earlier in 2023. There are now proposals to expand these tracks such that it would become possible to revoke the citizenship and residency of individuals [“who are found to support terrorism, incite to terrorism, or identify with terrorist acts.”](#) This expansion will remove those who were recently arrested after they expressed affiliation with the struggle of the Palestinians in Gaza.

These fascist technologies reduce the work of governing Palestinians to mere repression, pacification, and removal through killing, imprisonment, or revocation of citizenship. If they are to evade these technologies and so be reluctantly governed by Israel, Palestinians must revoke their historicity, their bond with the land, and any affiliation with struggle.

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The danger looming heavily over Palestine concerns the liquidation of Palestinian political collective existence by destroying the land, severing their relation to it, and crushing the struggle that maintains it. A marked ambition not to govern Palestinians but to wish them out of existence is becoming more evident. In Gaza, Israel wishes to efface any trace of Palestinian peoplehood from the land. In the West Bank, the colonial ambition is to confine and enclose Palestinians in small enclaves under a regime of mini blockades; there, too, it is doubtful that Israel intends to govern Palestinians, hence the need for a subcontractor, the Palestinian Authority, and the settlers, the non-governing arm of the colonial state. Then there are the Palestinian citizens of Israel, who had already lost their land and become confined to their villages and cities during the liberal stage of settler-colonialism. Since the struggle against the colonial state and the identification with other Palestinians-in-struggle are what keep their political collective existence alive, the state has mobilized its entire apparatus to crush or else remove them. The danger in all three geographies consists in hollowing out Palestinian resistance, turning Palestinians into empty vessels, evacuating their souls, eradicating their existence as a collective, and muting the liberation struggle. The blackout of Gaza, or Gaza going offline, is perhaps the umbrella signifier of this danger that is and will continue to be confronted. The international project of enclosing Palestinians to a small, confined state, subservient to the whims of the Israeli colonial state, does not eliminate this danger but further consolidates it.

This is why the crime of apartheid also falls short in describing the operations of this danger. At the core of an apartheid regime is biopolitical government, not necropolitical obliteration and removal. However discriminatory and segregating apartheid is, it still demands a relation to the living. Israel's efforts to foreclose Palestinian inhabitation of the land, from Gaza to Hebron to Haifa, point to the limits of the language of apartheid. The production of Palestinian absence from the land, not the government of Palestinians present on the land, is the ambition that facilitates Israel's existence. And if apartheid falls short of describing these aspects of the colonial

ambition, as [others](#) have also noted, so too does an imaginary of equal rights and coexistence between Jews and Arabs that does not contend with the removal of Palestinians from the historic land of Palestine.

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This danger that is looming heavy is not new; it is only the recent and cruel iteration of an older colonial, international effort to liquidate the question of Palestine. A long radical Palestinian tradition has diagnosed this danger and struggled against it. It has left us with some instructions: the more the bond with the land is severed, the more it is affirmed; the more collective inhabitation of the struggle is banned, the stronger it becomes; the more there is obliteration, the more life is fashioned from the ruins. Colonial obliteration, however cruel, is so prevalent in Palestine that anti-colonial politics has never taken any distance from it.

In the Palestinian imaginary, land is not a measured economic resource. Even land's most delimited and dismembered existence still gestures toward its abundance. This explains how the Palestinian refugees and diaspora, whom Israel bans from inhabiting Palestine, managed to develop a collective existence in struggle away from the land. At present, but also since 1948, their struggle has been pivotal to translating Palestinian anticolonial politics to the world and contributing to it. The imaginary that produces abundant land in the face of its destruction maintains collective existence in struggle. This is what answers the rhythmic iterations of Israel's machinery of destruction.

Lessons from '48

*Soheir Asaad interviewed by Riya Al'Sanah
4 December 2023*

This conversation was conducted over Zoom on 4 December, 2023 and has been edited for length and clarity. It was [first published](#) by the [Middle East Research and Information Project](#) and is republished with their permission.

RIYA: Soheir, can you speak about the general situation in Haifa, where you're based, and across '48 since 7 October?

SOHEIR: Since 7 October, we've seen unprecedented levels of silence and fear in Haifa and across '48 as well as a real lack of political action. This silence is markedly different from previous wars —the 2006 war on Lebanon, the many previous wars on Gaza. And this silence comes during what is not just another war but a period of unbelievable violence. It comes at a time when it's not only Israel that is engaging in genocidal war. We're seeing laid bare the complicity of the whole global structure and system of oppression, the whole capitalist system that profits from and experiments on the bodies of Palestinians in Gaza. At the same time, it comes in the context of unprecedented global solidarity. Gaza, faced with all this horror, is radicalizing the world. Gaza's resilience and resistance is

inspirational. It's a manifestation of what oppressed people can do, while the racism and the high levels of persecution against those standing in solidarity with Palestine is a reminder of the degree of revenge and persecution that is unleashed the moment you challenge the basis for this establishment of power. Within this whole unprecedented scene, '48 is not there.

Looking back to May 2021, during the Unity Intifada, the scene in '48 was very different. Palestinians there joined others across historic Palestine in a struggle against Israeli settler-colonialism. How do you understand both the heightened levels of mobilization we saw in 2021 and then this shift to deafening silence?

I think much of what we saw during the Unity Intifada was a manifestation of processes that were already unfolding. Namely, the official Palestinian political leadership was growing increasingly irrelevant and the modes of organizing in Palestine and '48 had gradually been shifting from political party-oriented organizing to decentralized organizing. These processes began in the decade before the Unity Intifada. What we saw in the Unity Intifada that we hadn't seen before was a different social class entering into the scene as leaders. They claimed agency over what it meant to mobilize politically in '48 and in a way redefined for us what a revolutionary moment could be. We saw the writing and distribution of anonymous political [manifestos and statements](#), the spontaneous and communally-organized delivery of food and supplies to besieged communities in Lyd (where a state of emergency was [declared](#) and a military curfew was imposed) and other acts of mutual aid across '48. And of course, we saw the [general strike](#) that was called across historic Palestine on 18 May—a popular demand from below that was subsequently adopted by official political parties.

Israel's violence and oppression in response was extreme. The military was mobilized to disperse demonstrations, soldiers fired live ammunition at crowds, curfews were imposed and there was a campaign of mass arrests. More than 2,000 people were [arrested](#). 545

were **indicted**. The vast majority of them were prosecuted using laws to combat terrorism and laws against racially-motivated crimes—often both. The terrorism charges, as Adan and Lana Tatour have recently observed, are a racialized designation intended to rationalize harsher punishments against political mobilization and criminalize resistance. Meanwhile, the charges of racially-motivated crimes play into Israel’s growing attempts to conflate anti-colonial political action with antisemitism. In an attempt to further criminalize resistance, Israel linked the uprisings to growing crime rates in Palestinian society, which also had the effect of **erasing** the anti-colonial underpinnings that mobilized people. And it was really the most marginalized who ended up paying the highest price. Palestinian researcher and academic Khaled Anabtawi analyzed the data around arrests and **found** that the average income of the families of those indicted was 30 percent lower than the average Palestinian family in ’48. Thirty-one percent of those arrested were from single-parent, woman-led households and almost 64 percent were from families receiving social services and benefits. At the same time, the organizational structures that emerged in the Unity Intifada—the amazing solidarity and mutual aid—all collapsed extremely quickly, and so these already vulnerable families have been left to deal with the aftermath of the uprising on their own since 2021.

This ongoing violent repression combined with the absence of a sustained political infrastructure and feelings of abandonment have been a real deterrence to mobilizing in the present moment.

*Right, following May 2021 we saw an aggressive Israeli campaign to stifle any Palestinian political action that is framed as part of an anti-colonial struggle, and the simplest displays of Palestinian political identity, like the Palestinian flag, are being **banned**.*

Yes. It’s hard to describe just how paranoid the Israeli state has become around any sign of popular political mobilization in ’48 following the Unity Intifada. For example, two years later, in May of this year, Diar Omari, a nineteen-year-old Palestinian, was shot by a

settler on the road leading to the gated settlements next to his village, Sandala. After his killing, the whole village stood in an amazing display of revolutionary support for the family, demanding justice for Diar. His family and the village rejected attempts by Israel and Palestinians (like [Mansour Abbas](#), the leader of the Arab United List) to frame Diar's killing as stemming from a criminal case of road rage. The steps Israel took to stop the mobilization in Sandala—a small village of 1,700 people—were unbelievably severe. The village where people were demonstrating was attacked with helicopters, border police and pre-dawn raids. There was a systematic arrest campaign targeting Diar's friends and the village's youth. And, like you said, even the Palestinian flag was a target. Almost every night, the Israeli police would raid the village to remove the Palestinian flag from its streets and would even raid the cemetery and remove the Palestinian flag from Diar's grave. Then his friends and family would put it back, and after a few hours, the Israeli military would come back and remove it, and it would be put back on, and so on. Basically, after the Unity Uprising, Israel couldn't tolerate any kind of mobilizing in a framework that is Palestinian. If people had stood for Diar without calling him a martyr or without rallying under a political Palestinian framework—had they not insisted on defining his death as a political death—I don't think Israel would have minded a commemoration or even protests. The support of '48 political leaders for the family was timid, which is also telling. This was precisely because the family insisted on defining Diar as a martyr and in doing so, situating his killing within the broader struggle against Israeli colonization. An acceptance of such a framing would have pushed them into a clash with the Israeli system.

This is consistent with a longer-term trend to delink political mobilizations in '48, moments like the Unity Intifada and before that the Second Intifada, from the broader struggle against Israeli settler-colonialism. Our political leadership, but also '48 Palestinian civil society organizations, are complicit in this process. For example, after May 2021, the New Israel Fund threw money at Palestinian and mixed (Israeli-Palestinian) civil society organizations under the guise of

supporting '48 Palestinian detainees, but at the same time they were framing their support—and the Unity Intifada as a whole—in terms of a narrow struggle for greater democratic rights for '48 Palestinians. This worked to disconnect May 2021 from a broader Palestinian liberation framework and reconfigure it as part of the pro-democracy Israeli protests.

One key difference in 2021 seems to be in the social class of '48ers who took the lead. With the weakening of formal political structures, a new organic leadership emerged that put forward a political analysis explicitly connecting local socio-economic conditions and police repression to Israel's settler-colonial rule. This framing challenged the one advanced by most political parties in '48, who, following Oslo, have re-oriented the struggle in '48 away from broader Palestinian liberation to being a struggle for equal rights or "citizens' rights." Can you talk about how this focus on citizenship came to be so central and its consequences for political organizing in '48?

Since Oslo and, more acutely, following the Second Intifada, our political leadership in '48 has been stuck within the framework of citizenship. Of course, the situation wasn't better before Oslo. But Oslo cemented the fragmentation of the Palestinian people and marked the Palestinian Liberation Organization's abandonment of '48 Palestinians, rendering their fate an Israeli issue. In this context, the nationalist political voices in '48 were left trying to create a framework for struggle and did so largely within the narrow framework of citizenship. There have been differences between different political parties in the way they have dealt with the issue: Some of them, like the United Arab List, went to extreme coexistence. Others, like Tajammu (Balad), wanted to work within the democratic order to challenge the Zionist core of the Israeli, Jewish state by promoting a state for all of its citizens regardless of national group rights and Palestinian identity. Others still, such as Al-Jabhah (Hadash)—Ayman Odeh's political organization—have advanced a discourse of shared Arab-Jewish working-class interests, which has served to

whitewash colonial power relations under the guise of Israeli-Palestinian coexistence. But I think the general commitment to this framework across parties led to what we're seeing today: Complete defeat, the continued shrinking of the "liberal" margins of what Israel has allowed and the compliance of political leadership in the interest of avoiding any clash with the system.

This orientation toward inclusion within the Israeli regime escalated in 2015 with the establishment of the Joint List. The Joint List was an electoral coalition bringing together the different Palestinian political parties and a Jewish Arab party. The formation of a united electoral block has been a longstanding Palestinian popular demand. We, Palestinians, conflate the lack of political agency with the lack of unity, but unity can defuse important political differences. In practice, the "unity" of the Joint List led to greater complicity with the Israeli regime. Under the leadership of Ayman Odeh, the Joint List project advanced a shift in political orientation towards what they called "impact policies." This was an approach that suggested Palestinians in '48 should focus on building power by integrating into the Israeli state's ministries and other institutions connected to the state, like governmental companies and the courts. They also placed an emphasis on gaining economic power through individual advancement in the Israeli private sector.

Ayman Odeh excluded three ministries from Palestinian integration: the foreign ministry, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Aliya and Integration (the ministry that regulates Jewish immigration to Israel) because, in his framing, these three ministries were the manifestation of the Jewish nature of the state. Odeh knows full well that the Zionist, violent core of the Israeli state is not limited to three ministries. It is manifested in every single arm of the state, including the courts, the police, social services, everything. Why then did he claim that these are the only problematic ministries? I think this illustrates the fantasy behind the vision for Palestinian integration.

Odeh embodies the individualist aspiration to be part of an Israeli development process, which Israel has fostered heavily since the Second Intifada through the initiation of governmental plans for

greater economic integration. A Palestinian being a head of a bank or a head of a governmental company—which are not only complicit in Israeli colonialism but are also complicit in a very harsh capitalist, neoliberal economic policy that disproportionately impacts Palestinians—was [celebrated](#). This celebration presented individual successes as collective achievements. It also ignored the fact that integration is according to the needs of the Israeli economy, not the needs of Palestinians. While leaders like Odeh point to the greater presence of Palestinian workers in the medical or high-tech sector as collective achievements, the reality on the ground tells a different story. These policies have failed to close the socio-economic gap, not just between Palestinians and Israelis, which is widely recognized, but also the gap between '48 Palestinians themselves, which the Unity Intifada brought to the fore. In 1997, some 38 percent of families in '48 lived in poverty. The number was 45 percent in 2018 ([compared](#) to 13 percent of Jewish families).

Odeh and others who supported these policies also upheld the notion that Palestinians can integrate into these systems and maintain our identity as a cultural identity. And I really think Gaza today has shaken these foundations just as the Unity Intifada did. Efforts at integration are not working because they're clashing with Palestinian political identity, which is being represented by a resistance that political leaders like Odeh want nothing to do with.

Over the same period, we've also seen Israel undermine Palestinian Knesset members by empowering local councils. Can you speak about this, and how it fits into the project you described of Israel engineering a Palestinian class whose political and economic interests are aligned with the interests of the Israeli state?

Much of the work of Palestinian Knesset members—beyond their vocal demands for equality or the end to occupation, which really operate at the slogan level—has been at what they view as the service level, work that in theory should be carried out by ministries: if there's a post office lacking in that village or a road that needs work,

etc. In effect, parliamentarians became the messenger for these services and tried to justify their role within the framework of dignity and equal rights.

In recent years, Israel has increasingly tried to empower local councils—a more technical, less political leadership—instead of Knesset members. These councils are not political parties. They operate at the level of the locality and are elected mostly on a family basis. They don't give Israel a headache by raising issues related to the occupation. Along with some NGOs, who are very close to the liberal Zionist sphere, they have become a bridge between the Palestinian community and the Israeli government for service delivery. As a result, political power and weight has shifted from the old classic political parties and the High Follow-up Committee (an extra-parliamentary umbrella organization that represents '48 Palestinians) to these councils and NGOs. They became a vessel through which Israel channeled investments into '48 Palestinian communities, leading to the gradual development of a Palestinian capitalist class whose whole material existence is dependent on “developmental” state funding. The main root of all evil is Israel's fragmentation of Palestinians geographically, politically, at the level of legal frameworks, all of that, of course, but I do think we need to talk about ourselves more and how these efforts at integration have set us back collectively.

You've laid out how we got to this point, but in this moment of unfolding colonial violence on steroids and in a landscape of fear, of silencing, of the lack of vision towards collective Palestinian liberation, where do we look to build, and how do we do so?

Before I speak to your bigger question, I want to say a word about fear. We cannot ignore that what Israel is doing in '48, now, is an attack. You could be arrested for showing sympathy with the Gaza resistance or even putting a [verse](#) from the Quran on social media or analyzing the military invasion. Now, if we look at the numbers of arrests in '48 since 7 October, they're low compared to the Unity

Intifada. We're speaking of 200 arrests, **compared** to thousands during May 2021. Of course, the circumstances are different. Back then, there were clashes. It was a different revolutionary moment. Now it's just people sitting on their screens and getting arrested for posts, most of them posted on the day of 7 October.

These arrests are accompanied by new repressive legislation. On 8 November the Israeli Knesset passed the consumption of terrorist material **bill**, which criminalized consumption of materials by Hamas or ISIS (notice that they put Hamas and ISIS together in this legislation, which is very deliberate). Israel has also **threatened** to revoke citizenship for those who've expressed sympathy with what they deem terrorism and **tried** to introduce new legislation that would make it permissible to shoot at people if they block streets that serve as roads for military supplies, which basically could be any road. These bills are meant to deter Palestinians in '48 from distracting or confronting Israel during its ongoing genocidal campaign in Gaza. Even though these two bills didn't pass, they are fixed in people's minds. In a way, this fear is a circle fed by Israeli repression and the political discourse of politicians in '48. If there were political will and infrastructure committed to breaking this circle of fear, I think people would have greater confidence to engage in mobilization, and it would open up a new process.

The task today in '48, but also in the West Bank (because Gaza doesn't need our lessons. Gaza consistently teaches us a lesson. Despite the extreme isolation that Gaza suffered under the blockade, we see different frameworks for organizing there, resilience and mutual aid, that we didn't see anywhere else) is to work towards building what I would call a liberatory or liberation infrastructure. This would involve the building of infrastructure that allows for disengagement from complicity with Israel, politically and economically. It would also center the re-articulation of the emancipation of '48's most marginalized communities as one that is linked to the broader struggle for Palestinian liberation. While complete economic disengagement is impossible under colonialism, I don't believe sustained liberatory work is possible without the

development of a new infrastructure that can maintain revolutionary action. I don't mean here the development of NGOs but of community-led structures of mutual aid that break away from the framework of individual growth and development under a colonial state and enable sustained revolutionary action. I'm speaking about food sovereignty, union organizing, protecting detainees, community safety to deal with crime and other issues. This is not an easy task, but it is essential we start thinking in such ways, seriously and creatively.

Otherwise, like you described of the Unity Intifada where we saw the rapid collapse of infrastructure, we will be left with perpetual spikes of revolutionary mobilization without cumulative gains. You've worked in the field of international advocacy for over fifteen years. Can you speak to the solidarity movement now and whether you see these same dynamics playing out beyond '48?

For so long, the solidarity movement was occupied with challenging Israel, and I think that's great. Please challenge Israel, but also, we want you to challenge your own establishment. We're seeing some of this now. People interrupting everyday life in global capitals, interrupting arms manufacturers, interrupting parliaments, interrupting media, interrupting academia, everyone who is complicit. But I wonder, if there is a ceasefire, will this all end? Are we rallying around a very specific limited framework? Or are we aspiring to build actual material global solidarity? Because if we look at the streets now, even though the protests are in Europe and in the United States —and of course there are a lot of protests in the Global South and in our region—but even in Europe and in the US, you see a lot of oppressed communities showing up for Palestine: people who are part of the Black liberation struggle, indigenous struggles, Latin American struggles, struggles against economic exploitation, feminist queer organizers, other people really mobilizing. We are seeing solidarity from people who get it, people who see the violence against Gaza as a manifestation of extreme colonial punishment and

revenge. But my great fear is that this growing and fast and large-scale solidarity will be limited to a certain slogan and to a certain time, that it will collapse if we don't build lasting infrastructure, by which I mean material power that can disrupt the enormous power held by Israel and its allies—and when I say allies, it's not only the United States. It's a global economic system. We don't want it only for Gaza and Palestine. We want to be able to have something beyond transactional solidarity and beyond these slogans.

When we speak about the future, I do believe, honestly, first of all and most importantly, in the agency of the Palestinians to struggle to free ourselves. But I also really truly and honestly believe in global solidarity, especially solidarity of the oppressed, solidarity of the global south. We've been putting a lot of effort into building that solidarity, and it's important. But we've been doing a bad job in creating a lasting infrastructure, and this is what we need.

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A war without a plan

Rashid Khalidi

30 October 2023

This is an edited transcript from Jacobin's [Long Reads](#) podcast, hosted by Daniel Finn, republished with their permission. You can listen to the interview [here](#).

DANIEL FINN: *What has been the material impact so far of the Israeli offensive on the people of Gaza, along with the parallel developments unfolding in the West Bank?*

RASHID KHALIDI: We're hampered by the information blackout that Israel has imposed on the Gaza Strip. They haven't allowed journalists in, and they've halted electricity supplies and fuel shipments. Some of the journalists who were there have been killed by Israeli bombardment and those who are still alive are very much hampered in their reporting. We have much less information than we should have about what's happening.

We know the death toll had reached 8,300 by 30 October, of whom about 3,500 are children. The number of people injured is probably much, much higher than the number that has been reported. The reported number is well over 10,000, but a lot of people are not able to get to hospitals and there's no way to tabulate statistics.

The number of dead is undoubtedly much higher than the estimated figures because there are many destroyed buildings that probably contain bodies that won't be reachable and therefore countable until heavy machinery can remove the rubble. Over a million people have been displaced from their homes—probably close now to a million and a half, but we don't know for sure. The human impact has been dreadful and the uncertainty and trauma for children must be quite horrible.

The situation in the West Bank is not quite as dire, but Israel has been carrying out multiple nightly raids on towns, villages, and especially refugee camps, and they've killed at least 120 people. There have also been settler attacks on Palestinians, which were ongoing before 7 October, but which have ramped up since. Some small communities have been displaced by settler violence in isolated parts of the West Bank.

All of this comes against the background of not only US support for and supply of munitions to the Israeli offensive, but also Joe Biden himself casting doubt on the Palestinian casualty figures. The Ministry of Health in Gaza issued a list of almost 7,000 people identified up to that point with their name, age, gender, and ID number, showing that the US president was a liar and that there was no reason to doubt those numbers.

I think that Biden's statement was despicable. It demeaned and diminished the dead, and I think it perfectly represents the outlook of this administration, which is sadly more Israeli than the Israelis themselves, on many issues at least.

Do you believe that Benjamin Netanyahu and his allies have developed a coherent plan for how they intend to fight this war, let alone for what they intend to do in the aftermath? How much of a factor in all of this is Netanyahu's own desire for political self-preservation?

It's impossible to answer the second part of that question, Netanyahu has never been much of a strategist. He's a political survivor.

Somebody said to me the other day that he is one of the great charlatans in modern history, fooling the Israeli people. I think they've actually discovered that they've been fooled and whatever efforts he may be making for political survival, my sense is that the Israelis have probably had enough of it, but that's a matter for after the war.

As to whether Israel has war plans or plans for what follows, it's clear that they have finally developed some kind of plan for the bombing and invasion of the Gaza Strip, and they're carrying it out methodically. They've dropped more bombs in a few weeks than the United States would drop on Afghanistan in a year, on a territory a fraction the size of Afghanistan.

They appear to have developed some kind of plan for a ground operation, and they currently seem to be attempting to encircle Gaza City. In other words, they're moving in from the north, they're moving down along the coast, and they seem to be moving on an east-west axis, so they have Gaza City, which is the largest agglomeration in the Gaza Strip, surrounded.

Do they have a plan for the day after? I don't think they do. There are plans that have been published—one of which came from the Intelligence Ministry, if it's reliable—for expelling a large part of the population to the Sinai Peninsula. Is that the policy of the Israeli government? We don't know. This particular ministry doesn't have much authority, but this may be what they will try to do eventually.

There is evidence that this is what the United States was trying to persuade Arab countries to accept. There's also the possibility that they'll try to keep hold of a large part of the Gaza Strip, emptying the population and forcing them into a smaller area. This, after all, has been their policy in the West Bank—the creation of Bantustans in which the Palestinians are more and more shut up, along with the dispossession and ethnic cleansing of other areas. The long-term strategy is to take as much of the land as they can and push the Palestinians into the smallest area possible.

They may adopt that strategy in the Gaza Strip. Does that mean they have an idea of what they will do on the day after? I don't think so. Netanyahu's close ally, the strategic affairs minister Ron Dermer,

spoke this morning and said, "When the war's over, we will decide." That may actually be the way they look at it. There may be various options that they're considering, but I'm not sure that they've decided on one yet.

We've seen a major escalation over the past few days, beginning with the communications blackout imposed on Gaza last Friday, [27 October], followed by one of the heaviest nights of bombardment to date and the deployment of ground forces in the Gaza Strip.

Does this represent the opening stages of a full-scale ground war, which according to some Israeli spokesmen would be expected to unfold over the space of months rather than weeks? If that is the case, what would its impact be on the civilian population of Gaza, and could it even succeed on its own terms in the stated Israeli goal of ousting Hamas from Gaza?

Let me start from the end of that question. Hamas is a political movement with a military wing. It has cultural, religious, and ideological elements to it, some of which are impossible to extirpate. You can say that there's a military wing and Israel might try to destroy that military wing entirely, but you can't destroy or eliminate Hamas per se.

It was a movement that won an election in 2006. We're talking about a plurality rather than a majority, but a lot of people voted for it. It has a huge network of social services, political branches, and so forth.

It also represents an idea of resistance and an idea of some kind of Islamic society. You can't extirpate that without killing hundreds of thousands of people. Could Israel defeat the military wing of Hamas? Possibly. Could they completely eliminate Hamas from the Gaza Strip? No.

What does this ground operation represent? Is it the opening stage of something else? I think it's impossible to say at this stage. It would appear from the very limited data that I've seen that they intend to carry out a large-scale operation in the northern part of the Gaza

Strip. I think they intend to encircle and possibly to enter all of those areas.

Will that be successful? Will they eliminate the entirety of Hamas's military infrastructure in those areas? I don't know. Will this have a horrific impact on the civilian population who have remained in Gaza City and the areas to the north and east of it? Yes, it will have a horrific impact on whoever is still there.

My niece's in-laws moved from their home in the neighborhood on the western side of Gaza toward the sea to southern Gaza. But they came back, first of all because they were being bombarded in the south, and second because there was no food and no shelter. They returned a few days ago.

We were cut off from them during the communications blackout before hearing from them again on Sunday. Now I don't know what's happening, because the Israelis are moving down the coast and that's where the neighborhood in which they live is located. According to reports coming out of Israel, Israeli armor was moving down the coastline.

There will be awful consequences for the many people left inside Gaza City and the northern parts of Gaza. Apparently over a million people have left. But my guess is there are several hundred thousand people still there.

Looking at the international reaction to what has happened so far, let's begin with the reaction from governments in Europe and the US. We have yet to see any major Western state calling for a cease-fire. There have been visits to Israel from Joe Biden, Rishi Sunak, Emmanuel Macron, and Olaf Scholz, not to mention the European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, all pledging their support for Israel.

How does this compare to the response that we saw to previous Israeli wars, from the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 to the previous offensives against Gaza over the past fifteen years?

I think that the full-throated support for Israel by the US and West European countries is partly a function of Joe Biden's intense ideological commitment to Israel. We're talking about a politician who has been supportive of Israel for forty years or so. I think it's also a response to the very large number of Israeli civilians who were killed on 7 October.

If you think back, every war that Israel has fought since 1948 has been fought on Arab soil. Those wars have been fought inside Gaza and the West Bank, or inside Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. All of the fighting and most of the civilian casualties have been on Arab soil and among Arab civilians in every war Israel has fought for over seventy-five years. This is the first time that Israeli territory has been subjected to this kind of attack and the first time that Israeli civilians have been targets to this extent.

Israeli civilians have been killed many times in the past, whether by rocket fire from Lebanon and Gaza or attacks by commando groups, going back to the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. But in those cases, we are talking about casualties in the single digits or the low double digits, with nothing like the emotional or psychological impact of what followed the 7 October attack. That has been—I'm trying to find the right word here—displayed on a world stage by a public relations machine that has no rival in history.

What was being displayed were horrific scenes, which had a particular resonance from Western audiences for multiple reasons. First, because people in many Western societies could relate to the people who had been killed. There were people who knew or were related to the people who were killed.

Second, because they were like us—in other words, this was a Western society that was being attacked. Similar scenes of atrocities perpetrated against Palestinians would not have had the same impact except among immigrant communities and minorities in the West, for whom those people are like us.

You are talking about a huge shock—because this war was taken into Israel; because Israel, which was seen as invincible, had been defeated militarily; finally, and most importantly, because of the way

in which these civilian deaths were amplified and given resonance in the Western media. They affected Western politicians in a way that no amount of atrocious Arab deaths has ever affected them. I have never seen tens of thousands of Iraqi deaths or Syrian deaths or Afghan deaths—or the more than 8,000 Palestinian deaths so far in Gaza—producing any notable reaction in these Western capitals or among their media outlets. There’s obviously a double standard at work here.

Those are all of the reasons, I think, that you have had this incredible outpouring of support for Israel on the part of politicians, the media, and corporations. Public opinion is in a different place in most countries, including the United States.

On that point, we have seen very substantial public support for a cease-fire in the US revealed in opinion surveys, particularly among supporters of the Democrats, as well as countries like Britain. We’ve also seen major protests in the US and a number of European countries—the largest, I believe, taking place in London last Saturday, [28 October]. What do you think is the significance of that gap between government policy in Europe and the US and dissenting views among the population of those countries?

First of all, I think there is a generation gap. Younger people are not as susceptible to the myths and fabrications that influenced so many of their elders over the course of many decades. They are completely indifferent to and contemptuous of the mainstream media. They get their information from other sources.

I was on CNN recently, and after I mentioned the sympathy of young people for the Palestinians in this conflict, the anchor referred to a survey which said that in the eighteen to thirty-five age group, just 10 percent supported the Biden administration’s policy on Gaza. The remaining 90 percent were either opposed to it or had no view. That’s quite extraordinary.

The second aspect is that we live in increasingly diverse societies and for important elements of American society, what is happening to

the Palestinians has a resonance. I've talked to African Americans, and they say that if you go to Palestine, it's like Jim Crow. They can relate to this situation: separate roads for separate people; some people have the vote, while others don't.

It's not exactly the same as their experience in the US, but they can relate to it. I think that's true for many other minorities in the United States as well. They see brown people suffering and they can relate to it, whereas others are indifferent, especially older people in some Western societies.

I think there has been a shift over time in the willingness to at least consider that there is a Palestinian narrative. No Palestinian narrative was admitted to the public space fifty years ago. It didn't exist so far as people were concerned: it existed, but nobody knew about it.

That's not true anymore. More and more people know that such a narrative exists, and sometimes they set it alongside other narratives. Sometimes they disregard part of it, but at least it's there in the public space.

This is no thanks to mainstream corporate media or the major political parties—the Democrats and the Republicans in the US, Labour and the Conservatives in Britain. They read from an Israeli playbook morning, noon, and night, whether we're talking about Keir Starmer or Rishi Sunak, Donald Trump or Joe Biden.

But the grassroots are in a very different place, at least when it comes to the Democratic Party in the US. Even among Republicans, there's an interesting generational divide. Republicans are much more supportive of Israel generally, but older Republicans considerably more so than younger ones.

Another thing we're seeing is that the same people who buy and sell our politicians and contribute to political parties also contribute to private universities and are partners in hedge funds, law firms, and so on. They dominate corporations like NBCUniversal, which runs MSNBC, or the investment firm of Jeff Bezos, which owns the *Washington Post*. The multi-billionaire class is mostly on one side in this conflict, and they have enormous influence on politicians and the media.

You basically have on one side the capitalist class, older white people, and the major political party leaderships, while on the other side, you have much of the grassroots of those parties, young people, and a very diverse coalition, including a very large part of the younger generation in the US Jewish community. Some of the big demonstrations in New York were led by Jewish organizations. They shut down Grand Central station the other day.

Again, that's partly a generational divide, but it's a deep divide that didn't exist twenty years ago within the Jewish community. I think what's happening on college campuses reveals both a generational divide and the fact that even among faculty, there's an openness in many cases to sympathy with the Palestinians and to understanding that there's a Palestinian narrative that simply didn't exist a generation or more ago.

Looking now at the Middle East, again, you have a disjunction between state-level opinion and popular opinion, albeit in a context where the majority of those states are authoritarian and not directly accountable to their own citizens. How much pressure, despite that authoritarian framework, is there on Arab rulers from popular opinion in their own states?

To be more specific, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are probably the two most important countries in the regional equation. Would it be possible for the Saudi kingdom to pick up again with its normalization efforts with Israel after what's happened over the past few weeks? In relation to Egypt, despite the rhetoric that Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has come out with recently, could he nonetheless be induced by the US to cooperate with a program of ethnic cleansing and forcible displacement from Gaza?

Let me take your question by going back three weeks ago. The conventional wisdom among the American policymaking elite and among almost every think tanker who dealt with the Middle East was that Palestine doesn't count in Arab politics. It's not an important issue. They thought that normalization was an inexorable process,

and that Israel would be integrated into the region sooner or later, with a new era of prosperity and regional integration on the doorstep.

That was the sense coming out of Saudi Arabia, out of the Israeli government, and out of the US administration. It seemed like a major plank of Biden's foreign policy was to achieve normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Well, it turned out that they were all wrong, as anybody with the slightest knowledge of history would have told them. But that knowledge was clearly absent from the consciousness of leaders and policymakers.

Anyone who studies this issue knows that there was already concern about Zionism across the Arab world before WWI. In the 1920s and '30s, there was widespread Arab support for the Palestinians. In the 1940s, the Arab regimes were dragged unwillingly into war with Israel by Arab public opinion. They were terrified of the Israelis and had no desire to enter the war. Their armies were not ready, and they knew it, but they were forced by public opinion to go to war.

Arab public opinion is not represented by the undemocratic regimes that blight most of the Arab world. Especially after the suppression of the uprisings of the 2010s, those regimes were confident in their ability to control public opinion, suppress dissent, and govern as they pleased, doing the bidding of the US when necessary and cozying up to Israel without any possible downside. That whole illusion has been shattered, starting on 7 October.

You've seen the biggest demonstrations in some Arab countries for a decade or more. In the case of Egypt, I think there has been the first public demonstration since the 2013 coup that brought down the first and only democratically elected Egyptian government. You've seen similar huge demonstrations in Yemen and Iraq as well as countries like Morocco, Algeria, and Turkey, which is outside the Arab world. That is quite extraordinary, and I think it has put the fear of God into Arab governments.

Will that change what I think is a set policy of the Saudi regime of trying to normalize its relations with Israel over the long term? Maybe

not. They may resume trying to do that afterward, when whatever horrors we still have to experience in Gaza are past.

Will the Egyptian regime accept the blandishments of Washington? There has been a lot of reporting on the offers that are being made to cancel half of Egypt's \$160 billion debt. Will they continue to resist those enticements? I don't know. But there are reasons to think they might not succumb. One is that Sisi has called a presidential election for December this year, and I'm not sure he wants to run on a platform of having facilitated the completion of the ethnic cleansing of Gaza.

There are other reasons for the Egyptian regime not going along with this. One is the fact that Palestinians have never once been allowed to return after having been displaced from Palestine. If you accept Gazan refugees that Israel forces into Sinai, they're going to be there forever, which means an infringement on Egyptian sovereignty and a long-term security problem.

I don't know what will happen. The Egyptian regime has talked very firmly about this. But I've seen reporting that indicates that when these blandishments were being offered, there was at least some consideration of it before a decision was apparently taken that for whatever reason—whether on account of the reasons I've cited or for other reasons—this would be a very bad idea.

I think that the reaction was also coordinated. I believe that similar suggestions were made to Jordan, and I believe that Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, may have asked the Saudis to endorse or bankroll such ethnic cleansing during his visit to Saudi Arabia. The rebuff from Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia was absolutely resolute, and I wouldn't be surprised if it had been coordinated.

I know that this is a very difficult question to address at this time, when the situation is changing from one day to the next, but could you perhaps say something about what you think the long-term implications might be of what has been happening over the past month for the Palestinian movement for self-determination. Is it

possible, even in a time as difficult as the present, to identify strategies that could help advance the Palestinian cause?

That is an extremely difficult question to answer in the middle of a war whose outcome is impossible to foresee, and in a situation where we may see another chapter in the historic process of dispossession and expulsion of Palestinians. A lot will depend on the outcome of the war and on how various parties interpret the outcome.

A lot will also depend on what happens to the people of Gaza. Will Israel succeed, as some Israeli plans have indicated they want to do, in expelling a proportion of the population of Gaza from historic Palestine? Much will depend on how Arab countries react.

It doesn't have to be in collaboration with those countries. It can be done forcibly. In 1967, they kicked 300,000 people out. They just took them to the bridge and forced them to cross. Heaven forbid that something similar is attempted now.

It's also a hard question to answer because the Palestinian national movement is in a state of fragmentation. I'm not sure that what we're seeing now is going to clarify the questions about a unified strategy for Palestinian liberation, which existed before 7 October.

Does this reinforce a commitment to resistance and armed struggle? I can see a scenario in which this is perceived as a victory for Hamas. I can also see a scenario in which this is perceived as a tragedy for the Palestinians for which Hamas is blamed. Between those two extreme scenarios lie all kinds of questions and possibilities for strategy.

If you look at a lot of young Palestinians right now, I'm sure they've been encouraged in believing that Palestinians have no alternative, and that armed struggle is the only course of action available to them. I am also sure that there are other Palestinians who are looking at the devastation of Gaza and are afraid of what may come next in terms of another Nakba. They will say this was brought on our heads by the strategy of Hamas.

It's very hard to see a strategy that leads to political change, if you accept a settler-colonial paradigm, in the metropole or in the colony—and more importantly in the metropole. If you look at the wars of independence in Ireland, Algeria, and Vietnam, or the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, what was happening on the battlefield was part of a larger political strategy that also included the metropole.

For example, it meant convincing popular opinion in Britain and the US that Irish independence was a worthy and achievable aim—or at least in the case of England, that it was a war not worth fighting. The Irish Republican Army won, I think, in Manchester, Birmingham, London, New York, and Boston as much as it won in Cork. They were on the back foot in military terms by the middle of 1921. But the British decided that they couldn't sustain the war any longer.

It was the same with Algeria, Vietnam, and South Africa. Without the battle of Algiers or the Tet Offensive or the struggle in the townships, those liberation movements would not have won. But without the demonstrations in the US, you wouldn't have had the US government deciding that it couldn't win the war in Vietnam.

The same was true when it came to France in Algeria. When Charles de Gaulle said that they couldn't win in Algeria, it wasn't because their army was losing on the ground. That wider strategic element has to be thought of, and I'm not sure that everybody is considering it.

Much also depends on whether there is a political horizon on offer at the end of this. If, as has been the case for the last fifteen or twenty years, Israel and the powers that be offer Palestinians absolutely no political horizon, then you will have more resistance. Whether it's on this level or on another level, that's axiomatic: no political horizon—no alternative—means resistance, as sure as night follows day.

We are seeing a horrifying attempt to shut down the space for freedom of speech in Western societies around Palestine. They are not just shutting down people who support Hamas. They are shutting down people who say anything positive about Palestine in American universities or in the media. It's happening at a frightening pace.

The McCarthyite repression that is beginning to come down, at least in this country, is intended to create a situation where you're not allowed to talk about Palestine anymore. For decades, you couldn't talk about it, then the space was opening for a while, and now there's an attempt to close it again. I'm not sure how far that attempt will go or whether it'll succeed.

The point is, if you shut down the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, deny people the ability to demonstrate or go to the International Court of Justice, and refuse to negotiate with the Palestinians—all of which has been the position of the Israeli and US governments for fifteen or more years—then you leave the field open to people who say there's no alternative but armed struggle: "We either surrender or we fight." A lot will depend on whether there are political options or whether people who feel there is no alternative will choose violence.

Part 3

The enemy trinity

The enemy trinity

Jamie Allinson and Sai Englert
29 November 2023

The following essay was commissioned by [Salvage](#) and will be published in Issue 14. It is republished here with permission.

The Palestinian Marxist Ghassan Kanafani, in his famous study of the Great Arab Revolt of 1936–9, and its defeat, theorized the regional and international character of the Palestinian struggle through the alliance of enemies it faced. Reflecting on the Palestinian uprising under the British Mandate, he [wrote](#) “between 1936 and 1939, the Palestinian revolutionary movement suffered a severe setback at the hands of three separate enemies.” This tripartite enemy constituted and remained “the principal threat” to Palestinian liberation: “the local reactionary leadership; the regimes in the Arab states surrounding Palestine; and the imperialist-Zionist enemy.”

The “enemy trinity,” Kanafani argued, was not only present in the 1930s but remained relevant in the 1970s. Kanafani himself was assassinated by Mossad in 1972. Israel received military, diplomatic and economic support from the imperialist powers because of the strategic role it played in maintaining their dominance in a key region of the world economy. It was for the same reason that the reactionary Arab regimes—principally amongst them the Gulf and Jordanian

monarchs—were backed by Washington, Paris, and London. The Arab ruling classes, in turn, benefited from this arrangement through access to power, wealth, and influence at both local and international levels. The Palestinians and the wider Arab masses shared a common enemy alliance that needed to be defeated if liberation was to be achieved for all.

When the masses erupted onto the streets and workplaces of the region in 2011, and then again in 2019, they made the connection between their own poverty and oppression, and that of the Palestinians. They were not only doing so in the abstract—as people who spoke the same language and faced different oppressive rulers—but in the most concrete way possible. They were recognizing, once more, the realities of a century of collective repression and control by Western Powers, local ruling classes, and Israel.

Palestinian liberation as a regional project

The Palestinian national movement has always understood itself as part of a wider regional struggle against imperialism from its earliest days—both as it confronted British imperialism and the Zionist movement in the 1930s as well as during its reconstitution in the 1950s after the Nakba. If this was especially true amongst its Left-wing factions—most famously in George Habash’s formulation that the road to Jerusalem runs through the capitals of the Arab world—it remained present across the different political wings of the movement whether communist, nationalist, or Islamist. All emphasized that the liberation of Palestine would be one aspect of the wider liberation of the region.

This focus remained as long as the struggle for the liberation of the whole of Palestine and the return of the refugees—“liberation and return” as the PLO slogan had it—was the guiding principle of the Palestinian national movement. After the expulsion from Lebanon in 1982, Fatah first and then the wider PLO started to shift their focus from decolonization to nation-building in a mini-state on only part of historic Palestine. Yasser Arafat increasingly turned to a conservative

regional strategy. The transition is summed up in the famous cartoon of Arafat deftly skipping from a hammer and sickle to a Saudi crescent. The question was no longer how to change the balance of forces in the Middle East as a whole, but how to accommodate a Palestinian institutionalized presence within the existing ones. It is also in this period that the Palestinian political identification of Zionism as colonialism was played down. “Recent Palestinian political history” as Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie and Sobhi Samour point out, “has been a long march away from a liberation agenda and towards a piecemeal approach to the establishment of some kind of sovereignty under the structure of the Israeli settler colonial regime.”¹ Such an approach can only confirm, and not challenge, the regional and global structures of which the oppression of the Palestinians forms a bulwark.

The questions of regional liberation and anti-colonialism did not disappear from the Palestinian national movement all together, however. Amongst those who rejected the retreat of the Oslo years, from the internal opposition within Fatah to the Communist and Islamist wings of the movement, liberation from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea continued to be understood as part of a wider struggle against reaction across the Middle East. This political position emerged from the international realities that the Palestinian faced on the one hand, and from the analysis they made of the enemy they faced, on the other.

Indeed, since the Nakba² and the expulsion of three quarters of the Palestinian population who lived within the area that became the Israeli state, the majority of the Palestinian people have been marooned beyond the borders of their homeland. Roughly 7 million today live in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan (where around half of the population is Palestinian or of Palestinian descent), as well as in the West Bank and Gaza. Until the first Intifada in 1987, these refugee populations formed the political centers of the Palestinian national movement. Palestinian factions launched military operations from these enclaves against Israel, but also participated in wider uprisings against the authoritarian regimes they encountered. The so-called

“Black September” in Jordan in 1970, a popular insurrection against the monarchy now glossed—inaccurately—as a “Palestinian-Jordanian civil war,” and the alliance of the Palestinian organizations with the Left in the first phase of the Lebanese civil war, were crucial such moments.

The mainstay of this strategy, debated across the Arab Left, and popularized in English in the pages of *Khamsin*, the journal of the Israeli Revolutionary Socialist Organization, was the unity of national, regional, and global structures of exploitation and oppression. At the heart of this strategy lay the calculation that the defeat of pro-Western regimes, would not only isolate Zionism and make a collective regional confrontation possible, it would also put greater pressure on its imperial sponsors. Anti-imperialist or Arab nationalist regimes would force a choice on Europe and the United States: continue to support Zionism and cut ties with the rest of the region, or break with Zionism and attempt to maintain relations with the rest of the Arab world. This dynamic was visible, for example, in the US and the USSR’s hesitations on which alliance to make: either with Israel or with Arab nationalism.

Importantly, Zionism was understood in very similar ways by both Zionists themselves and their imperial supporters.

Zionism as a regional project

Palestine was (and remains) an important nodal point in the world economy. At the crossroads of historic trading routes between Africa, Asia, and Europe, Palestine is also located on the Eastern side of the Suez Canal, the beating heart of world maritime trade. From the 1920s to the 1940s the country played a crucial role in the oil routes of the British empire, whose pipelines ran from Kirkuk in Eastern Kurdistan (today’s Northern Iraq) to Haifa, from where it could be transported more easily to European markets. To have a friendly western population, armed and ready to suppress Indigenous populations’ rebellions, was a major strategic asset for first European and then US imperialism.

Other settler populations played this role in many parts of the world. British settlers in the Falklands, Afrikaner settlers in the Cape, the Pieds Noirs in Algeria; all accumulated indigenous land in order to defend the trade routes of their empires. This connection was made directly by Sir Ronald Storrs, the first British Military Governor of Palestine, when he described the Zionist presence in Palestine as a “little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism.”³ Decades later, the US Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig put it in these terms: “Israel is the largest American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk, does not carry even one American soldier, and is located in a critical region for American national security.”⁴

Similarly, the Zionist movement understood itself as a colonial project and an ally of Western Imperialism from its emergence in the late nineteenth century. Theodore Herzl, founder of the Zionist Organization, wrote in his [The Jewish State](#):

Should the Powers declare themselves willing to admit our sovereignty over a neutral piece of land, then the Society will enter into negotiations for the possession of this land. Here two territories come under consideration, Palestine and Argentina. In both countries important experiments in colonization have been made, though on the mistaken principle of a gradual infiltration of Jews. An infiltration is bound to end badly. It continues till the inevitable moment when the native population feels itself threatened, and forces the Government to stop a further influx of Jews. Immigration is consequently futile unless we have the sovereign right to continue such immigration. The Society of Jews will treat with the present masters of the land, putting itself under the protectorate of the European Powers, if they prove friendly to the plan.

For Herzl, Israel would “form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism.” He [added](#): “[w]e should as a neutral State remain in contact with all Europe, which would have to guarantee our existence.” Similar ideas have continued to be expressed in different ways by Israeli politicians and policy makers up to the present. Perhaps most famously, Ehud Barak described Israel as “a Villa in the Jungle,” an island of Western civilization surrounded by dangerous savage barbarians. In the

context of Israel's current genocidal assault on the Palestinians in Gaza, Benjamin Netanyahu [remarked](#), in a similar vein:

They want to return the Middle East to the abyss of the barbaric fanaticism of the Middle Ages, whereas we want to take the Middle East forward to the heights of progress of the twenty-first century. This is a struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle ... I tell our friends in the enlightened world: Our war is also your war. If we do not stand together in a united front, it will reach you as well.

The Zionist movement first, and then the Israeli state after 1948, played its strategic role diligently over the last century. In the 1930s, the Zionist militias were trained and armed by the British army to help break the Arab Revolt. These 'Special Night Squads' were tasked with guarding key infrastructure of the empire in Palestine against attacks by the revolutionaries, first among which was the Iraq Petroleum Pipeline.⁵ Simultaneously, the Histadrut—the largest Zionist trade union federation—provided workers to break the Palestinian strike in key industries.

After the creation of the state of Israel, and despite confrontations between the Zionist movement and the British over the speed at which the Zionists would be allowed to take control of Palestine in the 1940s, Israel continued its close collaboration with European powers. This also included France, which made Israel's nuclear program possible. In 1956, after Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, Britain and France called on Israel to invade the Sinai desert and take the canal by force. Israel complied and Britain and France stepped in, presenting their action as "keeping the peace." It was only the intervention of the US and the USSR—keen to demonstrate their new status as the most important global powers—that forced all three invading forces to retreat. Ben Gurion famously argued after this humiliating defeat that Israel could not again declare war on its neighbors without explicit American support.

The 1960s marked the turn of Israel fully into the US sphere of influence. Military aid and investment grew rapidly by the mid-1960s and Israel once again played its role as a loyal ally in "a sea of

potentially hostile Arabism.” As Arab nationalism grew in influence, rejected Western dominance, and increasingly aligned itself with the Soviets and the newly independent Third World, Israel’s military became a key asset to break the movement’s back. It did so in two wars, in 1967 and 1973, during which it both humiliated the two most important Arab nationalist regimes—Egypt and Syria—and took control over the whole of historic Palestine, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai desert. Expanded colonial rule for Israel was the reward for its military success. As Henry Kissinger [made plain](#), in talking about US support for Israel in 1973:

The United States saved Israel from collapse at the end of the first week by our arms supply ... What we wanted was the most massive Arab defeat possible so that it would be clear to the Arabs that they would get nowhere with dependence on the Soviets ... we sought to break up the Arab united front.

He [summed up](#) US policy as aiming “to enhance Israel’s strategic capacity in the region, consolidate friendly Arab regimes, and to isolate and debilitate the Palestinian movement.” The breaking of the united front and the military defeat of Arab Nationalism, at the very moment that the world economy was entering its first major crisis since the end of WWII, opened the door for bringing the Egyptian regime into the US sphere of influence. The 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, under US tutelage, represented the final outcome of this process and the opening of a new role for Israel in the region. Indeed, from that moment on, while it still played a military role—as its invasion and occupation of Southern Lebanon in the early 1980s demonstrated—its role would increasingly become one of facilitating the US’ economic domination.

Normalization

Peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, on the one hand, and the Oslo accords between Israel and the PLO under Yasser Arafat, on the other, would lead to economic and political normalization. In 1998 and 2004, respectively, the United States created Qualified Industrial

Zones in Jordan and Egypt. Companies within these zones could produce without the restrictions of local labor law and could export tax free to the United States. They had to, however, include Israeli inputs in production to do so—8 percent worth in Jordan and 11 percent in Egypt.

At the same time, Israeli capital was increasingly integrated into its US counterpart, making the distinction between the two increasingly ambiguous. Starting in the 1980s the process took a number of forms. First, Israel was given preferential access to the US market through a gradual free trade agreement. Whereas across the Global South, countries were forced to open their markets in one fell swoop, and thereby saw their industries collapse under the unequal competition of the Global North, Israel was first given unilateral free access to the US market for a number of years before having to reciprocate. Second, the US allowed Israel to privatize American military technology—the only country in the world to receive this right. A swathe of Israeli entrepreneurs emerged from the ranks of ex-IDF officers, who laid the foundation for Israel’s so-called start-up nation. Third, both the US and Israel encouraged joint US and Israeli ventures, at the very moment when the Israeli state and Histadrut-owned enterprises were being privatized. The outcome of these intertwined processes was that by the turn of the millennium, as Nitzan and Bichler point out: “there were already 110 ‘Israeli’ companies listed in New York, with a market value twice that of the 665 companies listed in Tel Aviv. An estimated 60 to 90 percent of all new Israeli start-ups filed for a U.S. charter,” a process which was facilitated by the fact that the state “unilaterally recognized corporate registration in the United States.”⁶

In this context, the spread of Israeli influence and strengthening of its economic relations with the Arab world was *de facto* also the spread of US economic influence and interests.

In the same period, the US attempted to develop free trade agreements with states across the Middle East and North Africa in a series of so-called MENA summits. As Adam Hanieh points out: “[t]he MENA summits explicitly linked normalization to the consolidation of

neoliberal reform, with the integration of Israel into the region predicated upon the dropping of barriers to trade and investment flows under the auspices of US power.”⁷ Ruling classes in the region were invited to partake in the spoils of neoliberal reform, but only if they were prepared to abandon their commitments—however rhetorical they might have been—to Palestinian liberation and normalize with Israel instead. Changing relations with Israel was a test of fealty, a declaration of loyalty to the global neoliberal order and its imperial overseer.

The so-called Abraham accords, signed in 2020 between the UAE, Bahrain, Israel, and later Morocco and Sudan, were a further step in this direction—although this time in a slightly different set up. The United States, since the Obama presidency, had started operating its “tilt to the pacific,” in which it recognized China as its greatest rival and decided to focus its military and strategic might to contain it. The Middle East was lessening (although not disappearing) as a focus, especially since the US had become virtually self-sufficient in terms of oil and gas production. The hope was therefore that the US’ closest allies could maintain control over the region, without its direct participation.

Political and economic deals were made, principally with the UAE and open negotiations were initiated with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The point at which the path to attempted normalization began in Saudi Arabia can be precisely identified: 11 February 2011. The US’ acquiescence in the toppling of Hosni Mubarak put the al-Sauds on high alert: no longer could they place their trust in imperial protection against threats from below or without. Riyadh forged a relatively independent path in the counter-revolutions against 2011, focusing on breaking the uprisings militarily and refusing to support the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots as an alternative to the existing regimes—as the US attempted to. This allowed the KSA to distance itself somewhat from direct control by Washington and to start demanding the kind of access and support that the Israeli ruling class already has to the US economic and political system—and to its weaponry.

The normalization negotiations were therefore not so much about an agreement between the Saudi regime and Israel, but between the former and the US. In this process, Israel was a means and the Palestinians a disposable afterthought. The Saudi rulers had clearly given their agreement to the previous round of negotiations, without which its vassal state, Bahrain, would not have signed on. In the beginning of 2023, however, the kingdom started openly discussing the possibility of normalization with Israel in exchange for increased US military support and its own nuclear program to rival Iran's.

All of this took place on the background of growing Israeli aggression across historic Palestine—especially visible in the intensified attacks by settlers across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where pogroms and murders became increasingly normalized. This year was already the deadliest year for Palestinians since the second Intifada, even before the current genocidal war. The message was clear: the reactionary Arab regimes had abandoned their pretense of caring about the Palestinians, and Israel was convinced that it could advance both its economic power in the region and its colonial project at home without worrying about any significant push back. Benjamin Netanyahu's smug UN performance on 22 September 2023, where he presented a map of the "new Middle East" in which Palestine had entirely disappeared, represented the regional and Western ruling classes' state of mind perfectly.

Al Aqsa Flood's regional implications

This status quo was shattered two weeks later, in the first minutes of operation Al Aqsa Flood. Well before the Qassam fighters entered any Israeli urban or agricultural centers, the break out from Gaza, the destruction of the barbed wire surrounding 2.3 million people, the end—however brief—of the eighteen year illegal blockade of the strip, demonstrated that Israel's rule would not go unchallenged and that the world—Arab or otherwise—could not continue to ignore the Palestinians without paying a terrible price.

The political developments since have shown just how brittle this “new Middle East” was. As Israel launched its genocidal assault on Gaza, millions took to the streets. Crucially, in Egypt and Jordan the collaborationist regimes were put under major pressure by reemerging mass movements which they thought repressed into oblivion. Across the region, presidents and kings who had spent the early decades of the young century developing closer economic, diplomatic, and military relations with Israel were forced to issue statements of denunciation, restate their commitment to Palestinian statehood—however truncated—and break ranks with the United States. In the face of growing instability, even Saudi Arabia has been forced to react in order to safeguard its regional influence. It has broken off negotiations over its potential normalization with Israel and entered close diplomatic negotiations with Iran.

As soon as news emerged of a major Palestinian operation breaking out of Gaza, the Israeli and Western media focused on the supposed guiding influence of Tehran. It was Iran, we were told, not Hamas, which had organized this offensive, in order to weaken Israel and undermine the Abraham Accords. Palestinians lacked the military technology or know-how to pull off such an extensive operation. Hamas would not act without the express green light from Hezbollah and the Islamic Republic. Each and every explanation was more convincing to pundits and experts than the obvious one: keeping a population of 2.3 million people captive, nearly 80 percent of whom are refugees from Israel’s previous ethnic cleansing campaigns, while limiting their supply of food, fuel, medicine, and building materials, interspersed with regular devastating bombing campaigns, for eighteen years straight, has consequences—and terrible ones at that.

Despite evidence of Iranian and/or Hezbollah involvement remaining underwhelming at best, these pieces of “analysis” have not abated over the course of the subsequent Israeli assault on Gaza. Not only do they continue to be central to think pieces and Israeli talking points, they have also served as justification for the US, Britain, and several other European countries to send military

hardware and personnel to the region. Battleships, spy planes, and ground troops surround Israel, purportedly to protect the country from Hezbollah or Iranian retaliation. In practice, the Western powers are demonstrating their support for Israel, while it carries out its genocidal offensive on the inhabitants of the strip in a region-wide reenactment of the Sabra and Shatila massacre. The Imperial powers cannot abide that their regional designs be disrupted, especially by a population it considered defeated and contained. The punishment must be as terrible as it is demonstrative. All must see the price paid by those who resist.

Iran and Hezbollah could not, on the other hand, have been clearer that they do not intend to intervene, a smattering of tit-for-that missile exchanges in Southern Lebanon aside. In a much-awaited speech on 3 November, Hassan Nasrallah pontificated for more than an hour on the strength of the Lebanese resistance but said little. Hezbollah would not do more than it was already doing, the General Secretary told the world, which was already plenty. “In response to the US,” said the Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in [an interview](#) with the *Financial Times* “we said that Iran does not want the war to spread, but due to the approach adopted by the US and Israel in the region, if the crimes against the people of Gaza and the West Bank are not stopped, any possibility could be considered.” A month, and thousands upon thousands of Palestinian deaths too late, the threat remains as empty as when it was uttered. As is surely obvious to anyone, had Hezbollah and Iran really wanted to attempt a death blow against the Israeli state, they would have done so with maximum force on the night of 7 October when the population was reeling, the high command paralyzed, and the reserves un-mobilized.

This is not to claim that the Iranian regime does not sit at the center of the ‘resistance axis’—an alliance of states, military organizations, and political parties in the region, centered on the Iranian regime, which opposes US imperialism and Saudi power in the region—retaining other players in its orbit. Tehran has proxies, such as many of the Shi’a militias in Iraq and Syria, which have recently mounted minor attacks on US assets in those countries.

Some are clients, with their own interests and capabilities, but nonetheless over whom Iran retains a passive veto, in which category Hezbollah is the exemplar. Others are allies, who share some strategic interest but are essentially independent. Hamas falls into the latter category—the Assad regime in Syria, by contrast, contains elements of all three. The outlier here is the Ansar Allah—i.e., the Houthi-led government in Yemen—which is at once the most rhetorically committed to the ‘resistance axis’ and at the same time most prepared to exceed the pre-existing rules of engagement. This has been made clear, for example, by its repeated seizing of Israeli ships, and the targeting of American ones, off its coast.

Hamas’ attack could not have come at a worse time for the axis, which has scored a number of important diplomatic victories over the last year: a trade agreement with China, a reopening of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, and a fairly stable agreement on its nuclear program with the US. The result of its participation in successive forms of counter-revolution since 2011, most notably in Syria, is that its major components have much to lose from a regional conflagration whose outcome they can neither control or predict. Hezbollah cannot afford to lose its traction over much of the Lebanese state, defended as recently as 2019, nor the Islamic republic its hard-won victories over recent protest waves. Neither has an interest in the still-febrile Syrian battlefield being reignited. Stability, for all involved, is the name of the game.

Yet, stability is hard to come by these days. The region is once again witnessing the kind of mobilizations not seen since the 2011 revolutionary wave, which was drowned in blood and vengeance by the regional ruling classes and their allies. In Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Iraq, and Morocco, to name only the largest, mass mobilizations have seen millions take to the streets. The ever-servile Jordanian regime has been forced to speak out about Western complicity and even canceled a US-sponsored summit in Amman after the attack on the Al-Ahli hospital. In Egypt, demonstrations returned to Tahrir square for the first time since 2013, and the chants quickly turned from support for Palestine to internal social demands. If the latter

demonstrations were given some space to operate by a regime seeking a safety valve for popular pressure, they nonetheless represent a dangerous trend for Abdel Fatah El Sisi and his allies. As was the case a decade ago, mass movements in the region are making the connection between the oppression of the Palestinians and their own—especially given their regimes are often involved in both. In the words of Fatima Said: “We are not freeing Palestine. Palestine is freeing us.”

Implications in the West

Much the same can be said further afield. In Britain, the US, and across Europe, we have seen an unprecedented level of mobilization. No previous war or act of oppression against the Palestinians has provoked so large and deep a movement. Demonstrations, occupations, sit-ins, and trade union refusals to handle military exports have mushroomed across the West. Whereas in previous upsurges of solidarity, such as during the Second Intifada, actual support for Israel was combined with a form of liberal rhetorical hegemony—‘violence on both sides’, ‘a complicated issue’, and so on—the government response in countries such as France, the UK and Germany has been simple, outright repression. It is sufficient to remember that as recently as 2010, the then Prime Minister and now Foreign Secretary (Lord) David Cameron described Gaza as a “prison camp” to register how sharply this particular Overton window has slammed shut.

Yet in the face of this repression, the solidarity movement has redoubled its efforts and taken on its governments, demanding that they end their economic, military, and diplomatic support for Israel and end their complicity in genocide now, and in colonial rule always. In France, the movement was able to roll back bans on pro-Palestinian demonstrations, and in Britain it claimed the job of far-right Home Secretary Suella Braverman. In Belgium and in Spain, politicians have started talking about sanctions—and drew Israeli ire when they repeated their denunciation of its crimes in front of the

international press on 24 November at the Rafah crossing. Ireland has followed suit, while in the US the left wing of the Democratic party is being moved slowly—all too slowly—towards calling for a ceasefire.

However, the US—pulling a more split EU than ever behind it—has thrown itself fully into supporting its unsinkable aircraft carrier, which suddenly does not look so stable. Two actual American aircraft carriers have been rushed to the Mediterranean alongside 2000 marines, followed by a British gunship and spy plane, as well as German and Dutch troops stationed in Cyprus. Far from allowing the US to focus on containing China's growing influence, its closest ally in the region is in need of direct military and political assistance. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has been dispatched to both attempt to contain Israel's most fanatical ministers who see in the current crisis an opportunity to ethnically cleanse Gaza as well as important sections of the West Bank, while trying to bring Arab regimes back into the fold. Blinken not only participating in but chairing an Israeli war cabinet meeting points to how much the US is having to involve itself directly.

It is difficult not to think that in the process of defending its special relation with Israel, the US is severely damaging its relationship with its other close allies in the region. The fact, for example, that the US requested from Egypt that it accept to facilitate Israel's ethnic cleansing of the strip by taking in the Palestinian refugees in the Sinai desert, is extraordinary. Not only is the Egyptian regime's animosity towards the Palestinians well known, but the idea that it should accept hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of highly politicized refugees into an area on which the state's control is already tenuous, which borders both Israel and the Suez canal, can only be received in Cairo as an insult and a total disregard for the regime's own stability.

The empire suddenly looks rather overstretched—between Ukraine, Palestine, and China—and forced into taking actions to satisfy its allies, which it has spent much of the last decades trying to avoid. It would be premature to announce the end of the project of

regional normalization between Israel and key Arab states, although the direct entry of the KSA into the fold appears rather unlikely in the short term. That said, it would be equally unwise to imagine that Israel will be able to return to the pre-7 October status quo. Several European states appear on the brink of imposing real sanctions on Israel and to recognize a (truncated) Palestinian state. The masses have returned to the political stage across the Middle East and North Africa, while the Palestine solidarity movement has poured out across the streets, stations, and workplaces of the world—including in the imperial core. Even the American right, historically so solidly united on the question of Zionism, is showing significant disagreement on the US' continued unconditional support for Israel. Key figures such as Tucker Carlson and Candace Owens have repeatedly argued against US military and financial resources being expended to support Israel, distracting from the more important task of containing growing Chinese power.

The task for the left in this situation is clear. We need to intensify the current crisis of legitimacy by increasing the pressure on our institutions and governments. We need to demand that they break off all economic and political relations with Israel as well as with all companies and institutions who participate in or profit from the continued dispossession and oppression of the Palestinian people. We have to call for sanctions to be placed on Israel, for all military exports to end to the genocidal state, and to increase diplomatic pressure on Israel until freedom and democracy are a reality for all, from the river to the sea. The alternative is plain for the whole world to see: more ethnic cleansing, more massacres, more destruction.

What the rules allow

Spencer Ackerman

17 November 2023

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As the Palestinian death toll crossed the 10,000 mark in early November, two anonymous mid-level US diplomats marginalized by President Biden’s support for Israel warned that the US urgently needed to “publicly criticize Israel’s violations of international norms such as failure to limit offensive operations to legitimate military targets.” Israel’s war in Gaza, they wrote in a memo leaked to *Politico*, was sowing “doubt in the rules-based international order that we have long championed.”

The diplomats are part of a growing chorus against the impunity that the US has long provided Israel for unambiguous violations of international law. Jordan’s King Abdullah II railed that “in another conflict”—Russia’s invasion of Ukraine—the US condemned “attacking civilian infrastructure and deliberately starving an entire population of food, water, electricity, and basic necessities.” International law, he continued, “loses all value if it is implemented selectively.”

Abdullah is not the only one taken by the similarities between Ukraine and Gaza. On a Zoom briefing arranged by the writer Peter Beinart a week into the conflict, former Knesset speaker Avrum Burg said the Israel Defense Forces' approach—flattening infrastructure with air strikes and artillery to make urban warfare easier for tanks and infantry—amounted to a “Russian military strategy.”

The diplomats are right: Biden's green light to Israel creates doubt in the legitimacy of the “rules-based international order.” It also clarifies what that order truly is. For while the rules-based international order sounds like “international law,” in reality it is the substitution of international law with the prerogatives of American hegemony. Biden is not engaging in hypocrisy, exactly, in punishing Russia for acts that he materially supports when Israel does them. He is engaging in exceptionalism.

To be clear, many in and out of the US government often treat the term “rules-based international order” as a synonym for international law. And proponents of the rules-based international order are happy to use or hail international law when it serves the US, such as when the International Criminal Court seeks to arrest Vladimir Putin for his war crimes in Ukraine. Yet the United States will never submit itself to the ICC. Under President George W. Bush, the US revoked its (unratified) signature to the treaty establishing the court. Under President Donald Trump, it sanctioned the families of ICC prosecutors who opened a war-crimes investigation into the US war in Afghanistan. That is how the rules-based international order operates. It doesn't replace the mechanisms of international law; it places asterisks beside them. The rules may bind US adversaries, but the US and its clients can opt out.

A brief history of how the US spent its post-Cold War moment of supreme global power shows the rise of what we now call the RBIO at the expense of international law. When the United Nations wouldn't authorize war on Serbia to save Kosovo, the US acted as if NATO wielded the same imprimatur, and no nation was strong enough to challenge its assertion. That impulse was supercharged by 9/11. The

2003 US invasion of Iraq made a mockery of international law while claiming cynically to uphold it.

Though many in respectable circles objected to Bush's flagrant aggression, a strain of liberal foreign policy argued that American power could save international law from itself. In 2006, the scholars Anne-Marie Slaughter and John Ikenberry proposed a grand strategy they called "a world of liberty under law." They sought to reform and bolster existing international institutions. But if the United Nations "cannot be reformed," they urged a "concert of democracies" to "provide an alternative forum for liberal democracies to authorize collective action." In such fashion, the rules-based international order coalesced as a concept.

What began as a response to an emergency in the Balkans is now routine. President Barack Obama turned a UN humanitarian mission in Libya into supporting the overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi. After the wreckage of Iraq became the horror of ISIS, the US stationed troops in eastern Syria with neither UN mandate nor invitation from the unfortunately enduring Bashar Assad. Trump ordered the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, one of the most important figures in the Iranian government.

"The RBIO cannot replace international law—international law is inherent in the very concept of a state, of an international boundary, of treaties, of human rights," Mary Ellen O'Connell, an international law expert and professor at the University of Notre Dame, said via email. "But the RBIO is undermining knowledge and respect for the system of international law. The law's capacity to support solutions to global challenges, from war and peace to climate change and poverty, is being severely degraded by this competing, deeply flawed concept."

Now consider what Israel is doing in Gaza. By early November, it was killing an estimated 180 children a day. The IDF demanded Palestinians abandon their homes in northern Gaza and then, when hundreds of thousands complied, attacked the destinations in southern Gaza it herded them toward. After starving Gaza, denying it medicine, shutting off its communications, killing its journalists,

besieging and even raiding its hospitals, and asserting that places of mass refuge are Hamas positions, Israel claimed to have killed “dozens” of Hamas commanders, out of a total death toll at the time of 10,500 Palestinians.

There is no way to square those figures with international law’s demands for distinction and proportionality. Israel, however, knows it has something stronger than international law: the protection of the rules-based international order.

Holocaust scholars like Raz Segal of Stockton University and Omer Bartov of Brown University consider Israel to be at or past the threshold of committing genocide, the most horrific of atrocities that a state calling itself Jewish could possibly commit. Biden was stunned in 2022 when much of the world—the parts that tend to be on the receiving end of American power—did not accept the US narrative of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. That should have been an easy layup. Now the world is watching Israel annihilate Gaza with US weapons and diplomatic support. In doing so, Biden and Netanyahu show what the rules-based international order really is: not a world of liberty under law, but a mass grave.

The Oslo illusion

Adam Hanieh

8 December 2023

First published in Jacobin, 21 April 2013, and republished with permission. It has been updated and extended by the author for this ebook.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Oslo Accords between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Israeli government. Officially known as the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, the Oslo Accords were firmly ensconced in the framework of the two-state solution, heralding “an end to decades of confrontation and conflict,” the recognition of “mutual legitimate and political rights,” and the aim of achieving “peaceful coexistence and mutual dignity and security and ... a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement.”

Its supporters claimed that under Oslo, Israel would gradually relinquish control over territory in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with the newly established Palestinian Authority (PA) eventually forming an independent state there. The negotiations process, and subsequent agreements between the PLO and Israel, instead paved the way for the current situation in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian Authority, which now rules over an estimated 2.6 million

Palestinians in the West Bank, has become the key architect of Palestinian political strategy. Its institutions draw international legitimacy from Oslo, and its avowed goal of “building an independent Palestinian state” remains grounded in the same framework. The incessant calls for a return to negotiations—made by US and European leaders on an almost daily basis—harken back to the principles laid down in September 1993.

Two decades on, it is now common to hear Oslo described as a “failure” due to the ongoing reality of Israeli occupation. The problem with this assessment is that it confuses the stated goals of Oslo with its real aims. From the perspective of the Israeli government, the aim of Oslo was not to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or to address the substantive issues of Palestinian dispossession, but something much more functional. By creating the perception that negotiations would lead to some kind of “peace,” Israel was able to portray its intentions as those of a partner rather than an enemy of Palestinian sovereignty.

Based on this perception, the Israeli government used Oslo as a fig leaf to cover its consolidated and deepened control over Palestinian life, employing the same strategic mechanisms wielded since the onset of the occupation in 1967. Settlement construction, restrictions on Palestinian movement, the incarceration of thousands, and command over borders and economic life: all came together to form a complex system of control. A Palestinian face may preside over the day-to-day administration of Palestinian affairs, but ultimate power remains in the hands of Israel. This structure has reached its apex in the Gaza Strip—where over 2.3 million people are penned into a tiny enclave with entry and exit of goods and people largely determined by Israeli dictat.

Oslo also had a pernicious political effect. By reducing the Palestinian struggle to the process of bartering over slivers of land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Oslo ideologically disarmed the not-insignificant parts of the Palestinian political movement that advocated continued resistance to Israeli colonialism and sought the genuine fulfillment of Palestinian aspirations. The most important of

these aspirations was the demand that Palestinian refugees have the right to return to the homes and lands from which they had been expelled in 1947 and 1948. Oslo made talk of these goals seem fanciful and unrealistic, normalizing a delusive pragmatism rather than tackling the foundational roots of Palestinian exile. Outside of Palestine, Oslo fatally undermined the widespread solidarity and sympathy with the Palestinian struggle built during the years of the First Intifada, replacing an orientation toward grassroots collective support with a faith in negotiations steered by Western governments. It would take over a decade for solidarity movements to rebuild themselves.

As it weakened the Palestinian movement, Oslo helped to strengthen Israel's regional position. The illusory perception that Oslo would lead toward peace permitted Arab governments, led by Jordan and Egypt, to embrace economic and political ties with Israel under American and European auspices. Israel was thus able to free itself from Arab boycotts, estimated to have cost it a cumulative \$40 billion from 1948 to 1994. Even more significantly, once Israel was brought in from the cold, international firms could invest in the Israeli economy without fear of attracting secondary boycotts from Arab trading partners. In all these ways, Oslo presented itself as the ideal tool to fortify Israel's control over Palestinians and simultaneously strengthen its position within the broader Middle East. There was no contradiction between support for the "peace process" and deepening colonization—the former consistently worked to enable the latter.

It is worth remembering that amid the clamor of international cheerleading for Oslo—capped by the Nobel Peace Prize awarded jointly to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and PLO leader Yasser Arafat in 1994—a handful of perceptive voices forecast the situation we face today. Noteworthy among them was Edward Said, who wrote powerfully against Oslo, commenting that its signing displayed "the degrading spectacle of Yasser Arafat thanking everyone for the suspension of most of his people's rights, and the fatuous solemnity of Bill Clinton's

performance, like a twentieth-century Roman emperor shepherding two vassal kings through rituals of reconciliation and obeisance.” Describing the agreement as “an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles,” Said noted that the PLO would become “Israel’s enforcer,” helping Israel to deepen its economic and political domination of Palestinian areas and consolidating a “state of permanent dependency.” While analyses like Said’s are important to recall simply for their remarkable prescience and as a counterpoint to the constant mythologizing of the historical record, they are particularly significant today as virtually all world leaders continue to swear allegiance to a chimerical “peace process.”

One question that often goes unaddressed in analyses of Oslo and the two-state strategy is why the Palestinian leadership headquartered in the West Bank has been so willingly complicit with this disastrous project. Too often, the explanation is essentially tautological—something akin to “the Palestinian leadership has made bad decisions because they are poor leaders.” The finger is often pointed at corruption, or at the difficulties of the international context that limit available political options.

What is missing from this type of explanation is a blunt fact: some Palestinians have a great stake in seeing the continuation of the status quo. Over the last two decades, the evolution of Israeli rule has produced profound changes in the nature of Palestinian society. These changes have been concentrated in the West Bank, cultivating a social base that supports the political trajectory of the Palestinian leadership in its eagerness to relinquish Palestinian rights in return for being incorporated into the structures of Israeli settler-colonialism. It is this process of socioeconomic transformation that explains the Palestinian leadership’s submission to Oslo, and it points to the need for a radical break from the two-state strategy.

The social base of Oslo and the two-state strategy

The unfolding of the Oslo process was ultimately shaped by the structures of occupation laid down by Israel in the preceding

decades. During this period, the Israeli government launched a systematic campaign to confiscate Palestinian land and construct settlements in the areas from which Palestinians had been driven out during the 1967 war. The logic of this settlement construction was embodied in two major strategic plans, the Allon Plan (1967) and the Sharon Plan (1981). Both these plans envisaged Israeli settlements placed between major Palestinian population centers and on top of water aquifers and fertile agricultural land. An Israeli-only road network would eventually connect these settlements to each other and also to Israeli cities outside of the West Bank. In this way, Israel could seize land and resources, divide Palestinian areas from each other, and avoid direct responsibility for the Palestinian population as much as possible. The asymmetry of Israeli and Palestinian control over land, resources, and economy meant that the contours of Palestinian state-formation were completely dependent on Israeli design.

Combined with military-enforced restrictions on the movement of Palestinian farmers and their access to water and other resources, the massive waves of land confiscation and settlement-building during the first two decades of the occupation transformed Palestinian landownership and modes of social reproduction. From 1967 to 1974, the amount of cultivated Palestinian land in the West Bank fell by about one third. The expropriation of land in the Jordan Valley by Israeli settlers meant that 87 percent of all irrigated land in the West Bank was removed from Palestinian hands. Military orders forbade the drilling of new wells for agricultural purposes and restricted overall water use by Palestinians, while Israeli settlers were encouraged to use as much water as needed.

With this deliberate destruction of the agricultural sector, poorer Palestinians—particularly youth—were displaced from rural areas and gravitated toward work in the construction and agriculture sectors inside Israel. In 1970, the agricultural sector included over 40 percent of the Palestinian labor force working in the West Bank. By 1987, this figure was down to only 26 percent. Palestinian agriculture's

share of GDP fell from 35 percent to 16 percent between 1970 and 1991.

Under the framework established by the Oslo Accords, Israel seamlessly incorporated these changes to the West Bank into a comprehensive system of control. Palestinian land was gradually transformed into a patchwork of isolated enclaves, with the three main clusters in the north, center, and south of the West Bank divided from one another by settlement blocs. The Palestinian Authority was granted limited autonomy in the areas where most Palestinians lived (the so-called Areas A and B), but travel between these areas could be shut down at any time by the Israeli military. All movement to and from Areas A and B, as well as the determination of residency rights in these areas, was under Israeli authority. Israel also controlled the vast majority of water aquifers, all underground resources, and all airspace in the West Bank. Palestinians thus relied on Israeli discretion for their water and energy supplies.

Israel's complete control over all external borders, codified in the 1994 Paris Protocol on Economic Relations between the PA and Israel, meant that it was impossible for the Palestinian economy to develop meaningful trade relations with a third country. The Paris Protocol gave Israel the final say on what the PA was allowed to import and export. The West Bank and Gaza Strip thus became highly dependent on imported goods, with total imports ranging between 70 percent and 80 percent of GDP. By 2005, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated that 74 percent of all imports to the West Bank and Gaza Strip originated in Israel while 88 percent of all exports from those areas were destined for Israel.

With no real economic base, the PA was completely reliant on external capital flows of aid and loans, which were again under Israeli control. Between 1995 and 2000, 60 percent of the total PA revenue came from indirect taxes collected by the Israeli government on goods imported from abroad and destined for the occupied territories. These taxes were collected by the Israeli government and then transferred to the PA each month according to a process outlined in the Paris Protocol. The other main source of PA income came from

aid and foreign disbursements by the United States, Europe, and Arab governments. Indeed, figures for aid measured as a percentage of Gross National Income indicated that the West Bank and Gaza Strip were among the most aid-dependent of all regions in the world.

Changing labor structure

This system of control engendered two major changes in the socioeconomic structure of Palestinian society. The first of these related to the nature of Palestinian labor, which increasingly became a tap that could be turned on or off according to the economic and political situation and the needs of Israeli capital. Beginning in 1993, Israel consciously moved to substitute the Palestinian labor force that commuted daily from the West Bank with foreign workers from Asia and Eastern Europe. This substitution was partly enabled by the declining importance of construction and agriculture as Israel's economy shifted away from those sectors toward high-tech industries and exports of finance capital in the 1990s.

Between 1992 and 1996, Palestinian employment in Israel declined from 116,000 workers (33 percent of the Palestinian labor force) to 28,100 (6 percent of the Palestinian labor force). Earnings from work in Israel collapsed from 25 percent of Palestinian GNP in 1992 to 6 percent in 1996. Between 1997 and 1999, an upturn in the Israeli economy saw the absolute numbers of Palestinian workers increase to approximately pre-1993 levels, but the proportion of the Palestinian labor force working inside Israel was nonetheless almost half of what it had been a decade earlier.

Instead of working inside Israel, Palestinians became increasingly dependent on public-sector employment within the PA or on transfer payments made by the PA to families of prisoners, martyrs, or the needy. Public-sector employment made up nearly a quarter of total employment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by 2000, a level that had almost doubled since 1996. More than half of the PA's expenditures went to wages for these public-sector workers. The private sector also provided substantial employment, particularly in

the area of services. These were overwhelmingly dominated by small family-owned businesses—over 90 percent of Palestinian private-sector businesses employ fewer than ten people—as a result of decades of Israeli de-development policies.

Capital and the Palestinian Authority

Alongside the increasing dependence of Palestinian families on either employment or payments from the Palestinian Authority, the second major feature of the socioeconomic transformation of the West Bank was related to the nature of the Palestinian capitalist class. In a situation of weak local production and extremely high dependence on imports and flows of foreign capital, the economic power of the Palestinian capitalist class in the West Bank did not stem from local industry, but rather proximity to the PA as the main conduit of external capital inflows. Through the Oslo years, this class came together through the fusion of three distinct social groups: “returnee” capitalists, mostly from a Palestinian bourgeoisie that had emerged in the Gulf Arab states and held strong ties to the nascent Palestinian Authority; families and individuals who had historically dominated Palestinian society, often large landowners from the pre-1967 period, particularly in the Northern areas of the West Bank; and those who had managed to accumulate wealth through their position as interlocutors within the occupation since 1967.

While the memberships of these three groups overlapped considerably, the first was particularly significant to the nature of state and class formation in the West Bank. Gulf-based financial flows had long played a major role in tempering the radical edge of Palestinian nationalism; but their conjoining with the Oslo state-building process radically deepened the tendencies of statization and bureaucratization within the Palestinian national project itself.

This new three-sided configuration of the capitalist class tended to draw its wealth from a privileged relationship with the Palestinian Authority, which assisted its growth by granting monopolies for goods like cement, petroleum, flour, steel, and cigarettes; issuing exclusive

import permits and customs exemptions; giving sole rights to distribute goods in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and distributing government-owned land below its value. In addition to these state-assisted forms of accumulation, much of the investment that came into the West Bank from foreign donors through the Oslo years—infrastructure construction, new building projects, agricultural and tourist developments—were also typically connected to this new capitalist class in some way.

In the context of the PA's fully subordinated position, the ability to accumulate was always tied to Israeli consent and thus came with a political price—one designed to buy compliance with ongoing colonization and enforced surrender. It also meant that the key components of the Palestinian elite—the wealthiest businessmen, the PA's state bureaucracy and the remnants of the PLO itself—came to share a common interest in Israel's political project. The rampant spread of patronage and corruption were the logical byproducts of this system, as individual survival depended on personal relationships with the Palestinian Authority. The systemic corruption of the PA that Israel and Western governments regularly decried throughout the 1990s and 2000s, was, in other words, a necessary and inevitable consequence of the very system that these powers had themselves established.

The neoliberal turn

These two major features of the Palestinian class structure—a labor force dependent on employment by the Palestinian Authority, and a capitalist class imbricated with Israeli rule through the institutions of the PA itself—continued to characterize Palestinian society in the West Bank through the first decade of the 2000s. The division of the West Bank and Gaza Strip between Fatah and Hamas in 2007 strengthened this structure, with the West Bank subject to ever more complex movement restrictions and economic control. Simultaneously, Gaza developed in a different trajectory, with Hamas

rule reliant on profits drawn from the tunnel trade and aid from states like Qatar.

In recent years, however, there has been an important shift in the economic trajectory of the Palestinian Authority, encapsulated in a harsh neoliberal program premised on public-sector austerity and a development model aimed at further integrating Palestinian and Israeli capital in export-oriented industrial zones. This economic strategy only acts to further tie the interests of Palestinian capital with those of Israel, building culpability for Israeli colonialism into the very structures of the Palestinian economy. It has produced increasing poverty levels and a growing polarization of wealth. In the West Bank, real per-capita GDP increased from just over \$3,100 in 2007 to more than \$4,100 in 2012, the fastest growth in a decade. At the same time, the unemployment rate increased to 19 percent, among the highest in the world. One of the consequences was a profound level of poverty: income data found that around one in four Palestinians in the West Bank were suffering from “deep poverty” in 2010.

In these circumstances, growth has been based on prodigious increases in debt-based spending on services and real estate. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the hotel and restaurant sector grew by 46 percent in 2010 while construction increased by 36 percent. At the same time, manufacturing decreased by 6 percent. The massive levels of consumer-based debt levels are indicated in figures from the Palestinian Monetary Authority, which show that the amount of bank credit almost doubled between 2008 and 2010. Much of this involved consumer-based spending on residential real estate, automobile purchases, or credit cards; the amount of credit extended for these three sectors increased by a remarkable 245 percent between 2008 and 2011. These forms of individual consumer and household debt potentially carry deep implications for how people view their capacities for social struggle and their relation to society. Increasingly caught in a web of financial relationships, individuals seek to satisfy their needs through the market, usually by borrowing money, rather than through collective struggle for social rights. The growth of these

financial and debt-based relations thus individualizes Palestinian society. It has had a conservatizing influence over the latter half of the 2000s, with much of the population concerned with “stability” and the ability to pay off debt rather than the possibility of popular resistance.

Beyond the impasse?

The current cul-de-sac of Palestinian political strategy is inseparable from the question of class. The two-state strategy embodied in Oslo has produced a social class that draws significant benefits from its position atop the negotiation process and its linkages with the structures of occupation. This is the ultimate reason for the PA’s supine political stance, and it means that a central aspect of rebuilding Palestinian resistance must necessarily confront the position of these elites. Over the last few years, there have been some encouraging signs on this front, with the emergence of protest movements that have taken up the deteriorating economic conditions in the West Bank and explicitly targeted the PA’s role in contributing to them. But as long as the major Palestinian political parties continue to subordinate questions of class to the supposed need for national unity, it will be difficult for these movements to find deeper traction.

Moreover, the history of the last two decades shows that the “hawks and doves” model of Israeli politics, so popular in the perfunctory coverage of the corporate media and wholeheartedly shared by the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank, is decidedly false. Force has been the essential midwife of “peace negotiations.” Indeed, the expansion of settlements, restrictions on movement, and the permanence of military power have made possible the codification of Israeli control through the Oslo Accords. This is not to deny that substantive differences exist between various political forces within Israel; but rather to argue that these differences exist along a continuum rather than in sharp disjuncture. Violence and negotiations are complementary and mutually reinforcing aspects of a common political project, shared by all mainstream parties, and

both act in tandem to deepen Israeli control over Palestinian life. The last two decades have powerfully confirmed this fact.

The reality of Israeli control today is the outcome of a single process that has necessarily combined violence and the illusion of negotiations as a peaceful alternative. The counterposing of right-wing extremists with a so-called Israeli peace camp acts to obfuscate the centrality of force and colonial control embodied in the political program of the latter.

The reason for this is the shared assumption of the Zionist left and right wings that Palestinian rights can be reduced to the question of a state in some part of historic Palestine. The reality is that the overriding project of the last sixty-three years of colonization in Palestine has been the attempt by successive Israeli governments to divide and fracture the Palestinian people, attempting to destroy a cohesive national identity by separating them from one another. This process is clearly illustrated by the different categories of Palestinians: refugees, who remain scattered in camps across the region; those who remained on their land in 1948 and later became citizens of the Israeli state; those living in the isolated cantons of the West Bank; and now those separated by the fragmenting of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. All of these groups of people constitute the Palestinian nation, but the denial of their unity has been the overriding logic of colonization since before 1948. Both the Zionist left and right agree with this logic, and have acted in unison to narrow the Palestinian “question” to isolated fragments of the nation as a whole. This logic is also one wholeheartedly accepted by the Palestinian Authority and is embodied in its vision of a “two-state solution.”

Oslo may be dead, but its putrid corpse is not one that any Palestinian should hope to resuscitate. What is needed is a new political orientation that rejects the fracturing of Palestinian identity into scattered geographical zones. It is encouraging to see the mounting chorus of calls for a reorientation of Palestinian strategy, based on a single state in all of historic Palestine. Such an outcome will not be achieved solely through Palestinian efforts. It requires a broader challenge to Israel’s privileged relationship with the US and

its position as a key pillar of US power in the Middle East. But a one-state strategy presents a vision for Palestine that confirms the essential unity of all sectors of the Palestinian people regardless of geography.

It also provides a path to reach out to Israelis that reject Zionism and colonialism through the hope of a future society that does not discriminate on the basis of national identity, and in which all may live regardless of religion or ethnicity. It is this vision that provides a route to achieving both peace and justice.

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A decade has passed since this piece was first written, and in the midst of Israel's brutal war against Gaza, its main argument sadly stands true today. Since 2013, the fragmentation of the Palestinian population has become even more sharply manifest through the now sixteen years of encirclement, siege, and blockade of the Gaza Strip; ever-tightening restrictions on movement and Israel's control of the political economy of the West Bank; and the continued denial of the right of return to Palestinian refugees displaced across the Arab world. At the same time, the mainstream of Israeli politics has steadily adapted to the violent discourse of the far right and ultra-nationalist settler-bloc, emboldening the state's on-going policies of repression, occupation, and Apartheid, including against Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The Palestinian Authority and the Gulf states have also continued along the path described in this piece. The PA's continued role as gendarme for Israeli policy in the West Bank has deepened and the PA President Abu Mazen's inability to respond meaningfully to the atrocities in Gaza is striking. At the regional level, the last decade has shown the open willingness of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other smaller Gulf states to normalize political and economic relations with Israel. The longstanding US strategy to knit together its two main pillars of support in the Middle East—Israel and the Gulf states—has moved forward much more quickly than anyone could have possibly predicted, reaching denouement in the so-called

Abraham Accords. Yet, as with every such similar attempt over the last six decades, the Palestinian people have continued to reject this kind of regional normalization.

But given the brutality of the current moment, we must remember that a permanent ceasefire is *not* a cessation of Israeli violence, and when the bombs stop falling on Gaza—as they eventually will—that any return to an Oslo-type framework will not represent any lessening of Israel’s settler colonial project. There is no doubt that this is the post-war endgame desired by the main Western powers; and in this they will certainly receive the blessing of the PA, the Gulf Arab states, and other regional actors such as Egypt. The rhetoric of both the Biden Administration and the supposedly more “reasonable” European states point unequivocally to this conclusion. As such, it is crucial to reassert a basic historical fact: Israeli strategy has always been based on the periodic use of extreme violence, twinned with the illusion of a “peaceful” negotiated two-state solution. These poles are part of the same process, serving to reinforce the subjugation and fragmentation of the Palestinian people.

In this context, the goal of a single, democratic state that encompasses the entirety of the population across historic Palestine remains the only viable long-term route out of the current situation. In making the case for this slogan, however, we need to move beyond simple appeals to liberal notions of citizenship, and instead foreground the class and imperial interests that continue to sustain the status quo. What role does Israeli settler-colonialism—and thus the fragmentation of the Palestinian people—play in the architecture of US power in the Middle East? How does this connect to the place of other powers, especially the Gulf Arab states, in the regional capitalist order? What are the class dynamics of Palestinian society—across all its multiple geographies—and how have these been shaped by both Israeli violence and imperialist-backed plans such as the Oslo Accords? Clarity on these kinds of fundamental questions is more urgent than ever.

The shifting dynamics of Palestinian resistance

Toufic Haddad
5 October 2023

This interview was conducted by Anne Alexander for the International Socialist Journal, where it was first published. It is republished here with permission.

How would you set the current crisis in Palestine in the context of the longer history of the struggle? Is it right to speak of the current situation being rooted in a crisis of the “peace process” associated with the Oslo Accords, which came out of negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Israeli government in the early 1990s?

TOUFIC: It’s important to debunk the idea that the Oslo process had anything to do with “peace” or with Palestinian rights and international law and so on. Oslo was an implementation of the Allon Plan, which was essentially an attempt to permanently incorporate the conquests of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War into Israel, while enabling a form of limited autonomy and self-governance for the Palestinians, albeit without the provision of sovereignty¹. The “solution” of autonomy was aimed at scuttling the self-determination claims of the Palestinians. It

was seen as necessary to the preservation of the “Jewish and democratic” character of Israel, which could erode if the occupation of the territories conquered in 1967 continued indefinitely and thus threatened to incorporate more Palestinians into the Israeli polity. Such an eventuality might endanger the demographic majority enjoyed by Israel’s Jewish population². This became an issue that required head-on confrontation by the early 1980s, when Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) began organizing in formations of mass mobilization and, by the late 1980s, launched the uprising that became known as the First Intifada.

The Oslo process was an attempt to resolve these dilemmas by implementing a variant of the Allon Plan. This essentially took the form of a Bantustan solution. Israel needed to avoid what development studies scholars call “convergence”, economically and politically, between Israel and the Palestinians. After the war in 1967, the green line (the internationally recognized borders of Israel, drawn prior to the conquests in 1967) was erased; there were no longer borders between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza. Following 1967, Palestinian refugees living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip could even visit their old lands within the borders of Israel that had been established in 1948, when the state was founded amid the violent expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Arabs. Palestinians also entered the Israeli labor market in massive numbers, leading to much higher levels of income in Gaza and the West Bank, which enabled some building up of institutions. When the First Intifada erupted, it fed off these political contradictions. In truth, the reality Israel was overseeing before Oslo was unsustainable. Israel desperately needed a form of separation, but one that would not provide the basis for a future Palestinian state, because it still viewed the lands conquered in 1967 as essential to the Zionist project, both strategically and ideologically.

Israel’s approach was thus, to quote Israeli economist Arie Arnon, “neither two nor one”. They wanted neither a one-state solution, where Israelis and Palestinians would be part of a single political entity, nor the emergence of an independent Palestinian state

alongside Israel. Instead, there was constant vacillation between the two alternatives.

Ultimately, the Oslo process failed, but let's talk about some of its important successes. Chief among these has been the obfuscation of the political situation in the eyes of the international community through the appearance of a process of "peace-making" and "state-building". There was the illusion of something genuine taking place with Western taxpayers' money, which in reality is simply helping to restructure the Israeli occupation. The aim was to create a co-opted Palestinian elite and to place the Palestinians nominally outside of Israeli responsibility—though, in reality, Israel would maintain control of the land and the supposedly "autonomous" areas. The Palestinian Authority was to administer the education and health of Palestinians while acting as their main interface with the Israeli state and army, thus managing the "Palestinian problem," including its "security" dimension.

This situation has not been without serious contradictions. The creation of a dual infrastructure may have gotten the Palestinians "off the Israeli books" in economic, political and civil terms, creating the illusion that the Palestinians are on the road to something like the formation of their own state and are thus no longer Israel's responsibility. However, this argument becomes less convincing the more that the whole process grinds to a halt. In 2012, the International Monetary Fund acknowledged that the Palestinian Authority had achieved sufficient state building capacity to be self-reliant, with all the fixtures of statehood in place in terms of different ministries and a capacity to manage and govern the population. What was lacking was sovereignty. The creation of parallel infrastructures for Israelis and Palestinians therefore looks more and more like apartheid, designed to keep the Palestinian population down via various methods of oppression, control, surveillance and gerrymandering of the map, some of which are extremely brutal. The Gaza Strip is subject to a draconian policy of siege as well as to intermittent Israeli exercises in "mowing the lawn", whereby the Zionist military attempts to eliminate the constantly re-emerging efforts to resist its

strangulation. Gaza has very limited means of self-sustenance because of Israel's historic de-development policies, the pollution of water aquifers, the Strip's limited reserves of land and the lack of free access to the outside world. This situation continues indefinitely, with Israel simply hiding behind its "security" justifications for maintaining Gaza as an overcrowded and heavily polluted open-air prison for about two million Palestinian refugees.

When you begin to question the picture presented by Israel for international consumption, you see that the entire Palestinian population, from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea, exists under some form of Israeli domination and surveillance. This makes the case for categorizing Israel as an apartheid state all the more convincing. Indeed, over the past fifteen years or so, all the major international human rights organizations, including the Israeli ones, have started making this case, because to make any other would be an affront to their own mandates.

All this said, the major problem facing the Israeli and Western architects of the Oslo process is that, despite their technical solutions and gerrymandering of the "Palestine problem," they can't actually solve key political problems. Today's Palestinians are no less resistant to the occupation and no more accepting of Zionist settler colonialism and the state of Israel. They feel that the peace process and the international community have cheated them and that neither the Oslo Accords nor international law has delivered anything for them. On top of this, there have been significant economic, educational and institutional advances among the Palestinians over the past thirty years, with a larger Palestinian population that is more capable of raising its demands. All this is very problematic for Israel.

On the economic front, although the Oslo process claimed to push forward a two-state solution by allowing the Palestinians to set up various ministries and develop state resources, ultimately Israel maintained its de-development policies. This meant preventing the emergence of productive industries and the development of horizontal linkages between different Palestinian localities that might generate synergies and surpluses. Instead, Israel kept the OPT

dependent, stuck in a stasis reminiscent of the South African Bantustans, and reliant on imports from Israel's uncompetitive industries, which have been dumped in Palestinian Authority-administered areas. They also used the checkpoint system to cynically manipulate Palestinian elites and economic and political actors.

We have to understand the economic situation in the context of Israel's "closure policy"—a massive infrastructure that controls movement in and out of each of the isolated islands of Palestinian population that constitute an archipelago within the OPT today. The resulting lack of Palestinian economic self-reliance creates a burdensome situation for the international community, and the Israelis are not immune from its effects either. When they decide to shut down the Palestinian economy, it has consequences for the Israeli economy in some sectors that are dependent upon the flow of Palestinian labor—particularly agriculture and construction.

How has the Palestinian working class changed during the years of the Oslo process?

The Oslo Accords gave Israel the chance to "get Gaza out of Tel Aviv," a slogan deployed by former Israel prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1992, and find a way out of the First Intifada. Yet, the Gaza created by this process was one without jobs and where workers were put on the payroll of the international community by bloating the public sector. Indeed, the public sector is 36 percent of the workforce in Gaza—twice the equivalent figure in the West Bank. The public sector did not really exist on the same scale before Oslo. Around 20,000 people worked for the Israeli Civil Administration, which managed the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip before the Oslo process. Employment within it was considered politically dubious. Today, there are more than 150,000 workers in the Palestinian public sector as a result of the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

Another major section of the Palestinian population works across the green line, within pre-1967 Israel, or in the West Bank settlements.

Israel is, at the end of the day, primarily focused on colonization—permanently uniting the 1948 conquests with those of 1967, and they needed a substantial laboring population to do this. At the start of the Oslo process, there were fewer than 200,000 settlers in the OPT, but there are now 700,000. It was largely Palestinians, refugees and villagers, who supplied the labor force to build the housing and infrastructure needed by the Jewish settler population, because alternative economic opportunities were extremely limited due to the Israeli state's land and de-development policies.

What are the roots of the current political crisis generated by the rise of the religious right in Israel?

The Ashkenazi-based Israeli elite and Labour Zionist movement, which brought about the Oslo Accords, dominated Israeli political, economic and cultural life since the establishment of the state. In doing so, they created many enemies within Israeli society. These included not only the Palestinians, but also many among the religious Jews, who they treated as backwards, and the Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews, who do not share a similar history with the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. In the 1990s, members of the Ashkenazi elite privatized their kibbutzes and went off to buy property in Berlin and New York, getting into the stock market and doing well for itself. However, the underbelly of Israeli society was growing, including the Mizrahi and Orthodox Jewish populations. These sections of society often interacted more closely with Palestinians, frequently living in the settlements and on the periphery of Palestinian areas, since this was cheaper. Indeed, there was a long history of discrimination against these sections of the Jewish population in the name of “modernity” and the creation of a homogenous Jewish state. The Ashkenazi elite, who were largely secular and unobservant of Jewish religious principles, indulged in racism against non-European traditions, sometimes even adopting antisemitic caricatures of the religious Orthodox Jews.

Yet, even as Ashkenazi-dominated Labour Zionism reveled in its successes in reaping the fruits of the settlement project, it was diminishing demographically. We then saw the emergence of social and political constituencies, of various persuasions, with an axe to grind against the Ashkenazi elite, as well as their own vision for Israel as a Jewish state. These forces were eventually able to coalesce around the Likud party and its Revisionist Zionism, which pushed a more Jewish-supremacist political line. It didn't care about liberalism at all and saw no need for the Zionist project's liberal facade.

This right-wing coalition has now grown large enough and strong enough to increasingly permeate the state, attempting to reorganize and redefine it at the institutional level and challenge the remaining bastions of the old elite, such as the supreme court and the media. This process has been ongoing for a long time, but it now appears to have reached a tipping point, so that its reforms may become irreversible. This has major implications for both Israeli and Palestinian society.

What is that vision? Are you talking about completing the Nakba and removing the Palestinian population?

I think it's going in that direction. From the perspective of these political forces, Israelis should feel fully entitled to the land and powerful enough to reject any form of political compromise with the Palestinian people. They don't understand why Israel ever needed the Oslo process. The Labour Zionist tradition understood the value of pragmatism, particularly within such complex regional and international political contexts. However, these new tendencies are far less sympathetic to liberalism. Indeed, they feel oppressed by it. Moreover, as the lords of the land, they also feel entitled to much more.

Their vision is expanding Jewish settlement of the OPT and treating Palestinians inside the green line—who have long been officially referred to as “Arab Israelis” in an attempt to underline their supposed integration into Israeli society—much more like the

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Before he became finance minister in the current Israeli government in 2022, Bezalel Smotrich founded organizations in Israel to enable Jews to spy on and report any “illegal” construction activities among the Palestinian citizens of Israel³. He sees a demographic and territorial battle taking place across a single territory, including against Israeli citizens of Palestinian origin. There is a spiritual battle too. The current administration’s national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, has twice been to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, brazenly asserting Israeli sovereignty over it, which is intended as an affront not just to Palestinians but to 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide. Hundreds of settlers and Zionist fanatics are coming to Al-Aqsa daily, trying to create security incidents that can be used to justify partition of the mosque compound. Likud ministers have already put the partition of the Al-Aqsa compound on their agenda.

This monster grew out of the Oslo process. It aims at settling the remaining Palestinian territories, pushing back Palestinian demands, and doing away with the Palestinians as a people and a “national problem.” It is prepared to do this even through the threat of expulsion. The previous incarnation of Zionism was horrific and conducted multiple ethnic cleansing campaigns against the Palestinians. Yet, the character of these new forces—which grew up within and out of the old—is unapologetic about its Jewish supremacism. It is working hard to capture the Israeli state—the tool that manages the allotment of the fruits of the Zionist conquest among Israeli settler populations. They want to do away with the liberal facades that previously mediated and mitigated the horror of the colonization of Palestine and afforded some degree of nuance to the governance structures of this complicated project called Israel. They wish to do away with the Palestinians, take their land, and imprint their power upon the Arab world and the Middle East.

Is it fair to say that Smotrich, Ben-Gvir and their like don’t want apartheid, but rather conquest?

Apartheid was and remains the temporary managerialist solution the Zionist movement and Israel is forced to erect in light of the dilemmas previously described. However, whether this is sustainable in the long run, considering the long-term demographic and political indicators, is questionable. These factors certainly do not look favorable to the Zionist project. No one knows the exact demographic figures, but there are some indications that Jews are already a minority between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. Plus, there are limits on how much Jewish migration to Israel can really come about. There are not so many Jews out there in the world who are actually willing to come anymore. This begs the question of whether apartheid is just a temporary solution before a push toward ethnic cleansing is eventually attempted again. Meanwhile, Palestinian life will be turned into a hell in order to encourage emigration and disassociation from Palestinian national identity and organizing for national liberation.

It's worth pointing to the contribution of the "international community" during the Oslo process, which consistently sided with Israel and argued that the Palestinians were the problem, were the "rejectionists" and so on. The inverse side of this is that the exclusive focus on managing, subordinating and quashing the Palestinians nourished a new Israeli monster. I don't want to fall into the trap of letting Labour Zionism off the hook—after all, it created all these problems in the first place, and it did so as an extension of a Western imperialist agenda in the Middle East. Nonetheless, one cannot deny that what has grown up now is a more virulent variant of this. This contemporary Zionism is unapologetic about supremacy over the Palestinians—indeed, it is even bringing biological racism back into the picture and may even use this against people who identify as Jews.

What's your assessment of the Unity Intifada in 2021 as a model of Palestinian resistance from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea? Obviously, it lacked a unified political leadership, but there was unity at the level of slogans and some forms of movement activism.

The general strike observed in May 2021 didn't really have an opportunity to develop beyond what it was. It was a one-off affair that came about at the tail-end of the Jerusalem uprising, which started in Sheikh Jarrah and spread to the Old City, Al Aqsa and then to Gaza. Because Jerusalem was about to ignite the Arab and Muslim world, the United States stepped in and shut down Israel's settlement plans in Sheikh Jarrah. The US were not going to risk its empire and regional influence just so a bunch of radical settlers could implant themselves in Sheikh Jarrah⁴. Yet, from a Palestinian perspective, these events were not sustained enough to be able to generate new forms of political momentum, even if the experience did offer a vision of what might be possible.

It's important to recognize that the general strike took place within a context of Palestinians across all of historic Palestine having witnessed the convergence of their conditions and predicaments under Israeli colonial supremacy. This applies even to Palestinian citizens of Israel, who five years ago saw the Israeli parliament pass the Nation State Law, which clearly states that only Jews are allowed self-determination here and that Palestinians are, essentially, constitutionally unentitled to equality—even as citizens. In this broader context of Israel asserting institutionalized Jewish supremacy of one variety or another, and particularly with its "right-wing" variant now very much ascendant, it's natural that Palestinians would desire the reconnection of their struggle across all the borders imposed upon them over the past seventy-five years. That has begun to happen across the fragments that Israel created: the West Bank, Gaza, '48 Palestine and Jerusalem. However, the differing tools with which Israel manages each section of the Palestinian population, and the varying legal rights of each of these groups, naturally shapes the dynamics of the struggle and frustrates the emergence of a unified set of strategies and tactics.

Certainly, the broader tendency will be towards convergence of Palestinian interests and resistance to the aggressive nature of contemporary Zionism, because that's not going to go away anytime soon. Israel is committed to frontal colonial and racist assaults. Yet,

the territorial splintering of Palestine has fed into the continued fragmentation of the forces of resistance. In principle, this doesn't preclude the possibility of unified resistance through actions such as strikes and generalized rebellion, but the chances of these becoming effective are reliant upon much greater political preparation as well as the actions of our allies regionally and internationally. Furthermore, at this stage, the use of labor as a point of leverage for the Palestinians is insufficient for a successful strategy, due to the way in which the structure and character of the Israeli colonial project has been reorganized, especially after the Oslo Accords, so that Arab workers' organization is less threatening to the Israeli economy.

In this context, where something new is imaginable but as yet unborn, there is, of course, also the very real issue of the existing institutions and political organizations. Palestinian society is no vacuum. We have a rich and diverse ecology of civil, military and political resistance. Shifts in Palestinian society are taking place within a historical context and established dynamics of resistance, which are partly shaped by how Israel has responded to Palestinian resistance activity of one type or another in the past. The military resistance is at its most evolved in Gaza, where you have a fully developed military infrastructure and political economy. In the West Bank there is less military prowess, but you have conditions that are equally explosive and continue to generate the desire to resist, including via force of arms.

The Oslo Accords have been superficially successful in restructuring the occupation and managing the problem of the Palestinians while confusing international opinion about the nature of the colonial project. However, these are chimerical victories for Israel and the West. They are reliant upon endless gerrymandering of the map, indefinite use of the "stick" and permanent economic dependence on the international community. No political consent has been engendered among the Palestinians, including from its leadership. Indeed, Israel and the West got two Palestinian leaderships out of Oslo: the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which has legitimacy on the world stage (with recognition of the

statehood of the Palestinian Authority from 140 countries) and continues to demand Palestinian rights in international forums, and the Hamas leadership in Gaza, which is investing in military tactics that advance the cause of national liberation. Of course, there are many problems with having a split leadership, as well as with the clear lack of democracy. Nonetheless, neither of these leaderships are what Israel wants. It lacks solutions to dealing with either, despite the overwhelming imbalance of power.

Today, the dynamics on the ground, particularly in Jerusalem and the West Bank, are already very much like a slow-paced Intifada, with almost daily attacks on settlers and army personnel for much of the past year. These actions are currently being driven by disorganized social forces, rather than organized political factions. Recently, for example, we saw a forty-year-old man who smashed his car into a checkpoint, killing a soldier and injuring five others. He had five kids and comes from a village near Ramallah. This speaks to the kind of people who are forced to resist, and Israel has no clear answer to this style of resistance. They have no answer to the “lone wolf”—the disenfranchised Palestinian continually generated by the political situation. Sometimes, even people with permits to work in Israel settlements might carry out such attacks. There are large amounts of “illegal” arms among Palestinians, and there’s certainly enough anger, willingness to fight and political awareness. What happens if the organized resistance factions begin to become more directly involved in this, introducing training and more effective weapons?

A fairly serious military dynamic has also emerged in Gaza. Given how much time, energy and resources have been put into it, we should not underestimate it. The military resistance movements in Gaza have been able to rack up some modest but significant successes, such as the prisoner exchange that resulted in 1,200 Palestinian prisoners being released and 25,000 years being cut from prison sentences. That’s a major success for a Palestinian resistance formation and would have been unthinkable prior to the Oslo Accords. Sure, such victories don’t happen every day, and militarism is, in any case, an elitist form of resistance with many problems. Still,

Israel lacks the complete freedom of military maneuver it once had. Gaza, despite its extremely limited resources, has shown itself capable of firing hundreds of rockets daily into Israel, including at key infrastructure such as airports and military bases. Israel has failed to resolve this problem, despite its Iron Dome air defense system.

Indeed, it is important to acknowledge a significant accumulation of Palestinian resistance dynamics and expertise. This is something that is not going away. Instead, the resistance seems poised to explore ways to better understand its enemy and challenge its weaknesses. In this sense, Israel, despite its obvious military prowess, is vulnerable and exposed. Let's remember that Israeli settlers and Palestinians are living very close to each other in the West Bank, and the settlement enterprise is costly from the state's perspective. Moreover, it's hardly an attractive place to live for any person who has a family and lacks a high degree of ideological motivation.

These dilemmas take on a particular coloration due to the internal schisms within Israel's Jewish population. These divides are challenging the economic and political organization of the country, remodeling its institutional life and the identities of Israelis. We have already seen elements of the Israeli military reserve forces becoming associated with the opposition to Netanyahu and threatening to boycott army duties if he passes his "judicial coup" against Israel's supreme court.

Ensuring a strong Israeli army was a fundamental component of Western support for Zionism, both prior to the state's foundation and after 1948, so such events are significant. The West wanted the creation of a Spartan state that could defeat all the other regional states. It guaranteed Israel's "Qualitative Military Edge" over the other Middle Eastern powers, because it lacked reliable and stable allies in the region. Arab nationalism, or democracy, would create major problems for Western interests in the region, so the US and the European powers preferred to maintain influence by keeping the region disorganized, under the rule of dictators and the watchful gaze and cudgel of the Israeli nightwatchman.

We will see how Palestinian resistance develops and if it can find ways, directly or indirectly, to exacerbate and deepen the social and political fissures inside Israeli society, which will also necessarily have implications for Israel's army. This is where Palestinian opposition is heading. Although there is the potential to link up with broader regional and international campaigns, this is not really the priority at the moment. It's tough enough to organize resistance under occupation, and other areas of the world are clearly undergoing major transitions and disorganization, so it's not self-evident who or what can be linked up with and where.

The majority of political formations and actual resistance organizations in the OPT are preoccupied with ensuring Palestinians can remain rooted in their homeland and within self-conscious, organized and politicized communities. They are focused on generating the resources necessary to resist the settlers and the army without raising the crisis to a level where mass expulsion becomes possible. I would even say that even the Palestinian Liberation Organization is invested in this project, though its way of going about this is convoluted and involves dominating decision-making and funds so that it remains on top.

Given all this, the unification of the struggle across the fractures in Palestinian society is likely to only take place beneath the table, rather than in an overt fashion, because the larger structural dynamics that separate and fragment Palestinians are still so pervasive. It is rare that there are opportunities for a collective struggle against our collective enemy. People always feel on the back foot. Indeed, Israel is on the front foot due to the very fact that it is the colonial power.

Nevertheless, it is also significant that the political crisis inside Israel is having a major attritional effect on Israeli society, shredding the feeling of a unified national identity. Some 28 percent of the Jewish Israeli population is considering emigration. A large part of Israel's dominance over the Palestinians, and more broadly over the Arabs in general, has to do with its aerial superiority. Yet, we have recently witnessed Israeli pilots speaking about withholding their

service to the military. The pilots are largely from the privileged Ashkenazi section of the population. So, dimensions of the political and ethnic conflict among Jewish Israelis are hitting the military, including its most strategically important elements.

If trends persist across a longer period, we may well see large Jewish emigration away from Israel, the weakening of Israel's economy in certain respects, including a fall in international investment, and the reaffirmation of Israel's pariah status on the world stage. There's already talk of the high-tech sector moving its money out of Israel, although, of course, a lot of that will depend on the global dynamics of capitalism. A lot also turns on how the international community chooses to deal with Israel. As international relations shift in a "new Cold War era" after the 2007 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, it remains to be seen how the theater of Israel-Palestine will adjust. There are both encouraging and discouraging signs.

We are obliged to highlight the emergent dangers in the situation. It's a real horror show. You have very violent, racist and fascistic elements in office, and they feel entitled to power. They are, ironically, constrained by the historical legacy of the Oslo process, as well as the military machine and officer class that oversaw it and today supervises the main dynamics of interaction with the Palestinians. For the time, these more established social forces, together with the international community, which has paid for the Oslo Accords for the past thirty years, remain invested in the existing paradigm as the only solution to their dilemmas. However, there are problems bubbling up on all sides, in both Palestinian and Israeli society. Israel's emergent political formations believe alternatives to Oslo exist and should be considered and potentially exercised, including declaration of unapologetic Jewish-supremacist apartheid, total annexation of the OPT and ethnic cleansing of those who resist. The army does not yet agree, and neither do Israel's traditional political allies in the US and the other Western states. Netanyahu mediates these tensions, and all the while his own political neck is on the line.

It's a very unpredictable and unstable situation, and one that political actors standing in solidarity with Palestine need to understand. Yet, the situation also creates major opportunities for building new forms of consciousness. Targeted campaigns can speak to the horrific situation on the ground as well as the inspiration of Palestinian struggle and its sheer persistence. Activists in the West need to pose questions and challenge the merits of spending Western tax money on sustaining the situation—including the military aid that goes towards sponsoring an unapologetic, radicalizing, racist, homophobic and Jewish-supremacist settler-colonial project bent on violent pacification and ethnic cleansing. What place should such an endeavor have in today's world, in light of all the threats to global peace and wellbeing we face?

Bread, freedom and an Arab Palestine

Nihal El Aasar

11 December 2023

On Saturday 14 October, Israel gave 1.1 million Palestinians in Gaza an impossible ultimatum: either move to the southern half of the Gaza Strip or be **killed**—a request that the UN decried as “**inconceivable.**” Some heeded the warning, but Israel attacked them nonetheless. In a flagrant breach of international law, Israel bombed Palestinians who chose to evacuate to the south along the designated corridors leading towards the Rafah border crossing that connects Gaza and Egypt. The IDF also bombed the Rafah passage itself multiple times, resulting in at least nine injuries on the Egyptian side. It is now early-December and bombings in the “safe” southern half of Gaza have continued unabated. As I write, over 17,700 Palestinians including 7,870 children have been killed, with full backing from the US, the UK and the EU, and by the time you read this, no doubt these numbers will be devastatingly out of date.

In an effort to deflect responsibility for the bloodshed, Israel and its Western backers originally asked why Egypt was not willing to open its doors to Palestinian refugees from Gaza (the majority of whom were already refugees before Israel’s siege began). The fact of Egypt’s restrictive—but crucially, not always closed—border is often cynically used by Zionists to cast the Palestinians as a globally

undesirable population, painting all Arabs into one homogenous mass, eliding complex political realities in the process. In the present crisis, however, they have framed the question of allowing refugees into Egypt as one of humanitarian concern, obscuring the actual goal of this “solution” to the crisis: ethnic cleansing. As the people of Gaza know first-hand, when Israel expels Palestinians from their land, they are notoriously never allowed to return.

Egypt’s position in the current conflict must be understood both in historical context and in contemporary regional perspective. While Egypt historically played an important role in the fight for Palestinian liberation, today’s Egypt seems to have been, for the moment, neutralized as a threat to Israel. It owes large foreign debts to international financial institutions. Simultaneously, its economy is fully dependent on imports, stuck in its role as a periphery producer of goods for export to the West, reliant on Israel for its natural gas, reliant on Ukraine and Russia for its wheat, and unwilling to exert full sovereignty on its border with Palestine in Rafah under the US and Israel’s shadows. Although Egypt was the first Arab country to formally normalize relations with Israel in the notorious Camp David Accords forty-five years ago, most of Egypt’s population remains pro-Palestine, and heavily invested in the Palestinian cause. Due to Palestine’s long history as a core element of Egyptian political consciousness, millions of Egyptians have been moved to protest in opposition to the proposed displacement of Palestinians. Israel and the West’s efforts to impose a mass transfer of Palestinians into the Sinai has the potential to further destabilize Egypt with significant consequences for the broader region.

Palestinian and Arab liberation

While Egypt, today, acts as a pseudo-client state of the US, its role in the mid-twentieth century was one of a crucial regional power invested in Palestinian liberation. In the mid-twentieth century, central to the Palestinian cause and its vision of liberation was its Arab dimension. Reading Palestinian intellectual and revolutionary

Ghassan Kanafani's writings during that period, it is clear he was interested in defining Palestine and the Palestinian question outside of its relational dynamic to Israel. He was, instead, more concerned with Palestinian revolution in relation to the surrounding regional dynamics and as part of the tide of other Arab revolutions.

At the heart of pan-Arabism, on the other hand, was the liberation of Palestine. It was the project for Palestinian liberation that gave Arab nationalism and its chosen leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the necessary legitimacy across the Arab world to create a unified political bloc out of the Arab states and to attempt to return Palestine to the Arabs. Even prior to Nasser and the establishment of an Egyptian republic, from the late thirties onwards, Egypt had played a leading role in Arab efforts to prevent the establishment of a Zionist state in Palestine. In 1948, it contributed the largest single contingent of troops in the Arab war against Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestine, and the ensuing humiliating loss was one of the main factors behind the weakening of the monarchy and its ultimate overthrow by the Free Officers movement in the popular coup of 1952. Within the FO movement, Nasser was one of two 1948 war veterans, the other being Mohamed Naguib, Egypt's first president who Nasser later forced into resignation. Egyptian nationalism was often the motivation for Palestine's liberation among Egyptian veterans. Nasser, himself, remarked of fighting in the 1948 war, "we were fighting in the field while our thoughts were directed towards Egypt."¹

But it was not simply because Palestine was an Arab nation that its liberation was essential to Nasser's Egypt. There was an understanding that the newly formed Zionist state was an imperialist vassal in the region—the chosen American outpost, given life by colonial Britain—that would prevent any pan-Arab socialist project from succeeding in the region, as well as would obstruct an Arab drift towards the Soviet Union. Israel's status as an imperial outpost became abundantly clear in 1956 when Nasser, now president of Egypt, nationalised the Suez Canal to the outrage of the Suez Canal Company and its British and French shareholders. This, in turn, prompted an immediate tripartite aggression from Britain, France,

and Israel, which dissipated only after political pressure from the UN, the US and the USSR. The aggressors were humiliated, and Nasser strengthened, despite the fact that the canal city of Port Said was severely destroyed and hundreds of its residents displaced after a brave resistance campaign.

Egypt, the PLO, and the Naksa

Egypt, under Nasser, was involved in Palestinian affairs in several ways. In 1964 the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was established during the Arab League Summit in Cairo. The following year, Nasser's Egypt successfully stopped West German arms supplies to Israel, causing the US to step in instead. The global consensus at that stage was that if a solution to the Palestine question was to be found, it would have to be through Cairo. At the same time, Nasser had tied Egypt's regional power to the success of the newly formed Yemen republic. This embroiled Nasser's Egypt in regional conflict, leading him to involve a third of Egypt's troops in Yemen's war against Saudi Arabia, which severely weakened Egypt militarily. This, alongside internal, domestic policy failures, led to Egypt's eventual catastrophic defeat—the great unravelling against Israel in 1967, also known as the “Naksa” or the setback, which would eventually spell the demise of Nasser, the pan-Arabist project, and any prospect of attaining Arab socialism.

Despite Egypt's complete unreadiness to fight in the war of 1967, Egyptian public opinion largely supported the country's participation in the conflict. The factors that led to the war included the US and Britain arming anti-Nasser royalists in Yemen, as well as increasing tensions between Israel and Syria. There was a widespread expectation among the populations of the Arab states that Egypt should aid both Syria and the PLO. Nasser was accused of being an “escapist” and risking his standing in the Arab world. When Nasser half-heartedly took the decision to block Israel from using the strait of Tiran, the UN refused to act as a buffer, and the decision was seen as a declaration of war that Israel welcomed. Nasser's special forces

were far away in Yemen, there was little to no coordination between Egyptian forces and the Syrian and Jordanian armies that joined the war, and the US was eager for any chance to undermine Nasser. All was lost before the war truly began. “It took eighty minutes to execute a plan that was in the making for ten years,” Shimon Perez [said](#). In six days, Israel had occupied Gaza, all of Sinai, and the West Bank, and two days later it had also occupied the Golan Heights.

The defeat was so large in scale that many citizens of the Arab world still see it as the starting point for many of the disastrous realities facing the Middle East today. After the Naksa, the PLO was able to step out of Nasser’s shadow and become more autonomous. It became a truly Palestinian entity, able to determine and represent the will of the Palestinian people, rather than being controlled by the Arab states.

After Nasser’s death in 1970, his successor Anwar Sadat, decided to take Egypt down a different political and economic path. It turned to the so-called “open door” economic policy or *infitah*, allowing foreign companies to operate largely unchecked within its economy, it allied itself with the US, and increasingly relied on international financial institutions and gulf monarchies for financial support. This was in line with the global trend towards neo-liberalisation and the decline of the Soviet Union. The early years of the Anwar Sadat era were defined by the haunting aftermath of Nasserism, a strong student movement, and widespread public demand to go to war with Israel in 1973, after a four-year-long war of attrition which saw Israel bomb Bahr al-Baqr primary school in Al-Sharqiyah in April 1970. After Egypt’s defeat in the 1973 war, Sadat’s legacy is primarily tied to the 1979 Camp David accords, which saw Egypt normalize relations with Israel, neutralizing the former as a military threat and assuaging western fears about what was, until then, the biggest challenge to its imperialist outpost. Yet, today, despite almost fifty years of formal normalization, the overwhelming majority of the Egyptian population remains staunchly anti-Zionist.

Debt as discipline

The current demand that Egypt take in 2.3 million refugees from Gaza in furtherance of Israel's completion of the 1948 Nakba is both immoral and logistically unfeasible—not to mention staunchly opposed by Gaza's Palestinian population. On 24 October, a [document](#) (currently being circulated by Israeli Intelligence Minister Gila Gamliel) was leaked to the Israeli news site Calcalist. It detailed Israeli plans for the forced transfer of the Palestinians in Gaza to the Sinai Peninsula as a culmination of Israel's genocidal purge of the Strip. Pressure on the Egyptian government to take in the exodus of refugees was touted by the press and Middle East analysts as a serious option at first, with unsubstantiated reports in the regional press stating that the US would be prepared to offer Egypt some significant debt relief in exchange for hosting a large number of refugees in the Sinai.

Egypt is currently facing a historic debt crisis. [Bloomberg Economics](#) ranked Egypt as second only to Ukraine in terms of countries most vulnerable to defaulting on debt payments. The Egyptian debt crisis has been little discussed in the West, but it is a daily presence for Egyptians, who continue to face mounting inflation and unparalleled price hikes as a result of Egypt's complete reliance on international lending from the IMF and wealthy Gulf states. Such reliance circumscribes Egypt's range of action and erodes its sovereignty, making it difficult and unlikely for the country to act independently from US interests—including on foreign policy.

This wouldn't be the first time the US has used the prospect of debt forgiveness as a tool to coerce Egypt into complying with its policy demands. In 1991, the United States and its allies forgave half of Egypt's external debt (\$11.1 billion USD, out of \$20.2 billion) in exchange for Egypt's participation in the anti-Iraq coalition during the first Gulf War. The precedent for 1991 however, was the 1978–9 Camp David accords—Anwar Sadat's infamous normalization treaty with Israel under the auspices of the U.S., which saw Sadat break with the anti-colonialist foreign policy of his predecessor Gamal Abdel Nasser. In the post-Camp David period, Egypt became a credit-worthy state for Western governments and Western-backed international

institutions, both of which increased economic and military lending. The upshot was that Sadat moved even further away from the Nasser regime's self-sufficient economic policy.

Despite the potential of loan forgiveness, it quickly became clear during high-level [conversations](#) between Egyptian officials and President Joe Biden at the end of October that the Egyptian government was unwilling to consider absorbing Palestinian refugees and was seeking reassurances from the US against that option. This could be attributed to several countervailing domestic and regional considerations, as I describe below.

Protests from above—and below

In the current run-up to the December 2023 Egyptian presidential elections, Egyptian president Abdel Fatah El Sisi's popularity is at an all-time low due to the country's dire economic situation, with public dissent augmented by his unprecedented crackdowns on political life. He is clearly wary of appearing opposed to the public with respect to Palestine. In a [statement](#) last month, Sisi said, "Egypt rejects any attempt to resolve the Palestinian issue by military means or through the forced displacement of Palestinians from their land, which would come at the expense of the countries of the region," even acknowledging that Egyptians would "go out and protest in their millions ... if called upon to do so."

It is notable that on 18 October, shortly after Sisi's statement, and after nearly a decade of the absolute prohibition of demonstrations, state-aligned parties and charities held state-sanctioned demonstrations in support of Palestine in designated areas—the first sanctioned demonstrations since Sisi became the Egyptian president in June 2014. Despite an attempt by state security forces to contain the marches, some protesters were able to move towards Tahrir Square. They chanted, pointedly, that this was a real protest, not a mandated one, and *not* one in support of the sitting president. Protestors even called for "bread, freedom, and an Arab Palestine," a spin on a famous chant from Egypt's 2011 uprising. There's

something genuinely inspirational in seeing Egyptians back in Tahrir Square after a decade of repression.

During spontaneous demonstrations that arose in universities and in front of the Journalists Syndicate at Al-Azhar, Egyptians chanted, “No displacement or resettlement, the land is the land of Palestine,” and “Neither Naqab nor Sinai, Palestine is entirely ours,” referring to President Sisi’s [comment](#) suggesting that Palestinians could be forcibly moved to the Negev desert instead of the Sinai Peninsula. That same day, volunteers at the Rafah border staged a sit-in, as well—even Egyptian online influencers took part. Around twenty trucks of aid—a limited concession that was laughably inadequate—were allowed to pass into Gaza, probably when the U.S and Israel decreed it rather than at the behest of the Egyptian government, or as the result of the limited pressure. Then, the border was closed again, and reopened only to allow meagre amounts of aid in.

There has been some speculation that Sisi agreed to allow these demonstrations to take place as an attempt to co-opt the Palestinian cause in order to boost his dwindling popularity. There is also a theory that he is allowing space for the expression of some civil liberties in an effort to stave off social unrest. Both options could well be true, but I think there is a third reason: the Egyptian government—not unlike the Israeli government—is at a loss for what to do. Sisi may have been simply testing the waters to gauge the extent of the tension and to take measure of the sentiment on the Egyptian streets, as well as to consider the possibility of using public pressure as a bargaining chip with the US.

However, that never transpired. Despite the demonstrations’ official sanctioning, over 100 people were arrested, either at the protests or at their homes in the following days, according to independent Egyptian publication [Mada Masr](#). Moreover, as a result of the movement into Tahir Square and the subsequent spontaneous actions taken by protestors during the demonstrations, further protests have been prohibited indefinitely and attempts made at the Journalists Syndicate, Al-Azhar Mosque and various universities, were swiftly dispersed.

Friends with whom I've spoken in Egypt have told me that they feel stifled by their inability to adequately show solidarity with Palestine and press the Egyptian government to take more drastic action, including opening the Rafah border and sending medical teams into Gaza. Some online have even compared the prevailing mood to the sense of dejection and impotence felt after the 1967 "Naksa" (the Arabic shorthand for Israel's victory over Egypt; the West refers to it as the Six-Day War). Others have claimed that Egypt is also occupied in its own way—both by the tyrannical Egyptian government and by Western interests.

Still, Egyptians have been trying to find ways around the security apparatus to express their solidarity, with hundreds of thousands of Egyptians going way above and beyond the demands of BDS in calling for a boycott of almost all American products, resulting in a resurgence of Egyptian products that had long been largely sidelined. The owner of a grocery store in Sharqiya governorate [told Al Jazeera](#), "before the boycott, I would sell four, maybe five, boxes of Spathis (an Egyptian fizzy drink brand) in a week, now I can sell as many as fifty boxes in a day if I have that many in stock," adding that the surge in demand is "massive".

The most serious solidarity effort, however, has been carried out by the Egyptian Journalists Syndicate under the leadership of its general secretary Khaled al-Balshy who, in a rare moment of democratic possibility, independently won the syndicate election in March 2023, beating the state-backed candidate. He exerted his autonomy most openly on 10 November when he called on the world to take part in a "Global Conscience Convoy," made up of international delegations, to the Rafah crossing in order to exert pressure on the Egyptian government to open the Egyptian-Palestinian border, break the siege on Gaza, and allow the entry of medical teams, journalists, and politicians.

Egyptian and Palestinian liberation today

Sadat put Egypt on a path to the erosion of Egyptian sovereignty and increased reliance on the West and Gulf monarchies—one that the country has continued following up to the present moment, with the brief exception of the period of the January revolution from 2011 to 2013. That brief window of respite saw Egyptians storming the Israeli embassy, expelling the ambassador, and breaking the siege on Gaza through Rafah.

Despite the government's official position, Egyptian politics are intertwined with and steeped in the Palestinian struggle. The existence of the Zionist state on its border is one of the main reasons that Western and Gulf powers continue to oppose a democratically elected Egyptian government. It is also for this reason that the crackdown on pro-Palestine demonstrations in Egypt has been so brutal. Almost every time a major event has taken place in Palestine since the creation of the state of Israel, demonstrations were almost sure to ensue in Egypt. The pressure of these demonstrations has, historically, been incredibly strong. Indeed, student demonstrations [arguably](#) led to former President Anwar El Sadat's decision to go to war with Israel in October 1973, and it was the Second Intifada protests that forged the way for the organizing that eventually led to the January 2011 uprising. And it is precisely why, during the Palestinian uprising of May 2021, Egypt was the only Arab country to prohibit demonstrations for Palestine, making it the first time in the history of the country that a major event had happened in Palestine without a reaction on the Egyptian streets.

Egypt's ongoing crackdown on dissent and public displays of solidarity with Palestine, today, reflect the Egyptian government's deep anxiety regarding the potential transfer of Palestinian refugees into the country—an influx which would fundamentally change the demographic make-up of postcolonial Egypt, as well as broader dynamics in the region. Were Egypt to allow a mass transfer of Palestinians to Sinai, Palestinians would instantly become the majority population, further undermining Egyptian sovereignty in the area. In the likely scenario in which Palestinians who resettled in Sinai continued resistance operations (or even if they didn't), their

presence would give Israel reason to attack Sinai in “self-defense” at a time when Egypt is already struggling to assert sovereignty on the [North of Sinai, even reportedly going so far as to](#) coordinate with Israeli intelligence for security assistance in combating Islamist militia activity. A further possibility is that the entry of militants alongside other Palestinian refugees, combined with the popularity of the Palestinian cause amongst Egyptians, could influence a number of Egyptian citizens to join resistance movements. It is not an exaggeration to think that the expulsion of the population of Gaza into the Sinai could precipitate Egypt’s own version of [Black September](#), the ten-month long civil war in the 1970s in Jordan between the Jordanian state and an alliance of the Jordanian left and Palestinian militants. It is, additionally, worth remembering that Hamas emerged in the late 1980s as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood—the same Muslim Brotherhood that the current Egyptian regime has all but eradicated in Egypt. An influx of Hamas members, alongside other Palestinians, into Sinai might in turn revive not only the Muslim Brotherhood, but all kinds of opposition factions in Egypt who would see in the Palestinian cause a new *raison d’être*.

Of course, ultimately, the decision to accept refugees from Gaza is not entirely up to Egypt. It seems that the incessant bombing campaigns, along with the leaked expulsion plans and historical precedent, point towards Israel’s intent to force this reality unilaterally. That being said, there are several options between the complete expulsion of Palestinians in Gaza and the refusal to accept any Palestinian refugees. Egypt could take some refugees in exchange for a partial debt relief package. Egypt could accept the refugees and then allow them to slowly migrate to Europe, as recently threatened by an Egyptian ministry spokesperson in a [meeting](#) with the EU. If Israel creates its usual “facts on the ground” scenario whereby Palestinians are forced to evacuate, then Egypt might be left with no choice but to accept the aid package even if the ensuing implications would be disastrous for the country and the region.

Recent events have also shown that the conflict may spill over into Egypt regardless of its actions (or lack thereof). On 26 and 27

October, Taba and Nuweiba, two cities in Sinai, were struck by projectiles from as-yet-unknown sources, resulting in at least six injuries. Still, the most important issue is the demand that the Rafah border crossing must be opened indefinitely. Its use as a humanitarian corridor could help stave off the death, starvation, thirst, and disease that Israel has imposed upon the Palestinians in Gaza. Egypt shares this border with Palestine outside of Israel's direct control. The Egyptian government should be pushed to keep the crossing open—not for the purpose of displacing Palestinians, but rather as the bare minimum measure needed to avert more horrors. A lot of questions remain unanswered: why does Egypt need the permission of the US and Israel to open the Egyptian-Israeli border? Why are Israeli soldiers allowed to inspect trucks coming from Egypt into Gaza? Why is Egypt not exerting its sovereignty in opening the border?

As of yet, the Global Conscience Convoy has not been allowed to get to the Rafah border, and the border was only opened again under conditions agreed upon in the Qatari-Egyptian mediated negotiations between Israel and Hamas, as one of Hamas' requests that 300 trucks of aid be passed through the Rafah border each day of the temporary ceasefire. Had the Egyptian government exercised its sovereignty over the border, perhaps Hamas' demands of Israel would have been more ambitious during the negotiations.

Despite the uncertainty of the situation and the current Egyptian government's demonstration that the largest Middle Eastern army and its overwhelmingly anti-Zionist population poses no threat to Israel and its Western allies, one thing remains certain: the Egyptian people stand in solidarity with Palestine. Former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir said, "The old will die and the young will forget." But look around: you will see the young on the streets, many of them too young to remember the Intifadas. They were born and raised in the age of normalization; many could easily have just joined their first-ever demonstration. The young *do* remember—and as long as they do, Egypt's political fate will be bound up in the cause of Palestinian liberation.

Ink, gas and water: Jordan's peace with Israel

Samar Saeed

23 November 2023

Since 7 October, the world as we know it has irreversibly transformed. The Palestinian resistance operation against Israel, and the ensuing disproportionate and indiscriminate bombardments inflicted by the Israeli regime on Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Jerusalem, have left an indelible mark on our collective consciousness. Israel's egregious violence and the alarming silence from Western countries have shattered the legitimacy of longstanding global structures and discourses related to human rights and international law. The recent events have exposed the West's glaring hypocrisy and double standards, laying bare the fact that Palestinian lives occupy the bottom rung of the human hierarchy. The blatant complicity of Western powers in Israel's actions, particularly the US, through their unwavering economic and military support, is crystal clear. Despite a tragic death toll and destruction, Western countries remain unwilling to enforce an end to Israel's aggression. Moreover, international law and the United Nations, allegedly created to uphold human rights, enforce justice and hold perpetrators of crimes such as genocide and ethnic cleansing accountable, are now shown to be impotent tools controlled

by the powerful. The US [veto](#) has continued to protect and shield Israel from any accountability and has enabled the genocide.

As of 23 November, Israel [has](#) killed more than 14,800 Palestinians, including 6,000 children. Save the Children [reported](#) that within the initial three weeks of Israel's aggression, the number of children killed reached 3,195. This figure surpassed the annual toll of all children killed in conflicts worldwide since 2019. Israel has also attacked Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem, killing [over](#) 225 and [arresting](#) over 5,000, doubling the number of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. Six prisoners [were](#) killed there, most likely due to torture. Palestinians inside Israel have also been threatened, intimidated, and even arrested for criticizing Israel's actions in Gaza. It has become clear that Israel's aggression is directed towards all Palestinians across historic Palestine. Perhaps the most important shift taking place is the renewed realization amongst nations across the Global South of their shared struggle against US imperialism and the fact that unity is the only way to dismantle systems of oppression including the military-industrial complex, which is killing thousands in Palestine, Congo, Sudan, Haiti, and Armenia.

Similarly, Jordanians have looked past the facade of international law, Western democracy, and human rights. Given its close geographic proximity to Palestine and the large number of Jordanians of Palestinian origin residing in Jordan, the Palestinian struggle for liberation is an issue of utmost importance for all Jordanians, irrespective of origin. Activists and opposition parties are demanding an abrogation of the US-brokered Wadi Araba peace agreement between Jordan and Israel as well as the Jordan-Israel gas deal struck in 2016. For many Jordanians, the US's position as Jordan's strategic partner has been severely undermined. Jordanians—in protests, press, and on social media—are now scrutinizing the US-Jordan defense deal signed in 2021 and consider the presence of seventeen US military bases on its territory as potential threats to Jordan's sovereignty. On a more grassroots level, activists have revived a boycott movement targeting companies with connections to

Israel, in addition to several American companies like McDonald's and Starbucks, brands that symbolize American dominance and cultural imperialism. Moreover, NGO workers in Jordan are calling out the hypocrisy of their Western donors, who push a developmental agenda focused on allegedly empowering women and youth but fail to condemn Israel's aggression against Palestinians and to demand a ceasefire.

Background on Jordan-Israel relationship

In October 1994, the late King Hussein signed the "Treaty of Peace between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan," commonly referred to as the Wadi Araba agreement.¹ The Jordanian parliament ratified the [agreement](#) without accessing and reviewing its five annexes, footnotes, and listed maps. The Wadi Araba agreement was preceded by two peace treaties with Israel that transformed the region and opened the path of normalization with Israel. The first was the Egypt-Israel peace treaty signed on 26 March 1979, and the Oslo peace accords signed between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel on 13 September 1993. In exchange for signing the deal, the US waived Jordan's debts, and made Jordan one of its most important allies in the region, with increased military and economic trade.

For years, the majority of Jordanians have rejected the treaty and on every anniversary they would reaffirm their opposition to it. A narrow segment of the business elites was enthusiastic about the peace treaty and its potential trade agreements and profits. Israel is considered a colonial entity with expansionist plans that transcends the boundaries of historic Palestine and poses a direct threat to Jordan and the region. However, King Hussein and later King Abdullah believed that the stability of Jordan and the survival of the regime would be better served by maintaining peace with Israel. King Hussein hoped to achieve a "warm" peace with Israel. However, the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin the year following the treaty, transformed this vision and led to a "cold" peace

model instead, similar to the Egyptian-Israeli one. Anti-normalization forces in Jordan have seen Israel's repression against Palestinians in the Second Intifada in 2000, the war in Lebanon in 2006, repeated aggressions in Gaza (2008, 2012, 2014, 2021), settlements expansions in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and the recent attacks on sites of worship under Jordanian custodianship—including Al-Aqsa Mosque as so many reasons to rescind the treaty. To them, these are Israeli attempts to create facts on the ground and to continue the colonization of Palestine, and as such they have been demanding the abrogation of the Wadi Araba agreement.

In 2016, the majority of Jordanians protested the gas deal signed between Nobel Energy on behalf of Israel and The National Electric Power Company Ltd. (NEPCO) on behalf of Jordan, to import gas from the Leviathan field off the shores of Haifa directly into the kingdom. The deal binds Jordan to buy electricity from Israel for fifteen years at a price of \$10 billion. To [many](#), the gas deal implicates every Jordanian home in Israel's colonial project in Palestine, through electricity bill payments. Despite existing trade agreements between Jordan and Israel, the gas deal was seen as giving Israel the power to undermine Jordan's economic and political security and sovereignty in the future, through its control of the gas flow. The government claimed that its rationale for signing the deal was economic efficiency and the lack of other alternatives. However, Jordanian experts and analysts refuted these claims. In order to ratify the agreement, King Abdullah II had to dissolve Parliament and [dismiss the government](#), after they refused to fall into line.

Jordanians do not consider that they stand in solidarity with Palestinians. Rather, they consider the Palestinian struggle as their very own. They view Israel as a threat to Jordan's sovereignty and stability. This has dictated their political activism and demands, especially since the start of Israel's latest aggression on Gaza.

Jordanian mobilization

“No Zionist embassy or an ambassador on Jordanian soil.”

“Wadi Araba isn’t peace, it’s surrender. Wadi Araba is treason.”
“Oh Jordanian government, this is the people’s will.”
“The enemy’s gas is occupation.”

Jordanians have shouted these chants during the protests that have swept the country since 7 October. While several of them respond directly to the current moment, many are part of a repertoire of chants from Jordanian social movements going back decades. They were chanted during Israel’s attack on Gaza and Sheikh Jarrah in 2021, Israel’s attacks on Gaza in 2008 and 2014, the first intifada in 1987 as well as the second intifada in 2002. The Jordanian street has been consistent in its demands, views on Israel, Western complacency, and Jordan’s relationship with the US. However, Israel’s grotesque violence, being shockingly visible, intentional, and barbaric, has sparked a sense of urgency within Jordanian society to take action against the horrifying events unfolding.

Since 7 October, Jordanians have organized daily [protests](#) near the Kalouti Mosque, a site that Jordanians have historically used for protests related to the Palestinian cause due to its proximity to the Israeli embassy. On Fridays, meanwhile, they have taken their [protest](#) to downtown Amman, another historic protest site, attracting thousands of Jordanians from all ages, political affiliations, and walks of life. Protests, moreover, are not confined to the capital city of Amman but have also taken place across the country in Irbid, Madaba, al-Zarqa, al-Tafilah, al-Salt, Maan, and al-Karak.

Protesters have explicitly demanded the abrogation of the [Wadi Araba Treaty](#), the closure of the Israeli embassy, and the ambassador’s expulsion. They have also pushed for the cancellation of the gas agreement. Finally, protestors have called for an end to the [Current negotiations](#) between Jordan and Israel about a UAE-brokered water-for-energy deal.

This political moment has revived the Jordanian street in ways that have not been seen in years. Traditional political parties, such as the Communist Party, the Wihda Party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and the Jordanian People’s Party, just to name a few, have been

more visible and active in organizing their constituencies. Even new and unknown political parties² are coming into view during the recent protests, including the Namaa Party and the Alghad Party.³ Under the umbrella of the National Forum for Supporting the Resistance and Protecting the Homeland, **launched** in March 2022 to support the Palestinian resistance, these political parties and popular groups have been organizing collectively to exert more pressure on the state and make their voices heard.

Grassroot movements, including the Jordanian chapter of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, the civil society coalition HIMAM, the Jordanian's Women Union, the Arab Women Association, and the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature, have all organized and declared their support to the resistance. The BDS-Jordan chapter **has** been leading a campaign against the water-for-energy deal that Jordan and Israel were supposed to sign in November, highlighting its threat to Jordan's sovereignty and pointing out available alternatives. Several professional associations **have** also mobilized their constituencies **and** organized several protests and events to declare their support for Palestine.

Even the Jordanian parliament, perceived by many as lacking in legitimacy and effectiveness as well as failing to adequately represent the people, has been compelled to take action. On 14 November, the government **tasked** parliament's legal committee with examining the agreements that Jordan has signed with Israel and submitting recommendations on how to deal with them. The Parliament is expected to submit their recommendations on Sunday 26 November.

The escalating response of the Jordanian state

The pressure exerted by different political parties, civil society organizations, and popular groups, alongside the gravity of the situation in Palestine, has pushed the Jordanian regime to take harsher stances vis-a-vis Israel. King Abdullah II, Queen Rania, and Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi have taken up the

responsibility of debunking Israel's lies and propaganda, all the while using a confrontational tone that has rarely been voiced in the context of diplomatic relations with Israel. Between the three of them, they have referred to Israel as an "occupier," labeled Israel's actions in Gaza as "war crimes," and called out the hypocrisy of the West.

Since 7 October, we can trace how the Jordanian regime's actions and rhetoric have ramped up. From the onset, Jordan has vehemently rejected the possibility of Palestinians being forcibly displaced, which could mean expulsion to Jordan. Israel's expansionist plans in the region and the latter possibility are the biggest threat and concern for the Jordanian regime. King Abdullah stated in all his conversations with world leaders that no peace or stability could be achieved without a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue based on the two-state solution, guaranteeing the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The King outlined his views clearly in an op-ed published in [the Washington Post](#). On 14 October, [the King](#) started a European tour visiting Britain, Italy, Germany, and France to rally international support. Several foreign ministers also visited Jordan to discuss the situation.

The bombing of the Baptist Hospital, on 17 October, which killed approximately 300 Palestinians, marked a turning point. King Abdullah began to refer to the incident [as](#) a "heinous war crime." The bombing was framed as a tactic to terrorize and force Palestinians to leave their homes in the North of Gaza and evacuate south, paving the way for their eventual expulsion. Al-Safadi asserted that Jordan would not allow Israel to displace Palestinians into Jordan and stated that such a move would be interpreted [as](#) a declaration of war. Egypt adopted a similar position, asserting [that](#) they would not allow Israel to expel Palestinians from Gaza into the Sinai.

A week later, Queen Rania appeared on CNN [to](#) call out the "glaring double standard" of the West and their "deafening silence" on what is unfolding in Gaza. She described Israel as the occupier and spoke of the asymmetry between defenseless Palestinians and the US-backed Israeli occupation forces, considered among the

strongest militaries in the world. In a second interview, the Queen stated that **the** “root cause of the problem is the illegal occupation, routine human rights abuses, illegal settlements, [and] disregard for UN resolutions and international law.” The King and his government’s rhetoric deviate from their responses to previous Israeli attacks. This time around, it seems that there is a systematic escalation plan that Jordan is following in an attempt to impose a ceasefire and avoid a regional war.

On 27 October, Jordan addressed **the** United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), where a Jordanian resolution calling for an “immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce” in Gaza was introduced. The UNGA adopted Jordan’s resolution, proposed on behalf of the Arab Group, with 120 votes in favor, fourteen against, and forty-five abstentions. Despite being the first formal response of the UN to the situation in Gaza, after four different attempts by the Security Council, it has not been enforced and Israel continues to bomb the Gaza Strip.⁴

Unable to pressure the international community into imposing a ceasefire and witnessing the growing anger and frustration among Jordanians, the state decided to act more forcefully. On 1 November, **the** Jordanian government recalled their ambassador from Tel Aviv and informed the Israelis not to return their ambassador to Amman. By the time Jordan took these steps, Israel had killed 9,376 Palestinians, including 3,912 children, and displaced 1.5 million residents of Gaza. For Jordanians, the regime’s response was late, inadequate, and utterly inconsequential. For many, the devastating carnage in Gaza necessitated a stronger response: the abrogation of the Wadi Araba Peace Treaty and the severing of relations with Israel.

On 12 November, Jordanians were further dismayed by the outcome of the meetings of the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The summit did **issue** a declaration condemning Israel’s aggression on Gaza and agreed to open the Rafah crossing for humanitarian aid, but did not decide to take any concrete steps to achieve those goals. The crossing remained closely

monitored. To exert more pressure, on the 16 November Jordanians decided to organize an open sit-in in the Hashemite Plaza in downtown Amman—a large paved square flanked by the Roman Amphitheatre, on a major road, which is often a public space for leisure but has not been used for protest in recent history. The protest’s announcement stated that the sit-in aimed to send “local, regional and international messages and to arouse the resolve of the Arab and Islamic peoples and the free peoples of the world, to put pressure on their governments to stop these barbaric massacres. We are determined not to abandon our duty until this aggression in all its forms stops.” The signatories included prominent public personalities, former ministers, and retired military officers.

However, the Jordanian security forces did **not** allow the sit-in to take place and prevented people from reaching it by locking the gates that circle the plaza, while also attacking and arresting those who did show up. That evening, al-Safadi surprised Jordanians when he announced that Jordan would back out of the United Arab Emirates-brokered deal intended to have Jordan supply solar energy to Israel in exchange for desalinated water. He also **stated** that “We [Jordan] signed the peace agreement in 1994 as part of a wider Arab effort to establish a two-state solution. That has not been achieved. Instead, Israel has not upheld its part of the agreement. So the peace deal will have to remain on the back burner gathering dust for now.” The Jordanian street welcomed this news and demanded the gas deal be next.

The Jordan regime’s recent actions are unprecedented, and this shift can be read not only as a result of the actions taken by the Jordanian people but also of Israel’s relentless destruction of the Gaza Strip and the potential threat of Israel’s expansionist plans in the region.

Protesting US imperialism

“America is the head of the snake.”

“US ambassador, you are complicit in the aggression.”

“The decision came out of America [insinuating Jordan’s lack of ability to make its own decisions].”

“Down with the US approach.”

“No to US bases in Jordan.”

“No to the US embassy on Jordanian soil.”

These chants, which have begun to dominate the protests, are a clear indication that Jordanians now consider the West, especially the US, not only complicit but actively enabling Israel’s genocide of Palestinians. Jordanians have tried to organize several protests near the US, French, and British embassies. However, their attempts have been thwarted by security forces and street closures. The Jordanian government is not necessarily banning demonstrations, but they aim to control where, when, and how people protest. Even the daily protests near the Kalouti Mosque, which are sanctioned, are limited to between 7pm and 9pm, with security and police forces surrounding protesters at all times. The police have resorted to throwing tear gas on several occasions, arresting protestors, and compelling many to sign a pledge promising that they’ll refrain from engaging in political activities. These various restrictions and methods of intimidation have failed to deter Jordanians from expressing their anger or demanding concrete action be taken towards Israel. The protestors, despite their inability to reach these embassies, continue to demand a reassessment of Jordan’s relation with the West, especially the US.

In 2021, Jordan [signed](#) a defense treaty with the US. To do so, the state bypassed the Parliament, which was a violation of Jordan’s constitution. The agreement allows the free entry of US forces, aircrafts, and vehicles into the country. It allows US forces to possess weapons and circulate freely with them on Jordanian territory. In retrospect, the agreement elicited a relatively subdued response when it was made. However, in light of US support for Israel as well as the utilization of US military bases in Jordan in order to arm Israel, the deal has garnered more scrutiny and criticism recently, leading Jordanians to demand the agreement’s cancellation.

Since 1999, the regime has embraced an economic and political path that has deepened its dependency on the US, which has now placed Jordan on a tightrope as it aims to take action against Israel's relentless bombardment on Gaza, while simultaneously safeguarding this relationship.⁵ The extent to which Jordan can escalate, given the lack of support from regional powers, remains unclear. However, Israel's expansionist plans and increased settler violence in the West Bank and Jerusalem—and the possibility of Israel expelling Palestinians into Jordan—is likely to force the King to continue to escalate. On 18 November, a video of increased military reinforcements arriving on the border separating the West and the East bank circulated widely on social media. This move by Jordan might be read as a decision to reinforce the security of its borders, but it is also a message to the US that Jordan will not accept any plan to expel Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza.

Jordanian civil society has also critiqued the hypocrisy of the West and its donor organizations operating in Jordan. In a [letter](#) titled "The Masks Are Off" Sahar Aloul, an NGO founder and a prominent figure in Jordan's civil society, wrote about the selective application of international law, human rights, and UN resolutions and how international institutions have turned a "blind eye to the existence of the last settler colonial occupation" for the last seventy-five years. She criticized the many organizations that have ignored their own analysis, reports, and conventions on Palestine, only helping Palestinian refugees to remain where they are but never supporting their rights of self-determination and return.

This letter embodies the increasing cognizance amongst Jordanian civil society of the liberal facade adopted by most NGOs, which advocate liberal values, particularly in the realms of women and youth development, yet disregard them when it comes to Palestine. This perceived hypocrisy and double standards have become even more glaring against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukraine war. Jordanians have seen the international community rally in support for Ukraine, emphasizing its right to self-defense and self-

determination. These same rights have not been extended to the Palestinians.

On 20 November, some 200 activists [delivered](#) a petition to international organizations and UN agencies in Jordan demanding urgent action be taken against Israel's genocide in Gaza. The UN Resident Coordinator & Humanitarian Coordinator in Jordan, UNICEF, the UN OCHA Office, Plan International, the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, Save the Children, Médecins Sans Frontières, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mercy Corps all received the petition.

Jordanians do not view the international community as a monolithic entity. On the contrary, many recognize and derive hope and strength from countries that have stood in solidarity with Palestine, staying true to the values of justice, freedom, and liberation. Bolivia became the first country to sever relations with Israel over its genocide in Gaza. Honduras, Turkey, Colombia, Chile, and Bahrain have all recalled their ambassadors from Israel, isolating it in the international arena. South Africa has suspended all diplomatic relations with Israel.

Perhaps the most powerful show of solidarity are the protests in support of Palestinian liberation across the globe: Adelaide, Algiers, Athens, Auckland, Baghdad, Barcelona, Beirut, Berkely, Berlin, Boston, Braband, Brasilia, Brisbane, Cairo, Calgary, Cambridge, Canberra, Cape Town, Caracas, Colombo, Copenhagen, Dallas, Damascus, Dearborn, Delhi, Dhaka, Doha, Diyarbakir, Dublin, Edinburgh, Edmonton, Geneva, Glasgow, Hyderabad, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jakarta, Karachi, Kargil, Kolkata, Kuala Lumpur, Lahore, London, Los Angeles, Lucknow, Malé, Manama, Manchester, Marawi City, Melbourne, Mexico City, Milan, Mississauga, Montreal, Mumbai, Naples, New York City, Paris, Pittsburgh, Portland, Pune, Rabat, Rio de Janeiro, Rome, Sanaa, Santiago, San Francisco, São Paulo, Seoul, Surakarta, Sydney, Tehran, The Hague, Thiruvananthapuram, Tokyo, Tucson, Turin, Vancouver, Washington DC have all shown up for Palestine. The messages they sent were loud and clear: no one is free until Palestine is free.

Reality denial: the war to resuscitate the myth

Haim Bresheeth-Žabner

11 December 2023

On October 6 2023, Israel was the most socially-riven nation on earth, after nearly a year of mass demonstrations against Netanyahu and his *judicial coup*. The bitterness and determination to bring down his government has galvanized more than half the country and was virtually led by IDF, Mossad and Shabak ex-officers, along with the leading AI and hi-tech companies which are the backbone of the Israeli Military-Industrial-Complex (MIC)—the bread winner of Israeli armament exports, the largest branch of the economy. It **looked** like Netanyahu's fall was a matter of months. His judicial revolution stuck in the Supreme Court, his popularity at its lowest ebb, and without any let up in the waves of Protest. On the eve of the last day of the Sukkot festival, Israel took a break from the demonstrations, as the Supreme Court was about to publish the results of its long-winded deliberations. Israelis were waiting for the Court to pronounce a decisive and crucial **verdict** on Netanyahu's nine months in power. Both sides of the social cleavage waited with bated breath for a verdict that would clearly not end the protest, whichever way it went.

In the confusing terms used by Israeli media and academics, this was a deep chasm between Right and Left; in reality, it was no such

thing. There is no Socialist [left](#) in Israel, and in a deep sense there never has been. The rift is not a left-right cleavage, but a struggle between two groups jostling for power. The so-called Israeli Left now feels abandoned by the international Left, which in its vagueness, seems unable to realize that Israel is the real victim, that the whole world is antisemitic, that no one is protecting Jews from the next Holocaust, and that the international Left is making the courageous struggle against the occupation [impossible](#). Another “member of the Israeli Left has ‘[resigned](#) and returned her membership card to the international Left,’” no less. Neither has, in any real sense, been part of any Left, let alone this projected “international Left,” reminding one of the “international Judaism” of antisemitic ranting. Even seasoned ironists in Israel seem to have lost their sense of humor after 7 October, sharing in the national hysteria.

On either side, no one—either in the military or civilian leadership—seems to have been worried about an attack from Gaza despite clear [warnings](#) from Egyptian security services. Israel was so invested in its political belly-button—and so sure of its invincibility—that all precautions were abandoned. Shortly before the 7 October attack, a large IDF unit was even relocated from the Gaza Envelop zone to the West Bank in order to protect some demented and aggressive religious [antics](#) by fascist settlers in the midst of subjugated and harassed Palestinian towns like Huwarra, where pogroms [carried out](#) by Israeli settlers have become the norm. Then, overnight, Israel pivoted to a war-footing and both sides of the political divide combined to support the genocidal attack on Gaza, under the [heading](#) of “wiping out Hamas from the face of the earth.” In reality, this is an ethnic cleansing and genocidal murder combined—the continuation of the Nakba long prepared by the IDF. So, has the rift also become extinct overnight?

The cleavage was really a rift between the old elite of Ashkenazi Jews—an elite which [ran](#) Israeli society not just from May 1948, when the state was declared in the middle of the war, but since the 1920s, when left-Zionism set up the organizations that ruled Zionism and Israel in its formative decades. During the early 1920s, most of the

institutions of the state-in-waiting were set up by left-Zionism: the military (Haggana) , political parties, Trades Union Federation (Histadruth), higher education (Hebrew University and Technion), land purchase and settlement, the representative body (Jewish Agency), cultural organizations for publishing, filmmaking and theater, health insurance for workers (Kupat Holim), and many other administrative bodies for any task the future state may require. Legal, financial, diplomatic, education, military intelligence, arms production, an ancillary police force; the state was there, waiting for the British to leave so it could take over and control Palestine. Nothing remotely resembling this vast preparation took place on the Palestinian side, which was naively basing its hopes for justice and independence on the British Mandate and the Arab states. During the Mandate, these Zionist organizations matured—growing in size, function and financial support—into a force that rivaled the Mandate authority in both efficiency and influence.

To fully comprehend the shock the 7 October Hamas attack inflicted on Israeli society, one needs to go back to the formative period of the Israeli-Jewish nation, after the war of 1948. Zionist organizations controlled less than 8 percent of Palestine as late as 1947.¹ Zionist leadership has long understood the necessity of a modern military force for taking land in Palestine from the indigenous population. They knew that no political resolution would offer them what they wanted—total control of Palestine, or at least most of its arable land and the important urban spaces around the three main cities: Jerusalem, Haifa, and Tel Aviv. Realizing this vision would, therefore, require a very large army.

The three competing military organizations—Haggana (the Zionist left militia), Irgun (the militia of the fascist right), and LEHI (a small extreme anti-British militia)—illicitly trained and armed tens of thousands over the 1920s and 1930s. They also built rudimentary but efficient armament plants for supplying this large force—a force of more than 100,000 men (and some women) under arms—which would become the IDF in 1948. Many thousands had fought in the ranks of the British army during the Second World War, joined by

young survivors from the Death Camps, swelling the ranks after 1945. These, after arriving illicitly in Palestine, brought the total to 120,000 soldiers by the end of the war.

The Mandate authorities closed their eyes to this activity, except when they made use of it during the Arab Revolt from 1936–39 in Palestine. Combined forces of the British units and the Palestine police joined with large units of Zionist militias to defeat the rebellion and kill most of its cadres: around 9,000 poorly armed fighters. Palestine fell to the IDF rather quickly, with a few thousand irregulars defending the population, bolstered by ineffectual forces from surrounding Arab polities—Trans-Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Iraq—with small units from other countries. Most Palestinians were forcibly expelled, with two thirds, or 750,000, becoming refugees, either in the other parts of Palestine or in the surrounding Arab countries, who signed armistice agreements with Israel in 1949–50. Israel was at that point in control of 78 percent of Palestine and denied entry to all refugees, despite UN Resolution 194 requiring Israel to allow their return. No sanctions were applied to enforce the resolution, and Israel took the hint—it could do as it pleased with total impunity. This lesson was never forgotten.

But Israel, the large army which built a state, did not yet have a nation.² The 650,000 Jews within the new polity were far from forming a nation—they spoke numerous languages, came from diverse and distinct civilizations and did not share a culture or ideology, lacking coherence and unity. This was immediately noted by its unelected first Premier, David Ben-Gurion. During the 1951 election campaign, he said, “I see in these elections the shaping of a nation for the state; because there is a state but not a nation.”³ This insight had led him earlier to create an army, which then formed its own state to which the construction of a nation was assigned. The nation Ben-Gurion wanted would be a nation at arms, in constant conflict—neither peace nor war. To turn this type of existence (exceptional by any measure) into Israel’s *modus vivendi*, a major social engineering project followed, lasting decades and requiring constant renewal. As late as 1954, Ben-Gurion was worried about the nation’s non-existence. In

the Government Almanac, he noted, “For thousands of years we were a nation without a state. Now there is a danger that Israel will be a state without a nation.”⁴ Putting aside the absurd notion that Jews had been a nation for thousands of years, it is fascinating that the “missing nation” narration was used for so long. It combines cynical notions of influencing the Zionist narrative, as well as his deep-seated belief in engineering an Israeli-Jewish (or, as some called it, a Hebrew) nation.

The nation could only have been created by the army—the largest, richest, and most powerful organization of Israel, inclusive of all Jewish male adults, and most women—a warrior democracy akin to a modern Sparta,⁵ as was pointed out by Hannah Arendt. It was mainly a Jewish citizen army. Thus, the IDF became and remained the only mutual institution common to the great majority of Israeli citizens, excluding two marginal groups—Palestinians and the Ultra-Orthodox Jews—the two *others* of Zionism.

Through a long series of wars initiated by Israel, as well as limited military campaigns in between, Israelis adopted an identity determined by the IDF. Other issues may still have separated them, but most were members of the largest club in Israel—one straddling class, cultural, linguistic and religious differences—creating an organization trusted by all, as opposed to civic organizations *dividing* Israelis. Even when the IDF proved to be rather unwieldy and not up to the task, as happened in 1973 when the Egyptian and Syrian armed forces dealt it a terrible blow, the blame was put on politicians like Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan, sparing IDF commanders. The partial defeat in that war resulted from a deeper social process: turning the IDF into glorified colonial police, as was necessary after 1967, to subjugate more than a million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, with Israel set to settle the Occupied Territories—Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian and Lebanese—rather than sue for peace by negotiation.

After 1973, President Sadat achieved his intended result of the war—the return of Sinai and Gaza to Israeli control—as part of peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, in which Syria and the

Palestinians paid dearly. This would serve as the model for later stages of the process of *normalization*—removing other Arab countries from confrontation with Israel, by (the US) forcing relinquishment of the rights of the Palestinians. The latest Abraham Accords, and the negotiations with Saudi Arabia are only the most recent phenomena in a long historical process of Israel using US pressure to force its agenda on the Middle East. Presidents Trump and Biden are most revered in Israel for their unconditional support, and Netanyahu (“the magician” to his followers) is especially venerated on the religious right of Israeli society as the man who stopped Arab support for Palestine, achieving fully normalized relations with most Arab states. This includes diplomatic, tourist and commercial relations, not to mention substantial Israeli arms and security hardware and software exports to the authoritarian regimes of North Africa and Arabia. All went extremely well for the resource-rich Israel, in control of some 7 million Palestinians—a population slightly larger than that of Jewish Israelis—most of whom live under brutal occupation, lacking any rights, and with no prospect of gaining any. After the Palestinian elections of 2006, won by Hamas, Israel initiated and supported the PA in a failed coup before enforcing a blockade over Gaza, with no reaction from the “international community.”

More confident than ever after its series of attacks on Gaza in 2008–9, 2012 and 2014, Israel was enjoying total impunity before 7 October. It had become more extreme, especially during 2023, as the new Netanyahu government—buoyed by the Abraham Accords—brought the Zionist project into maturity by intensifying the project of disinheritance of Palestinians of the 10 percent of Palestine that was still under their (partial) control in the West Bank. It seemed the right time to speed up the process of expulsions with no danger of hostile Arab policies, Palestine being totally isolated and friendless. The Israeli government **deployed** the settlers as a whip for the Palestinians—terror, pogroms, arrests, expulsion of whole communities by violent means, **expelling** more and more Palestinians:

For years, settlers protected by the IDF have attacked Palestinian villages with the aim of forcing their residents to leave and tightening Israel's illegal grip on the occupied territory—but the expansion of this since 7 October is causing even Israel's US accomplices to blanch.

There was no adverse reaction from any quarter of the global economy, still controlled by the US despite the country's gradual decline.

At the same time, Netanyahu, egged on by the extreme right, saw a window of opportunity opening up, and used his power to totally change the nature of Israel's Jewish-only democracy through unprecedented judicial reforms. He now enjoys powers greater than any leader in the developed world, a dictator in all but name. A strong opposition rose up against him in response to the reforms, but that did not worry him—so much of the legal environment had changed that he would be safe from facing corruption charges in court. Nothing could stop his advance, it seemed. Netanyahu and his IDF generals believed they were untouchable, that the Palestinians could not possibly face the combined might of the IDF—the largest army in the Middle East—with its technological superiority and nearly six decades of experience perfecting its advantage over a disorganized, poor, and forsaken nation, without an army or heavy weapons.

But then, out of the blue, came the Hamas and Islamic Jihad attack of 7 October. The sky caved in. Within four hours, a small Palestinian force of around 2,000 fighters took over eleven massive military bases and strongholds, despite the most sophisticated combination of “smart” underground wall and electronic fencing, seemingly impregnable. Like fifty years earlier in the winter of 1973, this latest Maginot Line was breached after a few innovative operations, allowing the force in and astounding the Israeli soldiers, some of them in their underwear and unarmed. Within hours, using a combination of missile attacks, drones, infantry, motorcycles, power gliders and superb planning, the attackers were able to defeat all the defending forces, kill hundreds of IDF soldiers and officers, and return to Gaza with more than 250 hostages, which they planned to exchange for the thousands of Israel's Palestinian prisoners—more

than a thousand of whom were in administrative detention without trial or charges. The IDF, still paralyzed, its reserve forces a mere hour's drive away, took over six and in most cases eight hours, to regroup.

As I argue in my recent book, [An Army Like No Other](#)—the IDF have not won a clear victory since 1967, and never fought against another regular army after 1973. When facing small resistance groups like the PLO (1982, Lebanon), Hezbollah (2006, Lebanon), or Hamas (2008–9, 2012, 2014, and numerous other battles, Gaza) its performance has been impaired, proving that a small guerrilla group numbering a few thousand fighters can delay, hamper, harm or even [defeat](#) a huge modern army equipped with the latest technology. Such highly motivated and innovative organizations know the territory and move fast, while the IDF is too cumbersome to successfully negotiate small theaters of war like the Shouf in Lebanon or Gaza City, dependent on complex supply lines and, despite the great investment in personnel, armaments, communication and logistics, clearly unprepared for fighting against armed guerrillas. As a brutal colonial police force, like many before, it has fought unarmed men, women and children for too long. It is no longer [trained](#) to fight a war, and continuously underestimates the ability of its enemies, as it did in 1973. The attitude of Israel's military and political masters, combining Jewish supremacism with extreme Islamophobia, certainly clouds judgment. Unsurprisingly, the IDF proved unable to protect Israelis from the attack—the so-called Jewish State proved to be the only one where Jewish life is in mortal danger.

The confusion in the IDF was beyond description. By the time that larger, special forces arrived, they used tanks to shell the houses in the Kibbutzim where hostages were held, using concentrated fire power from helicopters and the ground troops, killing Hamas and Jihad fighters together with their [hostages](#). There is a debate in Israel about whether this was due to confusion or the *Hannibal Directive* of 2006, requiring the killing of hostages with the enemy fighters holding them, to avoid hostage exchanges⁶. It is likely to have been a combination of both factors—the Airforce was scrambled, but the

pilots had no [information](#) whatsoever to work with or ground forces to guide them, and for most of the day they killed friend and foe alike. Some of the propaganda images used by the IDF depicting burnt out cadavers in exploded vehicles, attributed to Hamas's "inhuman and brutal action," show victims which it seems could only have been killed by helicopter Hellfire missiles with their extremely high-temperature impact. Hamas has no such weapons. Some analysts have claimed that a large number of such deaths were caused by the Israeli Air Force, as pilots shot at anything that moved, and most of the hits were against Israeli soldiers, hostages and armed civilians, due to a total lack of coordination at that point in the attack. Some of the surviving hostages freed by the IDF have [claimed](#) that Israelis were killed by friendly fire. This is, of course, not to deny that acts of horrific violence against Israelis took place. But as long as no independent expert report is available, the versions trumpeted by the IDF and Israeli government should be treated with suspicion.

At the time of writing, the Gaza dead number nearly 20,000 and the injured number in the tens of thousands. Many thousands more are missing, buried under the rubble of their bombed homes, and unlikely to be rescued, or even buried. After so many Israeli bombing raids since 2007, Israel now moves to erase Gaza of human habitation through genocidal collective punishment—Israel's wrath knows no bounds, nor legal parameters.

In Israel, the attack on 7 October has been [described](#) in apocalyptic terms and always tied to the Holocaust: "single-worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust," as if the reason for their killing was their Jewishness. This description, also used by Biden and Sunak when they spoke in Israel, reflects an interesting paranoia which seems to have inhabited the occupier's mind. Israeli leaders and politicians spout hatred against all Gazans and [promise](#) to "wipe Gaza from the face of the earth" and at the same time speak of 'pogrom' against Israeli soldiers and civilians, as though today's Israelis were poor *Stet!* Jews in the Pale of Settlement or Ghetto Jews under SS control. The conflicting figures of Samson and the ghetto Jew are combined in these hyperbolic statements, enabling

Israelis to feel at once like helpless victims and a mighty divinity with unlimited wrath. The 7 October attack clearly shocked most Israelis beyond any other experience in the seventy-five years of their state's history.

What was most shocking for Israelis was the breakdown of all military systems. In numerous Hebrew-language interviews aired since the attack, army spokesmen and commanders have openly [admitted](#) to the utter chaos and innumerable mistakes made by all involved in the response. Israelis, maybe for the first time, find that the IDF is not able to protect them, despite enormous investment, the huge number of soldiers, the latest technologies—all failed them.

That the defeat was dealt by such a militarily inferior opponent is the most painful insult to the Israeli militarized ego. As most Israeli adults—men and women—served in the IDF, their identity, both personal and socio-cultural, owes more to the IDF than to any other Israeli institution. When the IDF fails so dramatically, this sense of defeat is shared by all Israelis who are committed to its mission of clearing Palestine of its indigenous population. Among the issues that have divided Israelis so deeply in the last year, this objective of the Zionist project is notably not one of them. On the contrary, most accept this aim. Recently, the new Intelligence Minister, Gila Gamliel, published an official report, dealing with the Israeli takeover of Gaza. It presents three options for the Israeli endgame, after the “expected defeat of Hamas.” The Israeli journalist Yuval Abraham [summarizes](#) the report as follows:

The document clearly and unmistakably recommends the transfer of Gaza civilians as the preferred outcome of the war ... The transfer program is divided into a number of phases: in the first one, it is necessary to act to move the population Southward, while the Airforce bombing focuses on the North section. The second phase will be the Ground attack leading to total occupation of the Strip, North to South and to “cleanse the underground bunkers of Hamas fighters.” In parallel to the occupation, the civilians will be expelled to the Egyptian Sinai, leaving the Strip, and will never be allowed back.⁷

This is one of the oldest ideas and plans of the Zionist project. From Theodor Herzl to David Ben-Gurion, the dream of expelling the Palestinians from their land has animated the Zionist imaginary. On 12 June 1895, Herzl devoted twenty pages in his secret diary to describing the takeover of Palestine and the expulsion of its Arab population. In own diary on 12 July 1937, Ben-Gurion wrote, “The compulsory transfer of Arabs from the valleys of the proposed Jewish state could give us something which we never had [an Arab-free Galilee], even when we stood on our own feet during the days of the First and Second Temple.”⁸ An idea of such vintage can now be carried out, being the [general position](#) in Israel. More than a century of Zionist aspirations, planning and subjugation seems at the point of realization.

Another crucial point must be carefully considered. Israel has no exit plan, a fact [known](#) even to the US, and [the UK](#), despite their criminal support of Israel’s genocidal action. Bearing in mind the number of times Israel has announced that it means to destroy Hamas, and the number of Hamas commanders it has assassinated by various means (including missiles, bombs and poison), it is clear that every such attempt has produced a more focused and effective organization of resistance. Hamas is far from being a mere military organization; it is a political movement, one which built a welfare system in Palestine where none existed. It controls numerous charities, hospitals, clinics, schools, universities, colleges, local government institutions—it is the Gazan society. Without it, Gaza is doomed, and the ideas [floated](#) about the PA taking over Gaza are nonsense, exactly like the Two-State Solution, killed by Israeli sabotage and revived every crisis as the “only solution” to the “problem of Palestine.”

The truth is that having “excelled” in military solutions for over seventy-five years of occupation, Israel is incapable of exploring non-military options. This is true about its political and military leadership, as well as the majority of the Jewish-Israeli population—they have never even considered a civic solution and are unable to imagine it. No Israeli party has even considered this option. The PLO offered

Israel exactly such a solution before 1988—a single, secular, democratic state for all in Palestine, Jews and Arabs, including the return of the refugees. For Israelis, such offers were beyond contempt and laughed out of court. Zionism was not about to give up its stranglehold over Palestine. So, the endgame in Gaza, the only one Israelis are capable of imagining, is the old one—ethnic cleansing. This project of “compulsory transfer” is now re-presented by Israel’s Western criminal partners as a “new idea for resolving the conflict,” and Egypt and other Arab polities are [pressured](#) into considering it, offered sums of money or in the case of [Egypt](#), a writing off of its debt to the IMF.

So, there we have it. Israel has acted according to this decades-old plan, revived now that the conditions seem right to the Israeli government. We have been witnessing the three-phase program take shape in the terrible landscape of post-apocalyptic Gaza.

The IDF, the author and apparatus of the 1948 Nakba and the 1967 Naksa, is carrying forward the third phase of the 2023 Nakba. It is unlikely to be the last. There are still almost 5 million Palestinians between the river and the sea. The leaders of the West, in their political and moral [decline](#), have enthusiastically signed up to this plan, without even reading it. They are now not just underwriting genocide in Gaza, but also guaranteeing that their decades-long destruction of the Middle East is likely to ignite the next regional or even global conflict. Like Israel, they cannot imagine non-violent options—they got used to living on the sword. This may guarantee that the decline of the West will also end modern civilization.

One last point should not be forgotten, though few have commented or even mentioned it. For a whole decade, partners of Israeli apartheid have spent money, time and effort on using the IHRA definition for attacking and defaming numerous public figures in Britain and the US. The case of Jeremy Corbyn is best known, due to the *Al Jazeera* series “The Lobby”, but many people so defamed were Jewish Labour Party members expelled for supporting Palestinian rights. This fake antisemitism has undermined the work of many peace activists on the Left and confounded the public. Fake

antisemitism became the daily diet of politicians and the media and accusations against “the wrong sort of Jews” weaponized antisemitism in the service of Zionism.

What has happened since 7 October has changed all that. Millions around the Western world saw their Jewish communities, egged on by Zionist leaders, move to pressure national governments to support Israel and their communal voice was used to support a genocidal war still raging as these lines are written. They used the media to persuade people that Jews are all supporting these crimes, implying that all Jews are Zionist racists. This show of support by every institutional Jewish voice in the West has already led to the highest incidences of antisemitism ever recorded. Israel has managed to restart the antisemitic movements which had disappeared from such societies—in effect to export their hatred of non-Jews to the Western world and elsewhere. As Marx told us, “Antisemitism is the socialism of fools.” In claiming that all Jews are Zionists, antisemites now have a material basis for their racism, as they make no distinction between Zionists and anti- or non-Zionists. Not only has Israel been unable to protect its citizens, but it has placed Jewish communities across the world in harm’s way and the leaders of these communities have walked willingly into this trap. Israel has successfully exported its racist hatred to the global community with the help of the Western leaders who are still supporting its crimes. An additional “benefit” is the parallel growth of Islamophobia across the Western world—a terrifying and dangerous development in communities already affected by this scourge, and threatening societies harboring Muslim migrants who have fled from war-ravaged countries and are already suffering the results of Western military action.

We must realize that a society like the one into which Israel has descended is totally unviable. Zionism has now pushed Israel into what I believe is a terminal phase of its colonial atrocity. I and many other Jewish and Israeli activists argued for years that the only viable and just solution to the colonial conflict in Palestine is the single, secular democratic state in the whole of Palestine—the solution proffered by the PLO before 1988. Today, due the destructive

influence of the Western powers, such a solution is even less likely than before. It is now difficult to imagine Palestinians agreeing to live side by side with their Israeli genociders. Yet, this remains the only just and workable resolution. If, as in 1947, 1967 and 1993, it is ditched in favor of the two-state phantom, or another Israeli-controlled colonial arrangement forced by the US, the current genocide is unlikely to be the last in Palestine.

Israel, fascism, and the war against the Palestinian People

Alberto Toscano

28 November 2023

Green-lit by Western governments¹ and described by human rights' [experts](#) as demonstrating "genocidal intent", the state of Israel's brutal response to Hamas's Al Aqsa Flood 7 October attack has also elicited talk of fascism in multiple quarters. In a collective statement, the Birzeit University Union of Professors and Employees has [spoken](#) of "colonial fascism" and of the "pornographic call to death of Arabs by settler Zionist politicians across the political lines"; in their own [declaration](#), the Communist Party of Israel (Maki) and the left-wing coalition Hadash "put the full responsibility on the fascist right-wing government for the sharp and dangerous escalation"; meanwhile, Colombia's president Gustavo Petro [described](#) the onslaught on Gaza as the "first experiment to deem all of us disposable" in a "global 1933" marked by climate catastrophe and capitalist entrenchment. Even quoting these lines probably falls foul of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) [definition](#) of anti-Semitism, which has served as an important instrument in concerted efforts to curtail non-violent international solidarity work against Israeli apartheid, especially in the guise of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

And yet the recognition of an incipient fascism in the latest Netanyahu government and even Israeli society at large seems, if not mainstream, certainly prominent in public discourse in Israel, not least in the wake of the protests against judicial reforms aiming to curb the autonomy of Israel's Supreme Court. Four days before the Hamas attack, the liberal Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* published an editorial under the heading "Israeli Neo-Fascism Threatens Israelis and Palestinians Alike'. One month earlier, 200 Israeli high school students declared their refusal to be conscripted in the following terms: "We decided that we cannot, in good faith, serve a bunch of fascist settlers that are in control of the government right now." In May, a *Haaretz* editorial opined that the "sixth Netanyahu government is beginning to look like a totalitarian caricature. There is almost no move associated with totalitarianism that has not been proposed by one of its extremist members and adopted by the rest of the incompetents it comprises, in their competition to see who can be more fully fascist. One of its journalists described an "Israeli fascist revolution" ticking off all items in the checklist, from racism to a contempt for weakness, from a lust for violence to anti-intellectualism. These recent polemics and prognoses were anticipated by prominent intellectuals like the renowned historian of the far-Right Zeev Sternhell—who wrote of "growing fascism and a racism akin to early Nazism" in contemporary Israel—or the journalist and peace activist Uri Avnery, who escaped Nazi Germany at age ten, and who, not long before his death in 2018, declared that

the discrimination against the Palestinians in practically all spheres of life can be compared to the treatment of the Jews in the first phase of Nazi Germany. (The oppression of the Palestinians in the occupied territories resembles more the treatment of the Czechs in the "protectorate" after the Munich betrayal.) The rain of racist Bills in the Knesset, those already adopted and those in the works, strongly resembles the laws adopted by the Reichstag in the early days of the Nazi regime. Some rabbis call for a boycott of Arab shops. Like then. The call "Death to the Arabs" ("Judah verrecke"?) is regularly heard at soccer matches.

There is nothing new in the analogy, of course. In December 1948, in the wake of the Deir Yassin massacre, Hannah Arendt wrote an open letter to the *New York Times*, co-signed by Albert Einstein and Sidney Hook among other, decrying Herut (the predecessor to Netanyahu's Likud party) as "akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties".²

Avnery also **singled out** the current Minister of Finance, Bezalel Smotrich, as a "bona fide Jewish fascist." Smotrich, who has happily **referred** to himself as a "fascist homophobe," has laid out the theological bases for his own genocidal intent to "abort" any Palestinian hopes for nationhood and repeat the Nakba—now a common refrain among Israeli pundits and politicians, who happily **invoke** a "Nakba 2.0" or "Gaza Nakba 2023". In an interview, Smotrich **said**:

When Joshua ben Nun [the biblical prophet] entered the land, he sent three messages to its inhabitants: those who want to accept [our rule] will accept; those who want to leave, will leave; those who want to fight, will fight. The basis of his strategy was: We are here, we have come, this is ours. Now too, three doors will be open, there is no fourth door. Those who want to leave—and there will be those who leave—I will help them. When they have no hope and no vision, they will go. As they did in 1948. [...] Those who do not go will either accept the rule of the Jewish state, in which case they can remain, and as for those who do not, we will fight them and defeat them. [...] Either I will shoot him or I will jail him or I will expel him.

Mention of the biblical book of Joshua is notable as it also served as an ideological reference for the secular David Ben-Gurion in the early years of the State of Israel.³ (The Old Testament paean to destruction echoes disturbingly today: "So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded. And Joshua smote them from Kadesh-barnea even unto Gaza" [Joshua 11:40–41].)

But the fascism "**godfathered**" by Netanyahu cannot just be reduced to fundamentalist settlers and their strategies of

dispossession (including the deep tendrils into the state of Smotrich's settler NGO, [Regavim](#), and its lawfare against Palestinian property); it is also firmly anchored in the business interests and legislative maneuvers of billionaires who, in Israel as in India or the US, are happy to combine lumpen mobilizations against decadent metropolitan "elites" and the ruthless defense of profit and privilege. In a recent interview, the Holocaust historian Daniel Blatman [observed](#):

Do you know what the biggest threat is to the continued existence of the State of Israel? It's not Likud. It's not even the thugs who run wild in the territories. It's the Kohelet Policy Forum. [...] They are creating a broad social and political manifesto which, if adopted eventually by Israel, will turn it into a completely different country. You say "fascism" to people and they picture soldiers cruising the streets. No. It won't look like that. Capitalism will still be extant. People will still be able to go abroad—if they are allowed into other countries. There will be good restaurants. But a person's ability to feel that there is something protecting him, other than the regime's good will—because it either will or not protect him, as it sees fit—will no longer be there. Israeli society was ripe to receive the present government. Not because of Likud's victory, but because the most extreme wing pulled everyone after it. What was once extreme right is today center. Ideas that were once on the fringes have become legitimate. As a historian whose field is the Holocaust and Nazism, it's hard for me to say this, but there are neo-Nazi ministers in the government today. You don't see that anywhere else—not in Hungary, not in Poland—ministers who, ideologically, are pure racists.⁴

Its insights notwithstanding, this argument also painfully demonstrates what liberal Israeli polemics against the rise of fascism bracket. Namely, Palestinians. Soldiers *do* cruise the streets in Israel and occupied Palestine, and always have. Millions of people ruled by Israel *cannot* go abroad. Or indeed return home. The "pure" racism voiced without compunction by the likes of Smotrich and Ben-Gvir is a product of the racism that structures and reproduces colonial domination, for troubled liberals as much as for giddy fascists.

Long traditions of Black radical and Third world anti-fascism, as well as of indigenous resistance, have taught us that, as Bill Mullen

and Christopher Vials observe, that: “For those racially cast aside outside of liberal democracy’s system of rights, the word “fascism” does not always conjure up a distant and alien social order.”⁵ In settler-colonial and racial fascist regimes—such as the Union of South Africa, which George Padmore in the 1930s deemed “the world’s classic Fascist State”—we encounter a version of that “dual state” which the German-Jewish lawyer Ernst Fraenkel anatomized in 1941: a “normative state” for the dominant population and a “prerogative state” for the dominated, exercising “unlimited arbitrariness and violence unchecked by any legal guarantees’. As Angela Y. Davis noted with reference to what state racial terror presaged for the rest of the US population in the early 1970s, the border between the normative and the prerogative state is porous.⁶

This is patent in Israel today, as government ministers [use](#) the pretext of war to “promot[e] regulations that would allow [them] to direct police to arrest civilians, remove them from their homes, or seize their property if [they] believe they have spread information that could harm national morale or served as the basis for enemy propaganda”. As the Moroccan Jewish Marxist Abraham Serfaty analyzed decades ago in his prison writings on Palestinian liberation, there is a “fascist logic” at the heart of the Zionist settler-colonial project of dispossession, domination and displacement.⁷ The Mizrahi feminist anthropologist Smadar Lavie has linked the intrinsic fascist logic of Israeli settler-colonialism with a regime of racial domination that combines Apartheid practices against Palestinians with the oppression of Mizrahi and other non-Ashkenazi Jews. As she observes in a recent [interview](#):

Fascism is immanent to Zionism from its onset and throughout its history. Historically, the white supremacist far right has drafted its participants by amalgamating ideologies and practices of religiosity and biologism as essences. Biologism might mean here the attempt to define racial, ethnic or other group identities as a hard-wired biological fact. These essences construct Zionism’s ideas and practices of the nation-state. At the basis of white supremacist, fascist movements there is a double standard: the upper-classes initiate it, but then it feeds on the

populism of the white lower classes. This populism is rooted in the centrality of the heteronormative family and conservative family values. In the era of neoliberalism, both the Ashkenazi left and the right-wing elites are promoting a myth of Jewish, multi-ethnic democracy that obscures the slow genocide of the Palestinians and state violence against the Mizrahi lower classes.

While it may be disavowed by liberals, unless it is dismantled in its core elements, this fascist logic cannot but re-emerge, virulently, at every crisis. As proven by its attacks on the hypocrisy of those who claim that they want a two-state solution while never [intending](#) to bring it about, the governing Israeli far Right is in many ways just saying the quiet part very, very loud. As the occupation and its brutalization of Palestinians has been [normalized](#) and treated to all intents and purposes as interminable, the *fascisant* settler and religious right has come to affirm and celebrate the structuring violence and dehumanization that mark Israel as a settler-colonial project—a condition that liberals have thought to mitigate or minimize but rarely to challenge. In Israel, as in so many other contexts and conjunctures, the ascendance of fascism might appear as a break or an exception, but it is deeply rooted in a colonial liberalism that could never countenance true liberation.

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In these days, when Israel's cynicism and carnage are met by the humbling courage of the doctors, journalists and people of Gaza, it is difficult to retain any confidence in the virtues of critical thought. Indeed, much of the commentary emitted under the aegis of theory or philosophy in the past month might make one despair of intellectuals and their representations.⁸ And yet, this murderous onslaught and siege has also triggered wider waves of discursive struggle around the world, which will be of consequence in the months and years to come—drawing dividing lines and serving as a testing ground for our concepts and frameworks, as well as our political stances and strategies. It is in this context that I want briefly to explore what it might mean to analyze settler colonialism and the return of fascism in

the context of the war on Gaza, the ethnic cleansing of the West Bank and the suppression of political liberties within the Green Line.

While the reactionary apologists for ethnic cleansing that populate so much Western media might balk at what they disparage as ideas “rooted in the hothouse jargon of academia”, as the *New York Times* [recently](#) had it, there is also a temptation for opponents of Zionism and Israel to see the present simply as the full revelation of the identity between settler colonialism and fascism—or, as George Habash [declared](#) in the mid-1980s: “We have seen it ... Zionism is fascism ... exactly.”

Today, the increasingly grotesque Israeli propaganda machine has turbocharged that Nazification of Palestinian resistance which has long served as one of its favorite tropes. We recently saw the Israeli President hold a pristine and supposedly annotated copy of an Arabic edition of *Mein Kampf* allegedly found on the body of a Hamas fighter in what he cynically called a “children’s living room” in Gaza. Meanwhile, in the pages of the British *Jewish Chronicle*, a far-Right pundit [advanced](#) the deliriously racist argument that Hamas is actually worse than the Nazi killing squads, because the latter took to drowning their conscience in drink in the aftermath of their atrocities. Anti-Palestinian racism can even morph into Nazi apologia, as long as it serves the cause of Israel. As Nurit Peled-Elhanan observed in a recent article on “The Nazification of Palestinians in Israeli Schoolbooks”, this process involves a perverse psychic and historical transfer:

The Israeli discourse of “a persecuted nation” perceives power not only as a necessary and inevitable derivative of the reality of the Arab-Israeli conflict but also as a redemptive act that retroactively assigns meaning to the Holocaust. In this discourse, the Arab, particularly the Palestinian, has become the container of Jewish fantasies of power and revenge. Jewish powerlessness and vulnerability, epitomized by the Holocaust, were transformed into a fantasy of absolute power, exercised against the Palestinians as a substitute for the European anti-Semitic goy (gentile).⁹

It is this complex that stood in the back of Mapai secretary General Yosef Almogi, declaring in an electoral speech during the Eichmann

trial: “There are thousands of Eichmanns near the borders of Israel. One hundred and fifty meters from the courtroom where the Eichman trial took place, there is a border, and behind that border, thousands of Eichmanns lie in wait, proclaiming explicitly, ‘what Eichmann has not completed, we will.’”¹⁰

These twisted transfers and analogies have a counterpart in the long history of criticizing Israeli colonialism and its violence by invoking Nazi likenesses. As I’ve already noted, while such analogies are open to censure or criminalization in many Western countries (namely via the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism), they are rife in liberal Israeli denunciations of the fascistic dispositions of Netanyahu’s governing coalition. Today, those settler-fascist ministers that have long been the bane of liberal Zionists oversee police-state repression against Palestinian citizens of Israel and [anti-Zionist critics](#) (preventive arrests, electronic surveillance, beatings, harassment) and the intensification of ethnic cleansing in the West Bank. Some are [talking](#) about the emergence of “full dictatorship” from the river to the sea. In a research project unsurprisingly rejected by the Guggenheim foundation in 1989, on “Fascism in Israel: The Funding of Fascist and Neo-Nazi Movements: 1970–1990”, Nitzan, Bichler and Rowley [write](#): “militarism, racism, unofficial apartheid, and political, cultural and ethnic cleavages are not vaguely related phenomena. Together they indicate the fascist potential existing in Israeli society. A fascist regime has not yet materialized but the danger of this occurrence is clear. A serious economic crisis, a military defeat or an unfavorable war stalemate might threaten the existing order and invoke Behemoth”.

Yet, as I’ve already noted, invocations of fascism within Israel—as evidenced by the recent protests against judicial reforms—are by and large aimed at trying desperately to shore up the myths of liberal Zionism, the sacred space of what is ultimately a *Herrenvolk democracy*. As Tareq Baconi [outlined](#) in March of this year:

Palestinians understand that Israel is a democracy for Jews and an apartheid regime for non-Jews. But just like the Green Line, this is a false separation, since the Jewish democratic system itself is dependent

on ethnic exclusion and demographic engineering. The liberals condemning the rise of fascism in Israeli politics are fighting for the rights of only part of the population: a functioning judicial system for Jews, a free press for Jews, rights for Jewish women and LGBTQ+ communities. Achieving these goals is generally predicated on ensuring their fellow inhabitants on the land remain without political rights. What worries the protesters is the prospect of the fascist ideology so familiar to Palestinians being turned on Israeli Jews.

As Sai Englert notes in an important critical essay, this is the pattern of Israeli invocation of fascism ever since the rise of Menachem Begin's Likud in 1977—namely the supposed exception of fascism serves to obfuscate the violent continuity of settler-colonialism, and to shore up the dangerous fantasy of an actually-liberal Zionism.¹¹ Or, to quote Uri Davis's 1987 *Israel: An Apartheid State*:

Political Zionism has united all Zionist parties around the objective of establishing radical apartheid in Palestine ... (Zionist) aspirations and objectives are far more radical than the paradigm of apartheid instituted in the Republic of South Africa. Whereas in the latter case, the body of native society is incorporated into the system in terms of clearly stated economic exploitation and patterns of legal segregation, in the case of Israel, the successful implementation of the Zionist enterprise has always been envisaged as entailing total exclusion and replacement, or in Zionist parlance, "transfer of the native Palestinian population".¹²

A version of this criticism was compellingly articulated in the pages of *Khamsin*, the magazine of Matzpen, the anti-Zionist socialist organization in Israel in 1978, by Avishai Ehrlich.¹³ Ehrlich revived Antonio Gramsci's concept of *trasformismo* "to denote the process whereby historic 'left' and 'right' Zionist parties have been converging in terms of their programmes. Theories and concepts which were historically associated distinctly with the left or the right lose this distinctiveness and are adopted by parties, or fractions within parties, which were historically opposed to them." Among the symptoms of Zionist *trasformismo*, he noted "that traditional left Zionism has no alternative ideology to pose against the settlers" arguments. Being a strongly ideological movement, Zionism has always regarded the

state as a mere tool for higher aims. The right-wing settlers now put their own principles above the reasons of the state”. Yet he also underscored that, notwithstanding Israeli communist positions unable to discern between fascism and other variants of authoritarianism,

Israel must maintain the formal facade of a democracy. This is because permanent war characterizes its existence, and the nature of its relations with Jews and zionists outside Israel. Under conditions of open dictatorship, immigration could well come to a halt and most Jewish support could cease. Israel’s citizen army is based on a high level of consensus and identification between government and citizens. Any openly dictatorial regime faced with a war will run the risk of defeat due to demoralization, desertion and civil disobedience ... The zionist parties share a basic consensus about aims. They also share the state and the zionist apparatus. An open conflict between them at a time of external isolation and in the face of a likely war would be suicidal. In an open struggle among zionists there will be no victors and vanquished—all are bound to lose.

In other words, the specificity of Israel’s racial project of war and dispossession required not crossing the threshold of formal fascism. (We may [note](#) the role of sizable sections of high-tech capital and of the security apparatus in the recent “democracy” protests as a sign of elite anxiety about said threshold.)

I think Ehrlich and Englert’s critiques of the instrumentalization of a fascist menace in Israel are compelling—pointing to how liberal Zionism strives to whitewash itself by denouncing an exceptional Jewish fascism—but I also think that there is a different, more capacious way of approaching the fascist potentials specific to settler-colonialism and its Israeli formation. This starts from how liberal Zionism—like settler-colonial liberalism *tout court*—has to disavow its complicities and continuities with the fascisms it seeks to demarcate itself from. And it also pays heed to the enduring presence of the analytic of fascism in the discourse of Palestinian liberation.¹⁴

Poulantzas once observed that Max Horkheimer’s famous quip from his 1939 “The Jews and Europe”—“Whoever is not prepared to talk about capitalism should also remain silent about fascism”—

should be amended to read “Whoever is not prepared to talk about *imperialism* should remain silent about fascism.”¹⁵ What if we replace, or perhaps better supplement this, with another variation? “Whoever is not willing to talk about *settler-colonialism* should be quiet about fascism.”

It is no mystery that European fascisms were not just a “boomerang” effect of racial-colonial violence, they were marked by their own settler histories (including the German genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples in 1904-8, and Italian colonization and massacres in Libya, Somalia and Ethiopia), while also treating Anglo-American settler-colonialism as a model, not least in the effort to base the domination of ethnic and racial minorities in Europe on US Indian Law.¹⁶ There isn’t merely a homology between settler-colonialism’s logic of elimination and the logics of domination and extermination of historical European fascisms, but a profound historical, material and ideological entanglement. As Padmore noted in his 1936 *How Britain Rules Africa*, settler-colonial racism was the breeding ground of 1930s fascism.

Attending to the settler-colonial (and imperialist) matrix of fascism —not as a static form but as recombinant process and potential—can also allow us to break with a facile identification of fascism with a monolithic totalitarianism. We should recognize instead that the deputization of violence in an expansive racial state is a hallmark of fascism, which bears an intimate affinity with settler-colonialism. As Walter Rodney noted in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*: “Fascism was a monster born of capitalist parents. Fascism came at the end-product of centuries of capitalist bestiality, exploitation, domination and racism—mainly exercised outside of Europe. It is highly significant that many settlers and colonial officials displayed a leaning towards fascism.” Fascism is not just the apotheosis of the leader above the sheeplike masses of his followers; it is also, in a less spectacular but perhaps more consequential and insidious manner, the reinvention of the settler logic of petty sovereignty, a highly conditional but very real “liberalizing” and “privatizing” of the monopoly of violence—one with its counterpart in the increasing

blurring and merger of settler and state violence, and not just in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

In his *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Albert Memmi, writing with French settler-colonialism as his context, depicted the colonist as follows:

This man, perhaps a warm friend and affectionate father, who in his native country (by his social condition, his family environment, his natural friendships) could have been a democrat, will surely be transformed into a conservative, reactionary, or even a colonial fascist. He cannot help but approve discrimination and the codification of injustice, he will be delighted at police tortures and, if the necessity arises, will become convinced of the necessity of massacres. Everything will lead him to these beliefs: his new interests, his professional relations, his family ties and bonds of friendship formed in the colony. The mechanism is practically constant. The colonial situation manufactures colonialists, just as it manufactures the colonized ... every colonial nation carries the seeds of fascist temptation in its bosom. What is fascism, if not a regime of oppression for the benefit of a few? The entire administrative and political machinery of a colony has no other goal. The human relationships have arisen from the severest exploitation, founded on inequality and contempt, guaranteed by police authoritarianism. There is no doubt in the minds of those who have lived through it that colonialism is one variety of fascism.¹⁷

The Israeli variety might seem unique for its theocratic imprimatur—with a long history of fundamentalist rabbis close to the settler movement finding scriptural warrant for extermination, and Minister of Finance and Deputy-Minister for the West Bank Smotrich turning to the Book of Joshua as a manual for ethnic cleansing. But as Netanyahu's genocidal reference to Amalek suggests, no religious conviction is ultimately necessary here, and the logic of elimination can operate in a fully "secular" mode.¹⁸ In Raz-Krakotzkin's [summary](#) of secular Zionism: "God does not exist but he promised the land to us."

Given the foregoing remarks, it should not be a surprise that Israel can serve today as willing model and a critical nexus for a planetary wave of racist authoritarian capitalism, or, as Antony Loewenstein

has it in *The Palestine Laboratory*, “a global leader in surveillance, drones, and ethnonationalist fervor”,¹⁹ drawing the enthusiastic support of philo-Zionist anti-Semites the world over, attracted by Netanyahu’s fascist [credo](#) that “The weak crumble, are slaughtered and are erased from history while the strong ... survive.” As the overlapping of the justifications and the technologies of apartheid and domination suggests, ideology and political economy are intimately entwined here. Lines of investment, military and logistical supply chains, weapons and political lobbies, and networks of far-Right think tanks are promiscuous indeed. The “fascist fix” seeded by the osmosis between settler-colonial violence and national security [neoliberalism](#),²⁰ a fix that Israel models and sells, takes place with relation to global scenarios of crisis and mass unrest, or organised resistance, that differ starkly from those of the 1930s. This is what Gustavo Petro’s vision of Gaza as the “first experiment to deem all of us disposable” is responding to—a form of potentially planetary fascism exacerbated by climate collapse,²¹ the vast inequalities produced by racial capitalism and the ongoing histories of colonial domination. In other words, unless settler colonialism is dismantled—unless, to quote Abdaljawad Omar’s [gloss](#) on Fanon, we hold true to “the colony’s ability not only to liberate itself from settler colonialism but to liberate the metropole from itself”—fascism can only ever return.

Three new realities for American Power after 7 October

Noah Kulwin

12 December 2023

The attacks of 7 October and subsequent Israeli military reprisals have permanently reconfigured the premise of American support for Israel. In the pre-7 October United States political landscape, there was something like plausible deniability on the question of Palestine. Because most Americans know relatively little about the world their empire makes, the suffering of the Palestinians has historically been no match for the Israeli government and its American lobby. An uninterested public has always been among the best defenses that a bad policy can have.

But this time is different. The Hamas operation carried out on 7 October augurs not a turning point nor reorientation of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and its total blockade of Gaza, but will instead go down as a great *intensification* of political currents that have been flowing under the surface of American domestic and international politics for some time now. These include more disenchantment and dissatisfaction with American Israel policy than ever [before](#); the strategic and security Israeli quandary revealed by the Palestinian strike; and the significant and growing liability on the

world stage that Israel poses for the US, its patron state and protector for the bulk of Israel's existence.

These three dynamics were not created by 7 October, but that event and Israel's barbaric response catapulted them into public consciousness. They indicate what is changing in a demonstrable and material way among great masses of people, as well as within the pro-Israel political order that has for decades held sway in Washington, New York, London, Paris, Brussels, and Berlin.

A disenchantment

A contemporary Democratic president's political credibility in any arena or quantity depends on the ability to at least project an authentic connection with common people. Many supported "Amtrak Joe" with reservations. The case for "Genocide Joe" is harder to make. Recent American economic gains, particularly when compared with Europe, cannot arrest a collapse of national conscience. A full two-thirds (67 percent) of Americans aged 18–34 "disapprove of the military action Israel has taken in Gaza," according to [Gallup](#)—Joe Biden is lucky that it's mostly old people who actually cast ballots. With now less than a year to go before the 2024 presidential election, Biden has curiously recreated the domestic political circumstances of a much earlier defining foreign policy crisis of his generation, the early 1968 Tet Offensive, which led to November ruin for the Democrats later that year.

A month into the post-7 October reality, Joe Biden's approval rating sits at 37 percent, a bottom he has reached twice [before](#). The dissatisfaction is undeniable. But thus far there has been no credible talk of finding someone to launch a primary campaign against the President, nor is a challenger likely to emerge. And among the names bandied about in such a hypothetical scenario—Governors Gretchen Whitmer, J B Pritzker and Gavin Newsom of, respectively, Michigan, Illinois and California—none would conceivably offer a line on Palestine and Israel that deviated much from Biden's. And despite mass Palestine solidarity protests of unprecedented size from

Washington, DC to London, nothing has come close to the supposed “civil war conditions” of 1968, as Henry Kissinger later described them, that forced then-President Lyndon Johnson to act on Vietnam.

Continuity in American pro-Israel policy will thus express itself until either Biden’s or Trump’s reelection, much as it did in the time of Tet 1968. The 50 percent US public support for its military action against Gaza that Israel could claim at the end of November 2023 marks not the beginning of a new phase of popular support for Israel —as shown for Ukraine against Russia, at least for the first two years of that war—but will instead be something like the high-water mark of an irreparably fractured consensus, a pro-Israel Democratic White House stuck with a base not at all excited about the policy. While down ballot Democrats may be more insulated from the enthusiasm collapse for Biden on top of the Democratic ticket (Republicans are even less popular), these are the kinds of electoral conditions that have historically put Republicans in office; Eisenhower over Stevenson during the Korean War in 1952, Nixon over Humphrey in 1968.

Among the new conditions imposed by 7 October is this: the unique kind of political disenchantment that can take place when a Democratic president improperly leverages US imperial power. Biden is here not exceptional, but emblematic of where the Beltway political class fits into American class conflict more broadly. On 2 December 2023, the United Auto Workers—fresh off the biggest organized labor victory of the year—[announced](#) their support for a ceasefire in Palestine and went where not even Bernie Sanders has yet gone. The largest-ever American solidarity protest with Palestine took place a month earlier, on 4 November, and counted over 100,000 people in attendance—the [largest](#) antiwar demonstration since the Iraq War days of 2003, and at least five times the size of the pro-Israel [rally](#) held in the same city ten days later. In America, the distance between US political leaders and their constituents is structurally vast but that fact is seldom made as public as it has been since Israel started decimating Gaza.

How might these changing perceptions of Israel be connected to the emerging challenges to American hegemony now taking place the world over? One obvious answer is the protests themselves, which span major world cities on nearly every continent. Another is the outright hesitation or slight second-guessing among US policymakers about how Israel will proceed from its Gaza carnage. Many senior government officials are conscious of the damage that the humanitarian catastrophe created by Israel's relentless bombing campaign may inflict not only to the Zionist and American "brands" but to their long-term strategy as well, whether the challenge is containing Iran or securing Saudi and Emirati friendship in America's relatively new anti-China posture. And by allowing Israel to wage essentially unrestricted war to end Hamas (an unrealistic prospect by even the most generous analysis), the US has wittingly allowed Israel to try and fail at killing its way out of its dilemma rather than facilitate negotiations on matters beyond hostage returns.

"You see, in this kind of a fight, the center of gravity is the civilian population," said US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on 2 December. "And if you drive them into the arms of the enemy, you replace a tactical victory with a strategic defeat." Although Austin was specifically talking about civilian deaths in Gaza City, one could very well imagine his remarks to be about civilians the world over made more sympathetic to the "enemy" by American-supported brutality. Even Democratic voters at home are, as Israel's war has dragged on, less and [less](#) approving of the American hand on the Middle East tiller.

A romance

The total failure of current US-led peace efforts speak to the threadbare condition of the "rules-based" international order. While international bodies or international law may in principle require the collection of evidence to prove that the many war crimes which Israel reports took place on 7 October did indeed occur, Israel's plan of total retribution was given the go-ahead by the United States, the UK,

France, and Germany. But after the birth of the post-Second World War order in the West and during the 1970s tumult that severely tested it, Israeli violence was instrumentalized by that order as America sought to bloodily widen its influence during the Cold War's twilight years.

The birth pangs of globalization in the 1970s—incidentally including the Arab oil embargo prompted by U.S. military aid for Israel in the Yom Kippur War—sparked an inequality crisis in the West over the following decades as neoliberalism (the replacement of state-led capitalism with private institutions and networks) took root. Jimmy Carter introduced a foreign policy based on “human rights” that aligned the US with, among others, white supremacist anticommunists in Africa. The failure of this line, combined with severe economic dysfunction, led to the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan. Emboldened by America's right-wing turn, Israel's own rightist leadership pursued a new war in Lebanon, ramped up settlement of Palestinian land in the West Bank, and empowered extremists like the Gush Emunim movement, which sought to blow up the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, among the holiest sites in Islam.

Even before the Soviet Union's collapse, the U.S. had awarded itself the de facto role of world policeman. Occasionally, as in the 1990–1 Gulf War in Iraq and Kuwait, the US acted under the aegis of the United Nations. But akin to Bush I's 1989 US invasion of Panama, which did not receive UN approval, “when the UN wouldn't authorize war on Serbia to save Kosovo, the United States acted as if NATO wielded the same imprimatur, and no nation was strong enough to challenge its assertion,” as Spencer Ackerman notes in this volume. In 1998, in the throes of the Lewinsky scandal, Bill Clinton also bombed Iraq—an illegal and pointless military action that was ultimately a prelude to what the Bush II White House would do with the permission slip provided by 9/11. America's open embrace of the Israeli government during this era widened as the latter became more overtly racist in its outlook, expanded the settlements faster than the internal state's population could grow, and encouraged the failure of the Oslo peace process at Camp David in 2000; these were all signs

of how Israel might push America toward needless wars just a few years later.

The twenty-first century's most catastrophic violation of international law to date was the American-led invasion of Iraq. Despite global sympathy in the wake of the 11 September attacks (the president of Iran condemned them in an [interview](#) with CNN's Christiane Amanpour), the Bushites quickly set about developing the false pretenses on which they would invade Iraq. Israel was a significant supporter of this effort, providing everything from phony intelligence to smooth-talking pro-invasion media surrogates like then-former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu¹. The Israeli government had long viewed Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a primary antagonist, and Israeli leaders further threw themselves into the incipient "global war on terror" being led by the United States. Israel, after all, was itself experiencing a resurgent Palestinian resistance, the Second Intifada, which led Israel to demand new concessions for its security such as the construction of a fence along the entirety of Israel's border with occupied Palestinian lands.

A few years later in 2006, battling a different "terrorist" threat from Hezbollah forces in Lebanon to the north, the Bush administration became "closely involved in the planning of Israel's retaliatory attack" in spite of "calls from several governments for the United States to take the lead in negotiations to end the fighting."² Where Ronald Reagan [sought](#) to draw a line for Israel in its 1982 incursion into Lebanon and George H.W. Bush dragged Israel kicking and screaming into 1991 peace negotiations, George W. Bush laid a foundation for a new kind of unequivocal American support for Israel.

The basic geopolitical conditions of Palestine from the post-Lebanon War period until 6 October 2023 were thus cemented in place: The Israeli security fence project became a full-fledged wall; the Israeli settlement population in the West Bank exploded as Palestinian territorial control diminished; a hapless geriatric in thrall to the Israeli government was then and is now the head of the Palestinian Authority; a different person, who is personally corrupt, is now in charge of the Israeli government. While two of Israel's historic

enemies, Libya and Syria, reel from civil war, Egypt remains under the thumb of a military dictatorship friendly to Israel's far-right government.

The events of 7 October 2023 and the crushing reprisal launched by the Israeli military—ongoing as of this writing two months later—mark the biggest challenge to this unsteady equilibrium in many years. Unable to maintain its two-front military occupation of the PA-run West Bank and Hamas-governed Gaza, Israel suffered the most damaging attacks on its interior since the 1973 war, despite the most favorable geopolitical climate in the history of the state and the most effective control over the Palestinian population its military has ever exerted.

“Operation Iron Swords,” as Israeli leadership has named its current campaign in Gaza, will not resolve this contradiction but inflame it. Continued military action has already drawn attacks from Houthi militants in Yemen on ships owned by or affiliated with Israelis and, as Rashid Khalidi discusses in this volume, there is no public plan for a “day after” in Gaza. Israel's government is in a pickle, having used the wound it suffered as an excuse to mete out slaughter that it misguidedly believes will bring it and the world peace and security, and suffering from a lack of leaders—both on the right and in the center—who have an alternative course of action. No wonder where Israel might have picked up that habit.

A death pact

My two prior theses—that American pro-Israel policy is currently under more popular duress than at any previous time in living memory, and that Israel has backed itself into a bloody corner with America's help—are both pieces of my third, final and synthetic argument: Israel's prize position within the constellation of American foreign relations has become a unique strategic liability. This was a central contention of John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt's classic 2007 study, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*. “Unconditional support for Israel is undermining relations with other

US allies, casting doubt on America's wisdom and moral vision, helping inspire a generation of anti-American extremists, and complicating US efforts to deal with a volatile but vital region," the two write. "In short, the largely unconditional 'special relationship' between the United States and Israel is no longer defensible on strategic grounds."³

In the decade and a half that has elapsed since the publication of their book, the Israel lobby's strength in the U.S. and Europe has not dwindled. When Barack Obama negotiated a 2015 deal with Iran in which the Islamic Republic agreed not to enrich weapons-grade nuclear material, it was that same Israel lobby working through Congress and cable news green rooms that attempted to kill it. During Donald Trump's campaign for president, it was not the Russians but the Israelis, [reports](#) journalist James Bamford, who waged the *actually* effective campaign to collude with candidate Trump. And as Israel instituted its siege of Gaza in October and intensified West Bank settlement and Palestinian dispossession, its allies in politics and the media loyally defended its reputation.

The price of supporting Israel unconditionally reaches ever new heights. Israel's recent saving grace, as far as geopolitical headaches go, is that it quietly patched relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. While attending the AIPAC Policy Conference in 2018, I saw a then-leader of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations tell a packed plenary session of thousands of attendees about the wonderful things he had seen while visiting Dubai. But even Israel's good relations in the region proved to be a liability for the US as the Gulf Arab kingdoms' access to the prized Israeli spy software [Pegasus](#) played a role in the Saudi government's 2018 dismemberment of critic Jamal Khashoggi. Even when Israel makes nice with its neighbors for reasons that are not primarily self-serving, it kicks up shit for the country that cuts it more than \$3.8 billion in aid per year⁴.

The bad ROI further compounds. The premise of the US's annual budget of \$3.8 billion for Israel, a package negotiated under the Obama administration, is that it provides the country with the

necessary means for security. But as the events of 7 October prove, the money wasn't enough to keep Hamas fighters who are denied many basic means of conventional warfare from carrying out one of the deadliest attacks in the country's history, or to quickly repel them once the scope of the operation from Gaza became clear over the course of that morning.

Even now, two months into its brutal siege in Gaza and with seemingly unwavering US support, Israel appears poised to lose this war. In an analysis entitled "Israel Could Lose," [published](#) on 7 November by the blog of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a Washington think tank historically aligned with the national security establishment, CSIS Senior Vice President Jon B. Alterman spells out the likely path by which Israel would fail to dislodge Hamas and perhaps spark a wider war:

In this scenario, Hamas rallies a besieged population in Gaza around it in anger and helps collapse the Palestinian Authority government by ensuring Palestinians see it even more as a feckless adjunct to Israeli military authority. Meanwhile, Arab states move strongly away from normalization, the Global South aligns strongly with the Palestinian cause, Europe recoils at the Israeli army's excesses, and an American debate erupts over Israel, destroying the bipartisan support Israel has enjoyed here since the early 1970s. Rumbblings of a regional war suit Hamas well, prompting global debates about the cost of an alliance with Israel. Israel's ability to sustain its own solidarity through this process is not Hamas' main concern. Rather, its goal is to estrange Israel from its international partners and turn it into the pariah that Hamas believes it to be.

For now, the US is sticking with its long-time regional client despite these troubling predictions, but it is an increasingly solitary position. On 8 December 2023, the US used its Security Council veto at the United Nations to block a resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. The vote was lopsided, even by UN standards; only the US voted against, its junior partner the United Kingdom abstained, and the remaining thirteen member states voted in favor. There was no alternative peace plan proposed. Speaking after the vote, one UN

official [summed up](#) what had happened: “Unfortunately, nearly all of our recommendations were ignored.”

The romance of American and Israeli power may not live to see a century. The “special relationship” has lasted for this long, in large part, because it was a credibly bipartisan affair—an arrangement in service of American empire. But a resurgent critique of US imperialism is mounting, moving people onto the streets and against long-standing US foreign policy. The disenchantment among left-leaning Americans—and many elsewhere on the spectrum—with Democrats’ pro-Israel policy has no apparent fix, with domestic popular support waning and Israel’s ever more naked barbarity threatening regional chaos. Israel’s intense effort to locate itself alongside American power or to make sure American power was always behind its worst excesses has led not to a secure “fortress Israel,” as evidenced by the hundreds of Israelis killed in a day. It has instead enmeshed the US further in the very policies that produced the calamity; the eighteen-year siege of Gaza and the use of the Israeli military not for protection but for policing and dispossessing Palestinians.

At the same time, the US’s geopolitical priorities are shifting. For as long as the United States has had enemies which Israel could fight—Arab nationalists, African revolutionaries, Latin American Marxists and, eventually, Muslim extremists—there was a logically sound, if immoral case for keeping Israel around as is. This thesis came under strain during the Iraq War years of the 2000s but has lasted through today. Now, the US is gearing itself up for a new global confrontation against China, one in which the role for Israel to play is less clear-cut than in the past. China is among Israel’s largest trading partners, and the American Israel lobby may find it hard to press the pet issues of a nuclear Iran or college campus antisemitism if its state cannot place itself at the center of the American strategic outlook. Whereas once it was oil that was the futureproof fuel of world industry and transport, the coming years will be dominated with a transition to a “greener” future that has as few hiccups for capital as possible. It is not clear how Israel can contribute to such a solution when its continued

existence requires pretending its problems do not exist. Israel's decreasing centrality to American foreign policy may yet create an unprecedented opening for American political activists to apply the same kind of pressure that helped fell apartheid South Africa; and US rivals abroad may abandon trepidation concerning Israel's human rights abuses, as the costs and benefits of tolerating Israeli policy recombine in a changing world order.

As a parallel competition for moral authority in the world takes shape, a kind of battle that the US has not really fought in several decades as architect and arbiter of the rules-based international order, Israel will have to justify many of the negative exceptions that have been made for it. Not to friendly Americans, as in years past, most likely, but to other millions who want to know about the ruins of the world they inherited, and why Israel should be permitted to drench them in blood, again and again.

Part 4

Not in anyone's name

Not in anyone's name

Ashley J. Bohrer

1 December 2023

Over the last several weeks, we have seen an incredible groundswell in the support for Palestinian liberation. Marches on every continent except Antarctica, each one seemingly larger than the last. The rise of struggle anywhere in the world is always a joy; when the tide turns globally, it is a marvel to behold. I have been especially moved, in addition to the millions in the streets and the breakneck pace of mobilization, by the epic resolve of Jewish anti-Zionist organizing in this time.

The more people study the so-called “Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” the clearer it becomes that so many narratives fed to us by the media and by our institutions are purely ideological. Despite what we are told, this is not a millennia-old, tribalistic conflict between irreconcilable religious entities. It is not “too complicated” to take a stand on. While it is important for Jews to be in this movement, and to stake our voice *as Jews*, that is not because this is fundamentally a *religious* conflict; it is rather because Jewish people and the charge of anti-Semitism are deployed as a wedge and bargaining chip to dampen the calls for Palestinian freedom. What we have seen over the last several weeks is Jews around the world contesting the supposed unanimity of Jewish support for the Israeli state. We will no

longer allow the forces of imperialism and settler colonialism to manipulate us or others into complicity or perpetration.

I'm a National Board Member, as well as an organizer in the Chicago chapter, of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), the largest Jewish anti-Zionist organization in the world (which has at the time of this writing swelled to over 22,000 dues-paying members). Over the last several weeks, JVP has planned or contributed to over eighty actions across the US: blocking entrances to the White House and Capitol Building in DC, shutting down Grand Central Station and the Statue of Liberty in NYC and the Israeli Consulate in Chicago as well as the Space Needle in Seattle, blocking boats carrying weapons destined for Israeli ports along the West Coast, stopping traffic in several cities including the recent take-over of the Bay Bridge, and so, so many others. The JVP Rabbinical Council organized the powerful and beautiful 'Rabbis for Ceasefire' service in DC, and across the country, JVP members have been at the center of takeovers of elected representatives' offices, pushing for them to sign on to calls for a ceasefire. In my own local community of Chicago, JVP members have been participating in actions, both Jewish and Palestinian led at a rate I have never experienced in my many years of organizing on this issue—sometimes up to two or three actions a day just in this one city.

Tens of thousands of Jews have participated in these actions. We have seen over 2,000 activists arrested at these demonstrations, and even more have been detained, ticketed, and intimidated by police in the past several weeks. As we saw on 15 November, many have also [faced](#) direct violence at the hands of the repressive state apparatus. Through JVP's congressional contact tool, at the time of this writing, 189,644 calls have been made and 212,004 emails sent to members of Congress demanding they sign on to an immediate ceasefire. And this is just here—across the world, from London to Toronto to Tel Aviv, more Jews than ever have been standing up to say “not in our name.”

This is far from the first time that Jews have stood up against Zionism. Jews have organized in solidarity with the Great March of

Return in 2019, and against every previous Israeli incursion (euphemistically termed ‘operations’) into Gaza. The last major inflection point for Jews in this struggle was in 2014, with new Jewish organizations in several countries rising to contest the appropriation of Jewish grief toward the end of brutality. Over the last decade, more and more young Israelis are refusing their compulsory military service, one of the key material engines of the brutal occupation.

Jewish organizing against Zionism stretches farther back than this still. The International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network was founded in 2008. Jews mobilized during both the First and Second Intifadas across the world. Matzpen organized marginalized Jews of Color in Palestine from a distinctly anti-Zionist perspective from the 1960s to the 1980s. New Jewish Agenda (1980–1992) and Not in Our Name were both organizations that emphasized the need for a distinctly Jewish voice in the struggle for Palestinian liberation. While not all of these organizations or all of their members embraced the language of *anti-Zionism* specifically, the anti-Zionist Jewish tradition grows out of their critiques of Israeli occupation and militarism.

But even before the Nakba, there were always Jews who opposed the founding of an ethno-nationalist state in Palestine. While the contemporary Israeli State and many mainstream Jewish institutions would like to pretend that Zionism was a historical inevitability born out of exile, the historical record shows otherwise. In nearly every context in which Zionism was proposed, much of the Jewish community rejected it. When Theodor Herzl began advocating for a Zionist state in Palestine, Jewish communities both secular and religious across Europe and the Middle East roundly dismissed it. Even some Jews seduced by the promise of Zionism reached the shores of Palestine and quickly repudiated it. Leftist organized Jews—in the US, in the Soviet Union, in Germany, in Ukraine, in Poland, in Italy, in Iraq, in Egypt, and in Palestine—were vociferously opposed to Zionism throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Building these alternatives reactivates long-standing principles of left Jewish organizing. In the early twentieth century, when my family lived in Europe and spoke Yiddish, the Jewish Labor Bund rejected

Zionism in favor of *doikayt*. *Doikayt* means “hereness,” a rootedness in place, a commitment to fight for our liberation and the liberation of all in the present, wherever we find ourselves. Wherever you are in this world, there is justice work to be done, and *doikayt* is one principle of our responsibility to do it. *Doikayt* is both a rejection of the ‘over there-ness’ of Zionism, which roots Jewishness in one particular (heavily mythologized) geography, and a rejection of the idea that redemption (liberation if you prefer) is something that comes from outside us, from divine intervention, from otherworldly design. We are the bearers of our own future, and we cannot wait for saviors to do that work on our behalf.

This current, incredible groundswell of Jewish Palestine solidarity organizing did not materialize out of thin air. This moment reflects a confluence of forces and transformations in the Jewish community, in Palestine organizing, and in broader political trends that have significantly shifted the terrain on which we organize. Some of these factors are the direct result of conscious organizing strategies, while others reflect broader shifts in political climate as well as the organizing strategies of the right.

Anti-Zionist Jewish community

Last Friday night, I sat around a Shabbat dinner table with several of my co-organizers of the shutdown of the Israeli Consulate General of the Midwest, many of whom are a decade or more younger than I, many of whom are new to this struggle. I asked them about how they ended up in this movement. In recounting their own organizing trajectories, many talked about how much easier it had been for them to access anti-Zionist Jewish community as young adults than it had been even a decade ago. The decades of organizing that allowed for the uptick in Jewish anti-Zionism around 2014 has meant that more and more young Jews are coming into contact with anti-Zionist ideas as potential elements *of* their Jewishness, not as threats to it. The more of us there are, the more of us there will be.

They spoke about how impactful it was to see Jewish elders speaking about their own struggles with Zionism, and to see that many of us had risked families and jobs to stand up for justice for Palestinians. The courage of others instills resolve in people who witness and come after. The fact that so many of us invested in building distinctly Jewish anti- and non-Zionist institutions—political organizations, but also synagogues, minyans, Talmud learning spaces, song circles, reading groups, zine collectives, etc.—means that newcomers to the movement have a place to land. It is not just that over the past decade, more Jews have divested from Zionism, but that in the course of disentangling ourselves from Zionism, the proactive building of alternative spaces (religious, political, and artistic) has been crucial to the explosion of Jewish Palestine solidarity organizing in this moment.

At the same time, more young Jews than ever have seen the Occupation firsthand. Organizations like the Center for Jewish Nonviolence (CJNV) bring Jews from around the world to Palestine to see the horrors of the occupation and to engage in acts of co-resistance with Palestinian organizations. CJNV alone has brought many hundreds of Jews to East Jerusalem and the West Bank, meeting Palestinians and engaging in direct action against the occupation shoulder to shoulder with Palestinian comrades. CJNV is only one of many organizations that over the years has facilitated a growth in diasporic Jews witnessing the horrors of occupation, and hearing the history of Palestine from a Palestinian perspective. To name but a few of the organizations in this ecosystem: Breaking the Silence, Achvat Amim, Encounter, Extend, the International Solidarity Movement, Operation Dove. While not all of these organizations are distinctly anti-Zionist, they all take aim at one of the most crucial links in Jewish diasporic support for the Israeli regime: propaganda, ideology, and ignorance. I have seen with my own eyes how moving through the checkpoint system or walking down the segregated Shuhada Street in al-Khalil (Hebron) or witnessing the amenities at the Carmel settlement in comparison to the lack of electricity and running water in Masafer Yatta brings the entire Zionist project into

grave doubt. When activists see with their own eyes and return home, simply describing what they saw and experienced, entire communities can be activated.

Through organizations like CJNV, many of us have participated in direct actions and civil disobedience against the occupation on the ground in Occupied Palestine. At these protests, we have been met with automatic weapons, flash bangs, arrest, assault, and threats of deportation, to say nothing of intimidation, epithets, and harassment.

Taken together, these methods of organizing inside the Jewish community have born real fruit in this moment, with more Jews than ever able to see how the Israeli state perpetuates oppression and violence rather than protection, and opening up the space for politicization of the Jewish community on this issue.

At the same time, the increase in Jewish Palestine solidarity organizing is not only a result of the prescient strategies we have pursued in our movement.

The far-right

Perhaps one of the most important factors driving the explosion of Jewish organizing on Palestine is a dramatic shift in the threat of anti-Semitism. While anti-Semitism had never disappeared, the last decade has seen a mainstreaming of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and a marked increase in anti-Semitic hate crimes, culminating in chilling images of the largest neo-Nazi rallies in half a century [chanting](#) “Jews will not replace us.”

The rising tide of real anti-Semitism has had several effects on Jewish communal life. On the one hand, it has prompted a renewed need for a deep analysis of what anti-Semitism actually is and how it functions. Even the most basic attempts at doing so, beyond basic denunciations of a supposedly pervasive “Jew hatred,” reveals anti-Semitism to be a central tenet of the far right; as Jews have been grappling with new threats to their safety across Europe and North America, it has become clear that the political force behind these threats is a radical, white nationalist bloc, enlivened by a rabid

commitment to heteropatriarchy and Christian nationalism, especially that of the evangelical variety.

At the same time that a new generation of Jewish people are seeing more clearly the dangers of the far right, several prominent Zionist organizations have cozied up to dangerous, avowed anti-Semites. AIPAC is only the most notorious of these, [endorsing](#) far right congressional candidates that openly espouse white nationalist conspiracy theories and refused to certify the last presidential election. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) spends nearly all of its [focus](#) on anti-Semitism on anti-Zionist Jews and calls for Palestinian rights, letting the far right off nearly scott-free; for this reason, dozens of organizations, including many prominent Jewish organizations have collaborated on a [campaign](#) to #DroptheADL. On 14 November, a coalition of pro-Israel organizations organized a “March for Israel” in Washington DC and invited the [infamous](#) anti-Semitic (as well as Islamophobic and homophobic) pastor John Hagee to speak from the podium; this is a man who once said that God had sent Hitler.

As these prominent Zionist organizations have cozied up to a far right increasingly emboldened in its outright anti-Semitism, it has become clear to more and more Jews that something is afoot. In this context, growing numbers of Jews see that the attempt to paint anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism is preposterous. And the Zionist attempt to locate anti-Semitism as a predominantly Muslim and/or Arab phenomenon does not match with what Jewish people are seeing with their own eyes. Although anti-Semitic language or imagery may emerge in many places, including occasionally in the Palestine movement; it is clear to a growing number of Jews that anti-Semitism is central to white nationalism and neo-Nazism, not anti-Zionism.

The rise of anti-Semitism and the return of the far right has surfaced profound doubts, especially in today’s youth, about the strategy pursued by our parents and grandparents: attempted assimilation into mainstream society, and at least for European Jews, into whiteness, in exchange for Jewish safety. Bolstered by the rise of powerful anti-racist and abolitionist movements over the course of the past decade, Jewish activists are finding much more compelling

narratives to think about difference, collective care, and a liberated future beyond the problematic bargains of an (il)liberal ethnostate. As critiques of capitalism, state power, the police, organized repression, and structural racism gain more power on the left, Jews, who have always participated in emancipatory struggles in higher-than-proportional numbers, have been transformed not only in solidarity with the struggles of other constituencies, but have been prompted to integrate these ideas into our own senses of self and community. It is becoming increasingly clear that the pathway to a world beyond anti-Semitism is one forged in relations of solidarity with our neighbors in the communities where we live, not in a magical elsewhere of last resort maintained through the domination of Palestinians.

Lessons

It is always difficult to draw lessons from a struggle in *media res*. The moment we are in is ongoing, and developing quickly. It will thus require continual reassessment as facts on the ground shift and as we continue to engage in the incredible laboratory of emancipation we find ourselves in. I do believe, however, that we can tease out a few key lessons at this juncture.

The first lesson to learn is that it is the work we do between the waves that really, really matters. The proliferation of Jewish anti-Zionist organizing in this time would not be possible without the incredible labor of organizing our communities to reject Zionism that has been ongoing. We do not always see the effects of smaller campaigns, endless spreadsheets, processing circles, reading groups, tough conversations, relationship building, documentation work, or action assessment as they are ongoing. But they do lay the foundation for the possibility of moments like this. Organizers cannot control or prompt the explosion of mass struggle, nor can we always predict when or what will ignite the fire; what we can do is make sure that when sparks fly, the gas is turned on.

This surge in organizing shows also that identity is important to the struggle in complicated and multi-faceted ways, and thus cannot

be ignored in our organizing strategy. While identity politics cannot be the only answer to our strategy, part of the power of this moment and of the swell in Jewish participation in the Palestine liberation movement is bound up with Jewish identity in multiple senses. Jewish participation is particularly powerful at dispelling baseless claims of anti-Semitism and disingenuous deployments of Holocaust trauma as attempts to disqualify Palestinian liberation. But it is equally true that so many Jewish participants in this struggle come to it and stay in it *because* they feel rooted in Jewish tradition, liturgy, and history. So many of us feel called to participate in the Palestine struggle, as well as in other social justice struggles, because of Jewish principles like *pikuach nefesh* (the sanctity of human life) and *tikkun olam* (a duty to repair injustice in the world), as well as because of Jewish histories of oppression (never again means never again for anyone). Identity functions in this struggle not only strategically, but also motivationally. It is of course true that identity politics are deployed also by Zionists, claiming to speak on behalf of all Jews. It is precisely because of the repressive deployment of identity politics in cases such as these that an oppositional engagement with identity has to be one part of a multi-faceted struggle for liberation. Identity does not give us any easy answers, but nor can it simply be ignored.

This is also true if we want to build long-term engagement with the struggle. Perhaps more than other issues, in the Jewish community this issue divides families—and not generally (at least so far) in a reparable way. Coming out as anti-Zionist in Jewish households often entails estrangement or outright disowning from one's natal family and expulsion from many of the institutions of collective Jewish life (Judaism, unlike many other traditions is less a matter of individual faith or conscience and more a communal practice). The success and longevity of Jews in the movement in part depends on being able to form real alternative communities and families that are simultaneously political and personal.

This is one of the reasons that intergenerational organizing has been such a powerful and effective element of Jewish anti-Zionist organizing. While some organizations have taken a youth-forward

approach to political engagement, it is clear that younger Jews' ability to be transformed on this issue significantly depends on their close political contact with elders who have experience in this struggle. As with any influx of new organizers into the struggle, it is always to our benefit to link new enthusiasm with seasoned experience to deepen our analysis, plan more robust direct actions, and avoid repeating mistakes our movements have already learned from. In the context of Palestine in particular, it is important to remember and honor that many of our elders have been alive longer than the State of Israel; we must work so that they live longer than the apartheid regime they are protesting.

In this moment, we have also seen the power of coalitional organizing. In my own local context, the rapid-fire planning of actions would not be possible without several groups working together, even when the political orientations of those groups include significant divergences in political analysis and aims. The record-breaking mobilizations in places like Washington, DC and London would not have been possible with the enforcement of ideological purity. It has been united front politics, with Palestinian organizations, Jewish organizations (both anti- and non-Zionist), organizations from other faith traditions, anti-war groups, unions, elected officials, racial justice orgs, communists, anarchists, and the widest swathe of the organized left that has brought us to this point. We have been effective at making demands for a ceasefire unanimous on the left; we must learn this lesson and apply it looking forward beyond the ceasefire and toward the full liberation of Palestine.

The challenges ahead

Despite the inspiring organizing of the past weeks, we face severe challenges on the road ahead, ones that we must take adequate stock of if we are to continue building towards freedom for all people who live between the river and the sea.

Despite a growing Jewish anti-Zionism, most Jewish communal institutions are not (yet) anti-Zionist. Zionism continues to be the

default position in our schools, summer camps, youth organization, movement organizations, service provision, rabbinical schools, synagogues, and other communal institutions. We are seeing a crisis in these halls unfold, but the battle here is far from won. The growth of Jewish anti-Zionism in this time reveals how much more work there is to be done.

At the same time, we should be cautious about how we center Jewishness in an understanding of Zionism. While I remain committed to the powerful organizing that demands Israel stop committing atrocities “in our name,” these acts would still be atrocities if they were committed with alternative logics, in the name of something or someone else. It is not the perverse deployment of Jewishness that ultimately must be stopped, but the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Which is to say that we need a sober assessment of the role of Jewish anti-Zionism in the movement and of the forces opposing Palestinian liberation. Zionism is hardly unique to the Jewish community. Without question, Jews have a unique and powerful role to play in this movement. But we cannot be so naïve as to think that once Jewish support for the Israeli state wanes, the ideological battle is won; there are many, many more secular and Christian Zionists in the world than Jewish ones, a fact the movement must remember as the balance of political power in the Jewish community shifts on this issue.

Christian Zionism is not new—indeed, one Israeli scholar [suggests](#) that Jewish Zionism actually has its roots here—it is, however, expanding in the US evangelical movement and is gaining steam across the globe, especially in places like Brazil, South Korea, and Nigeria. Christian Zionism has its own political, liturgical, and ideological contours, which I cannot treat in full here; it does suffice to say that Christian Zionism is often both anti-Semitic and Islamophobic and well entrenched in various other forms of right wing formations, including anti-feminist and anti-queer revanchism.

The idea that US or UK or UN support for Israel will falter because of Jews’ political positions simply does not take stock of the vastness

of Christian (and Christian-secular) power in this arena. Nor does adequately understand the many geopolitical and political-economic interests at work here; from tech firms to weapons manufacturers, oil and gas companies to water companies, there are very many powerful material interests at play in this context. Despite growing international consensus about the brutality and illegality of Israel's apartheid regime, the actions of Western governments, mainstream media organizations, and social media sites have overwhelmingly sided against Palestinian liberation; these are all potent forces of opposition our movements must contest and counter. It was, of course, the British Balfour Declaration, as well as acts by the United Nations, that created the State of Israel in the first place, that created the conditions of the Nakba. Jews were not in control of those processes or organizations, and the overestimation of Jewish agency in global politics has its own dark history. Jews remain a tiny minority; the creation of the State of Israel and its continued regime of abuse, occupation, and ethnic cleansing *is predominantly supported by states and organizations that are overwhelmingly Christian*. We must thus understand Jewish anti-Zionism as one crucial piece in a larger project of anti-Zionism directed at all the powers preventing a liberated Palestine.

We must also learn some hard lessons from the Zionist project. The dangers of Zionism tell us something incredibly important about our visions for liberation, safety, and justice. It is undeniable that Jewish people have faced terrors that must never be repeated. At the same time, the perverse deployment of our history shows that valid fears and important political imperatives can be turned against us; as we sketch out visions for what the future should look like, we should be attentive to the ways that even our freedom dreams can be seized, appropriated, and manipulated into new, unanticipated horrors. This is a key lesson to hold close as we expand our movements and articulate not only what we are *against* but what we are *for*.

A century ago, anti-colonial thinkers like Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon warned that, benefitting from oppressive systems degrades

our humanity. While oppressive systems may offer conditional protection or temporary liberty to its foot soldiers, it cannot furnish us with real security or real freedom. Above all, what the mobilisations that started in October 2023 should teach us is that there is significant global support around the ideas of justice and decolonization that touch every continent on the globe. The forces Palestinians are facing are forces responsible for immiseration across all parts of the globe. We must rise to meet that challenge, to respond to the example that the Palestine liberation movement has been setting for seventy-five years and counting. Some have said in the past weeks that we are seeing the reinvigoration of the global anti-war movement; some have said this is our generation's Vietnam. It is my strident hope that both of these prophecies come true, and that the fight for a liberated Palestine is also the center of a renewed anti-colonial and anti-imperial movement, in short, that we are witnessing the birth of this century's Tricontinental.

Gaza's imperial boomerang

Hil Aked

14 November 2023

Every western politician who declared support for Israel's attacks "has the blood of children on their hands," said British-Palestinian medic Ghassan Abu Sitta, speaking from Gaza's hospital-cum-morgue. Amongst them, we can certainly count British prime minister Rishi Sunak, who sent military ships and aircraft "aid" to Israel in support of its murderous 'self-defense' campaign. The Labour leader Keir Starmer, who had previously referenced the colonial trope that Israel "made the desert flower", undoubtedly cemented his place, too. When asked about Israel cutting off clean water and electricity to Gaza, he replied mindlessly, like an automaton, "Israel has the right!"

Naive for anyone to expect anything else, perhaps. Britain is, after all, a country which has long supported the ethnic cleansing of Palestine; a country which nurtured the Zionist movement in its early years; which issued the 1917 Balfour Declaration (a mere twelve years after the antisemitic Aliens Act); which *itself* colonised Palestine and ruled it for nearly thirty years; which, during this period, brutally repressed the [Palestinian revolution](#) of 1936–39 using Royal Air Force bomber planes and the Royal Navy; which trained Zionist militias in methods to torture, murder and terrorise Palestinians in Orde Wingate's 'Special Night Squads'; which, thus, paved the way

for those Zionist militias to soon afterwards expel the indigenous Palestinian population during the Nakba through which Israel was founded, while Britain skulked off shrugging its shoulders.

Delusional to hope for any better! The constitutive imperial fabric of the British state and its institutions thrown into sharp relief, in this moment, alongside Israel's foundational settler-colonial essence. Hollow moralizing about the "rights" supposedly conferred on human beings by the liberal state are creaking and giving way under the weight of a [principle](#) apparently far greater than the international legal conventions ushered in after World War II: namely, the principle of support for Israel, its right to [dominate](#), its right to [maim](#), and its right to kill. The toothlessness of the United Nations laid bare, repeatedly, at the mercy of US vetoes.

Animals and criminals

While Dr. Abu Sitta labored under Israel's bombs in Gaza, working to reconstruct and reattach Palestinians' blown off limbs, back home in London his family received a [visit](#) from counterterrorism police. As the Palestinian Youth Movement [notes](#), some living in the imperial core of Europe and America *are* acting in solidarity with Gaza, and in the eyes of the British government, even the heroic humanitarianism of Abu Sitta is highly suspect. If those in Gaza are "animals", Palestinians in the west, and their allies—predominantly second and third generation racialised migrant communities, alongside sections of the white Left—are criminals. And they, too, are being treated accordingly.

Just as the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement operates along the lines of the so-called "boomerang" model of transnational activism, whereby domestic actors "bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside",¹ the [so-called](#) "imperial boomerang" phenomenon helps us understand how and why states allied with Israel are currently repressing their own civil societies in response. The concept points to the relationship between violence against

colonized peoples and oppression of subaltern subjects in colonial motherlands. Developed by thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Aimé Césaire in order to place the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust *within* Europe in their proper context as a continuation of the horrors of colonialism that Europeans had previously perpetrated *elsewhere*, in the global south, Foucault [summed](#) up the “imperial boomerang” as describing the way colonization “had a considerable boomerang effect on the mechanisms of power in the West, and on the apparatuses, institutions, and techniques of power. A whole series of colonial models was brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonization, or an internal colonialism, on itself”.

Take, for example, the Metropolitan Police’s Special Branch. As Connor Woodman [notes](#), it was first established to gather intelligence on potentially subversive Irish migrants in Britain—the original colonized ‘suspect community’. Similarly, our intelligence agencies such as MI5 were rooted in coercive technologies of social control first tried and tested in the colonies before being brought back home for domestic deployment. Use of these methods soon expanded beyond their original targets to incorporate a broad range of actors posing a challenge to state power and capital. During the 1984–5 miners strike, for instance, policing tactics first used experimentally in colonial Hong Kong were [deployed](#) in the Battle of Orgreave.

Today, Britain’s Prevent counter-extremism policy, which was [shaped](#) by the counterinsurgency doctrine developed by British Army General Frank Kitson, has expanded from targeting Muslim communities—as the ‘homegrown extremist’ enemy within—to incorporate anti-war, anti-capitalist and climate justice movements too. Prevent is also a central tool used to repress Palestine solidarity in Britain today. In the US and beyond, the militarisation of policing is another expression of the imperial boomerang. The same tear gas canisters exported from the US to Israel, its imperial satellite state in the Middle East, for use against Palestinian liberation protestors are also [used](#) domestically against Black Lives Matter demonstrations. The arms trade and [exchange](#) of policing tactics are, however, far

from unidirectional. As Antony Loewenstein's *The Palestine Laboratory* [explains](#), Israel has long used Gaza in particular as a testing ground for weapons, border and surveillance technology which it sells around the world. Similarly, oppressive states around the world—from Mexico to Azerbaijan—have bought NSO spyware from Israel, under export licenses approved by its government, and used its Pegasus software to target dissident journalists and activists.

Palestine as microcosm

So, when we see France [banning](#) Palestine solidarity protests, Germany [criminalizing](#) calls for Palestine to be free “from the river to the sea”, and Britain [cracking down](#) on protest, while simultaneously pressing forward with plans to [outlaw](#) the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, this wave of repression [sweeping](#) Europe and other parts of the global north is not *merely* an issue of [free speech](#). When we see over thirty US states outlawing BDS and both state and private actors unconstitutionally monitoring, harassing and [undermining](#) solidarity and social justice organizing through a range of draconian measures, this is not merely holding back Palestinian liberation. While in magnitude it is clearly far from the longstanding and grotesque violence being visited upon Palestinians, it *is* a distant reverberation of the same colonial logic and violence of which Gaza is currently the epicenter, and uses some of the same technologies. And eventually, it will come for us all.

History is coming back to haunt us. It never left us, though we often chose to ignore it. It is apt—rather than surprising—that the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London [suspended](#) several students who protested in solidarity with Palestinians. Despite the institution today paying considerable lip service to decolonization, as its name suggests, the university was founded in 1916 to educate those preparing for positions as administrators within the British empire's various colonies. The MP Enoch Powell [learnt](#) Urdu at SOAS, in the hope of one day becoming viceroy of India, and years later, of course, became a leading, noxiously racist figure in

British anti-immigration politics. Nor is it coincidental that Michael Fidler, the MP who [founded](#) Conservative Friends of Israel in 1974, espoused similar politics to Powell: support for Zionism in the Middle East and opposition to immigration in Britain.

The racism which selectively mourns for murdered Israelis while dehumanizing Palestinians—legitimizing the murder of thousands of people in Gaza—is the same racism which dehumanizes migrants, enabling thousands to [drown](#) in the English Channel and the Mediterranean Sea. The Nakba denial, invisibilization of apartheid, and gaslighting of Palestinians enacted by the IHRA re-definition of antisemitism is the same racist gaslighting of communities of color in Britain enacted by the Sewell [report](#), which denied the ongoing reality of structural racism. The issue of Palestinian liberation, in short—as Barnaby Raine has [argued](#)—shakes the very foundations of the racial world order. The contemporary strategic alliance between the US, Britain and Israel is about these governments’ interests in maintaining this political and economic world order, which the issue of Palestine and Palestine solidarity threaten to disrupt.

Teaching life

Why is Palestine treated as axiomatically “controversial” and dangerous by the state, media institutions, and managers of universities and cultural institutions? In the global north, the question of Palestine provokes arguments between families and [friends](#) in a way few other issues do, because Zionist ideology and the Zionist project emerged from European imperialism and are deeply woven into the fabric of western liberal culture. When we challenge its rectitude we are pushing against the fraying edges of the western psyche and self-image. When we challenge Zionism, we also challenge US imperialism and British colonial amnesia. Palestinian liberation thus cuts to the very heart of systemic neocolonialism today.

The global eruption of grassroots Palestine protests, then, are not only about seeking changes in foreign policy to end the impunity

currently granted to Israel despite its decades of crimes. And the top-down repressive measures being used to silence and quell these grassroots movements everywhere are not simply a blunt reaction to the overwhelming moral power of the Palestinian cause (and a tacit recognition of it). As Ghassan Kanafani famously observed, “Palestine is not a cause for Palestinians only, but a cause for every revolutionary, wherever he is, as a cause of the exploited and oppressed masses in our era.”

Palestine transcends Palestine. Palestine is a portal and the countless Palestinian [futures](#) which beckon on different horizons are also, in a sense, possible futures for all of us. As Colombian president Gustavo Petro [observed](#), Gaza is “the first experiment in considering us all disposable” and shows us “the likely future for the working-class masses worldwide”.

So, as Kohl Journal [argues](#), we must move from the language of solidarity to collective resistance. Palestine shows us why the liberation of all oppressed people—the wretched of the earth—is truly intertwined. None of us are free until all of us are free. The events of the last weeks have pushed the world past a Rubicon. Much like the days post 9/11, when tectonic plates began to shift and the foundations for two decades of suffering in the name of the war on terror were laid, this moment is also a fork in the road and the path we choose to take depends on us all. On the one hand, we can allow Israel—the [model](#) coercive state—to finish the unfinished Nakba, and allow the world to continually move further in the direction of prisons, border walls, and racial injustice, following Israel’s example. Or we can stand in unconditional solidarity with Palestinians’ liberation struggle, their right to return, and the unfinished project of decolonization, embracing freedom, justice and equality. Palestinians, as Rafeef Ziadah’s [poem](#) asserts, teach the world life. Do we want to learn?

The war on Gaza and the war on free speech

Rebecca Ruth Gould

2 November 2023

On 28 October 2023, Israel imposed a communications blackout in Gaza, cutting off the ability of anyone inside the strip to communicate with the outside world. This thirty-four hour blackout came as Israel announced that it was expanding its ground operations inside Gaza.

Protestors around the world have been trying to stop this war. On 24 October, the tube driver for the Central Line of London's Underground was suspended from his job and may be fired. His crime? In a train full of passengers headed to one of the largest protests in London's history, he **led** the chant "free Palestine." The driver wanted to get the day off work in order to attend the protest but could not. His words were full of joy and hope, and not hostile to anyone. Yet Transport for London (TFL), the company that runs the tube, responded swiftly, **stating** that they were "urgently and thoroughly investigating the footage appearing to show a Tube driver misusing the PA system and leading chants on a Central Line train on Saturday. A driver has now been identified and suspended whilst we continue to fully investigate the incident in line with our policies and procedures."

For those uninitiated into the West's double standard on all matters relating to Palestine, the driver's expressions of solidarity might have appeared fully in line with TFL policy. After all, a year earlier TFL proudly announced its plan to offer for free travel to Ukrainian refugees. In March 2022, the Newport bus system in Wales **painted** one of its buses in blue and yellow, the colours of the Ukrainian flag. These expressions of solidarity were cheered by the media and politicians, with zero pushback from any politician.

Meanwhile the dangers of speaking out against Israel's war on Gaza are felt at all levels of society across Europe and North America. A freelance journalist for one of the largest US newspapers told me that her freelancer contributor status was terminated due to her social media postings expressing "solidarity to the over 4,000 Palestinian people killed in recent days, along with expressing sympathy to the innocent Israeli people being killed by Hamas." She retains her anonymity due to fear of retaliation and has deactivated her account on X.

Pro-Palestine protests are being **banned** across Europe, and many who have spoken out on behalf of Palestine have lost their jobs. In Dublin, an employee of the Israeli-owned internet company Wix, best known for its personalized websites, was **fired** for posting on Instagram in support of Palestine. It later **emerged** that this international company had been encouraging its employees based in Dublin to "show Westernity" in their social media posts and to show the world that "unlike the Gazans, [Israelis] look and live like Europeans or Americans." In Berlin, a tour guide at the Jewish Museum was **removed** from his role after using the term apartheid on one of his tours to describe the situation in Israel today. A senior staff member at Ofcom, the UK's broadcasting authority, was **suspended** from her position for liking an Instagram post calling the British government's support for Israel a "vile colonial alliance" and for posts describing Israel as an "apartheid state."

In the US, job offers that had been made to new graduates from Harvard, Columbia, and New York University's law schools were **rescinded** by the law firms Davis Polk & Wardwell and Winston &

Straw after the students signed open letters in support of Palestine. A Canadian doctor was [suspended](#) from his job (and recently [reinstated](#)) following pro-Palestinian social media posts. His home address was published on a public website for rating doctors, which led to death threats, a police investigation, and advice from the police to leave his home for his own safety. The corporate office of Starbucks sued its own union for expressing support for Palestine while using the Starbucks logo. For merely saying “Our enemies are not in Gaza. Our comrades are in Gaza,” the Executive Director of the Connecticut branch of the Service Employees International Union, with which Starbucks Workers United is affiliated, was forced to [resign](#).

Perhaps most shockingly, David Velasco, editor-in-chief for *Artforum*, one of the most prominent arts magazines in the US, was [fired](#) following complaints by influential art collectors and donors. On 19 October, Velasco organized a [letter](#) calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and published it on the *Artforum* website with several thousand signatories from leading artists. Michael Eisenberg, the inheritor of the company Bath & Beyond and owner of millions of dollars worth of artwork by many of the signatories, successfully pressured four of them to withdraw their signature.

Velasco was then summoned to a meeting with Penske Media Corporation, the conglomerate that owns *Artforum*, and was fired that same day. Velasco’s antagonists appear to be embroiled in an information war. Shortly after the letter calling for a ceasefire was posted on *Artforum* website, a [rival letter](#) began to circulate with the signatures of influential art collectors and gallery owners. The rival letter condemned the *Artforum* letter as “uninformed” and called for “empathy and unity” without mentioning the high number of casualties in Gaza. Among the early signatories of this rival letter was influential art dealer Amalia Dayan, granddaughter of Israeli politician and military commander Moshe Dayan. Velasco’s letter calling for a ceasefire has since been deleted. In an impressive act of solidarity, three of Velasco’s colleagues at *Artforum* [resigned](#) after he was fired.

The **dangers** of speaking out about Palestine have been clear for decades. In the UK, the process of criminalising Palestine solidarity dates back to 2016, when the UK **adopted** the IHRA definition of antisemitism. The stakes of this erasure are higher than ever now, at a moment when Israel has killed over nine thousand civilians—nearly half of them children—and wounded another thirty-two thousand. Israeli leaders have openly announced their intentions of committing **genocide** against the Palestinians of Gaza, with astonishingly little pushback from the West. As one Palestinian **said** from Rafah, near Gaza’s border with Egypt, her biggest fear is “to live, after all this war to live, and face the reality that our cities, our homes, our homeland, everything is destroyed.”

Historically, anti-colonial liberation movements have been won in the sphere of public opinion while fighters were in the trenches. The turn of French public opinion against the Algerian War was a major contributor to the end of French aggression. As for the US war on Vietnam, it was only when the American public was no longer willing to tolerate the growing death toll of the young men who were drafted into war that US politicians came to understand the Vietnam war as too politically costly. The struggle against apartheid in South Africa did include moments of violence, but the decisive measures that brought apartheid to an end were rooted in non-violent resistance tactics, including boycotts. As consumers, we have an opportunity to practise these successful tactics through a strategic **boycott** of the companies that are complicit in Israel’s system of occupation and apartheid. As readers, viewers, writers, and academics, we can engage in the cultural and academic boycott **advocated** by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel.

History teaches us that, although those of us in Europe and North America are heavily implicated in Israeli violence, we are not powerless. Protest has brought apartheid to an end in the past and it will do so again. Our protest and boycotts can and do make a difference. But we can only make this difference by exercising our right to protest. Only by using our free speech rights can we interrupt

the lies our elected representatives are spreading in order to justify the war on Gaza.

The United States of America is funding Israel's war on the people of Gaza through multibillion dollar funding packages that have funded Israel's military actions for many years. The current military [aid package](#), which extends from 2017 to 2028, comprises \$38 billion. Now, Biden will be adding to this extraordinary amount an additional \$14 billion of military [aid](#), specifically for Israel. Among the weapons the US supplies to Israel are KC-46A Pegasus tankers, CH-53K Heavy Lift Helicopters, and F-35 Joint Strike Fighters. These arms trades are all [documented](#) in detail by the Congressional Research Service, along with the names of companies, such as Elbit Systems and Lockheed Martin, that manufacture them.

Josh Paul, the State Department official who [resigned](#) on 18 October 2023 in protest against the US's continued flow of arms into Gaza, explained that he agreed to previous arms transfers because he believed that so-called Leahy vetting [procedures](#) that are supposed to protect human rights would be applied by the State Department. He expected that the strong evidence of Israeli human rights abuses during past wars on Gaza would stop the US from arming Israel. When it became clear to Paul that there would be no adequate human rights-based scrutiny in the case of Israel, he decided to resign in order to speak out against US support for Israel's war crimes.

While arming Israel, the US has so far blocked the international community's efforts to bring about a ceasefire during the 2023 war on Gaza through UN resolutions. This practice is unfortunately consistent with many other atrocities in which the US did not perceive a strategic interest in stopping, including the Rwandan genocide, which could have been stopped if the US had been willing to acknowledge publicly what members of the administration knew all along. Instead, the Clinton administration [prevented](#) the world from acting to stop genocide, and choose to engage in a semantic debate about the meaning of the term.

As with Rwanda, so with Gaza: the Biden administration has consistently cast doubt on the ability of Palestinians to tell their own story. When Gaza's al-Ahli hospital was bombed, Biden eagerly adopted the Israeli narrative and blamed it on Palestinian insurgent groups, despite evidence to the contrary. When a reporter asked Biden about the casualty figures in the war on Gaza, Biden replied: "I have no confidence in the number that the Palestinians are using." The Biden administration was willing to give Israel the benefit of the doubt for acts that it was later proven to be responsible for, such as the [murder](#) of *Al-Jazeera* reporter Shireen Abu Akleh. For politicians like Biden, even in their death, Palestinians cannot be taken at their word.

For those of us outside Palestine, there is only one effective way of resisting the racism underwriting Biden's words and of stopping the bloodshed in Gaza: protest. When we are suppressed for speaking out about Palestine, the effort to silence our protests must be documented. The erasure of pro-Palestine protests is part of the erasure of Palestine itself, which Israel is seeking to bring about in Gaza and the West Bank. Documentation is an act of resistance, because it makes visible what the censors want to hide.

When we come under pressure for our protests, rather than give in, we should push further. We should insist that our politicians who defend the state of Israel clarify how far they are willing to go. Will they support the extermination of the entire Palestinian people simply for the sake of supporting our "strategic" interests in Israel? There will come a point when our elected representatives will give in to the demands of the electorate, if not to the demands of their own conscience. We must do everything in our power to bring that moment about as quickly as possible.

If you face suppression for supporting Palestine, report the incident to [European Legal Support Center](#) (in Europe) or [Palestine Legal](#) (in the US).

For Palestine, it's BDS or bust

Omar Barghouti

9 May 2023

This interview was first [published](#) in Tribune, and is republished here with permission.

TRIBUNE: The far-right government in Israel, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, is increasingly saying the quiet part loud when it comes to apartheid. It is talking about the desire to make the occupation permanent, to erase the previously agreed international borders, to ethnically cleanse East Jerusalem and make Jerusalem the singular capital of an Israeli state. What has the response of Palestinian civil society and the BDS movement been to this development?

OMAR BARGHOUTI: This is indeed the most far-right government in Israel's history. It's also the most fundamentalist, homophobic, and sexist government in Israel's history. So what has been said with hesitancy is now being said openly, and Israel has lost the mask that has covered its ugly regime of oppression with a semblance of liberalism and democracy. You cannot have democracy with apartheid: of course, it's a democracy for settlers and for Israelis, while it's apartheid and settler colonialism for the Palestinians.

This government does not represent a totally new phase in the struggle for Palestinian rights. It's a continuation of seventy-five years of oppression, with a difference in degree. Previous governments have committed the same acts—from building illegal settlements to the siege of Gaza—whether they're so-called left or so-called right. These are relative terms in Israeli politics. The Left in Israel makes the far-right in Europe look liberal. But this government is unabashedly open about its plans.

But for Israeli society, it's a difference in kind, not in degree, with this government. They've never had a government that is ready to undermine even the settler democracy [and] the rule of law for settlers [or] take such hard lines on women's rights, LGBT rights, or trade union rights. This government is planning radical changes in Israeli society beyond the Palestinians. It is a horrible challenge, but [it is] also an unprecedented opportunity to further isolate this regime of oppression as was done with apartheid South Africa.

Recently, a Labour MP, Kim Johnson, used the term 'apartheid' to describe what was happening in Israel and Palestine. She was forced to apologise by the Labour leadership. Given that context, I think it's important to set out what we mean by apartheid. How would you define it?

Today, there is almost a consensus in the human rights community that Israel is an apartheid state. So it's not just the BDS movement that is saying it, it's UN experts and human rights organisations such as Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, and B'Tselem. So it's really quite laughable that certain leaders of opposition parties consider that designation to be unspeakable. That is McCarthyism, pure and simple. It's repression of freedom of expression. Israel is guilty of apartheid and should be treated as such. As Amnesty says, Israel treats Palestinian as an inferior racial group, and that's [been] a fact for seventy-five years.

Is it identical to South African apartheid? Of course not. No two systems of oppression are identical. Was British colonialism

equivalent to French colonialism? They were different, but they were both colonialism. They're part of the same family despite the differences. Israeli apartheid is more sophisticated than the South African version. But, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, it's a worse system of apartheid. He said, 'We did not have F16s bombing our Bantustans in South Africa.'

So what is the international response? If it's an apartheid system then it has to be met with targeted lawful sanctions, sports boycotts, academic and cultural boycotts, [and] economic and financial ones. Israel should be expelled from international forums, as South Africa was. That is how you respond to states that perpetrate the crime of apartheid against humanity.

In Britain, the government is considering legislation to crack down on exactly those activities, the Anti-Boycott Bill. What do you think the response should be to that piece of legislation, and how should we defend our rights to stand up for Palestinians against the occupation?

This is not simply an attack on Palestinian rights or [the] anti-BDS legislation. What the British government is trying to do is to take away democratic rights from local governments in particular. They're saying that local governments cannot decide where to invest or divest—for example, their pension funds—if the central government does not agree. What does the central government have to do with that? Taking that democratic right away is only the beginning.

If the British government gets away with passing this anti-boycott legislation and controlling local governments' pension funds, no justice movement will be safe in this country. They'll go after the trade unions and they'll go after Black Lives Matter; they'll go after women's rights and they'll go after every progressive struggle. Already, democracy is shrinking in the UK, with the right to strike and protest under threat. But this hypocritical government talks about its support for 'freedom of speech' and other freedoms. Every liberal, let alone socialist or progressive, should be up in arms against these kinds of legislation. And they must know that they are next.

It was the same with the first iteration of McCarthyism in the US. It wasn't just anti-communist; every liberal person opposed to government overreach and control was targeted. They only started with the communists. Similarly, they're starting with us.

This legislation is part of a much broader 'chilling effect' that is being applied to the Palestine solidarity movement. In the wake of growing public support for Palestinian rights in the past decade, since Cast Lead and Protective Edge, Israel has waged a pretty effective public relations campaign against its critics. One part of this is the attempt to criminalise the BDS movement, but the overarching theme is the association of anyone who campaigns for justice in Palestine with antisemitism. This accusation has been leveled at every major left-wing movement of recent times, from Jeremy Corbyn in the UK to Podemos in Spain and Mélenchon in France—and even to Bernie Sanders, the most high-profile Jewish politician in the US. Just how damaging do you think that campaign has been, and how can we fight back effectively against it?

The chilling effect is real and the weaponization of antisemitism to suppress Palestinian advocacy is very serious. One example is the so-called IHRA definition and its examples. But we are not alone in fighting that: dozens of progressive Jewish groups across the world, including in this country, have issued statements saying this definition conflates opposition to Israel's oppression, system of racism, and the ideology of Zionism with hatred against Jews.

This conflation is terrible for the real struggle against antisemitism. Trying to protect Israel from criticism and accountability by expanding this definition to say that an attack on Israel is an attack on Jews is equating Israel with all Jews. That is wrong. Anyone who says that all Jews are responsible for whatever Israel does is making an antisemitic statement. We must be clear on separating out these two issues. Many Jewish groups have reached that conclusion. This is bad for Palestinians and bad for Jews.

But for the chilling effect to work, it means the person accepting it. I was at the Labour conference in Liverpool and spoke at the PSC [Palestine Solidarity Campaign] fringe. I was shocked at how many people are practising self-censorship. People are afraid to speak their mind on justice issues, on evidence-based issues, in case they are accused of antisemitism. That is totally wrong and unsustainable.

Stick to anti-racist principles. Say, 'We are categorically opposed to all forms of racism, including anti-Jewish racism,' and don't be afraid. That is the best response to this chilling effect. Continue the campaigning on the ground and build people's power to speak up.

To what extent do you see the anti-apartheid movement, which was so big in the 1980s in Britain, as a model for the BDS movement for Palestinian rights?

It's worth remembering: that movement only got big in the 1980s. For a long time, it was very small. When the South Africans first called for a boycott in the 1950s, hardly anyone backed the call. It was very gradual and took thirty years to build that movement. People remember the glory days of the late eighties when it was massive. I was personally part of the anti-apartheid movement in New York where I went to school. It took forever to build the movement; let's remember that these processes take time.

If you are speaking to people in Britain who are concerned about human rights, they have plenty to be worried about at home—from attacks on the rights to protest and strike to draconian anti-immigrant legislation. That is before even considering those struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. How would you communicate to people in those positions why the fight for Palestinian rights is so important?

This is an important dimension, because the average person in this country would exactly ask that question. We have a cost-of-living crisis, austerity, neoliberalism, they're taking away our basic rights,

they're threatening our pensions, why should I care? Well, there are several answers.

First, because all systems of injustice are connected. This is a fact, and this drive towards authoritarianism and militarisation in the UK is connected to its foreign policy. They're not disconnected. Second, when we call on people in this country to stand with us, what we're basically calling for is to end complicity. So if you're a worker striking, if you're a driver, a nurse, an emergency worker, a teacher, we're not asking you to leave your strike and come join the garrisons for Palestinian rights. But, in addition to your strike, could you pressure your union, your city council, your institution to divest from companies that are perpetuating apartheid against Palestinians?

For example, if I'm part of a union and my pension invests in companies like JCB or Barclays Bank or Elbit Systems, military companies that are killing Palestinians or financing settlements or throwing us off our land, it's not too much to ask that you stop that complicity. If your money, your pension, your institution is doing harm, you have a moral obligation to stop that.

In May 2021, London saw the largest Palestinian solidarity demonstration in British history. It was the largest demonstration of any kind that I've seen here since the TUC demos back in 2011. But there is this challenge with the Palestinian movement where mass engagement happens at moments where people see atrocities on the television, and then the movement tends to wane in the aftermath while apartheid carries on. How can that be overcome? Can we get to a situation where there is more regular mass engagement in the solidarity movement?

The thing about BDS—and the reason why it's effective—is that it doesn't involve just one form of solidarity. It doesn't just call for demonstrations, for example. The PSC is our most important strategic partner in the UK and one of the most important in the world. It organises those mass protests at the right moment, as you said, in reaction to horrible atrocities and massacres. But it's a year-round

campaign, and a large part of that is campaigning against companies that are complicit in apartheid.

We mentioned Barclays Bank, JCB, Puma too, and there're so many other companies that are deeply implicated in Israel's system of oppression. BDS takes ongoing institutional forms, like pushing church funds, union funds, city council funds to divest. People might think that this is theoretical, so I'll give a few examples.

The largest sovereign fund in the world, the Norwegian Sovereign Fund, worth some \$1.2 trillion, has divested from Israeli banks, from international companies implicated in Israel settlement industries, and from the occupation. After a lot of struggle from trade unions, particularly the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), we got this over the line. LO has one-fifth of the population of Norway, by the way, that's how organised the Norwegians are. LO helped tremendously to pressure the sovereign fund of Norway to divest.

Pension funds in New Zealand, in the Netherlands, in Belgium have divested. The largest protestant churches in the US, the Presbyterian Church, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, have divested from companies and banks involved in Israel's occupation. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has divested from G4S, the biggest security company involved in Israeli prisons at that time.

Major funds have withdrawn from Israel's occupation under pressure from campaigners. The UK played the most important role in the campaign against Veolia, a French company that was involved in many illegal projects in Israel. One city council after another excluded Veolia from public contracts in Sweden, in Ireland, in the UK, in the US, in Kuwait. Veolia lost over \$20 billion over a seven-year period. It withdrew totally from the Israeli economy in 2015.

We're doing the same with Hewlett Packard. Orange Telecommunications withdrew completely from Israel under pressure from the movement. Now with the turn to the far-right, it should be easier because credit ratings agencies are already debating whether, if Israel goes ahead with its plans to undermine the independence of

the judiciary, they will downgrade Israel from a credit ratings perspective.

Those aspects of BDS—not to mention the cultural boycott, the sports boycott, the academic boycott—are continuing. Many academics in the UK are boycotting silently. Because of the chilling effect they don't speak out, but they're boycotting in silence. When a conference is organised in Tel Aviv University, the majority of British academics in whatever field do not go. All those aspects of BDS are continuing under the radar, so to speak. So you might not see thousands of activists going to the supermarket to do actions every week—but the campaign is growing well.

A lot of people look at the situation in Palestine today and see ever-growing numbers of settlements in the West Bank, the continued dispossession of the people of East Jerusalem, worsening conditions in the siege of Gaza—and they would say, it seems that things are getting far worse. But at the same time, you're saying there's been real progress in terms of the solidarity movement. There are successes that you might not necessarily see, but which are structurally important for putting pressure on the Israeli government.

We cannot take a snapshot and see how atrocious it is and say, oh, it's hopeless. Those of us who were active in the South African anti-apartheid movement know that the darkest moment was just before apartheid collapsed.

In fact, it was a quiet system of oppression for many years. But then the massacres committed by the South African regime became a trigger for a bigger movement. You never can tell when the tipping point will come. As we know in trade union struggles, as we know in every justice struggle, we never know when the tipping point will come. That's the nature of struggles, you keep building. But we never fool ourselves with the view that victory is going to happen no matter what. No, it's not guaranteed. It's never an eventuality if you don't do the work. You need to build power. If we restrict ourselves to within

the circles that already support us, we will never be able to change anything.

So, yes, the movement is growing, and yet repression, violence, and colonialism continue at a much higher pace. You have major fascist tendencies in this government, and this is the F-word being used by analysts across the Israeli media, not to mention pro-Israel forces that are terrified of what might happen to Israel with the rise of the far-right. Palestinians will be at the receiving end of horrific racism and violence. But Israel's system of oppression cannot continue without state, corporate, and institutional complicity. You cut those links and Palestinians can do the rest to undermine the whole system of oppression.

Israel's new government certainly does close off space for those who argued—without much evidence in recent decades—that change could come from the inside. It's pretty obvious that the Israeli state is not a partner for a peace process. But at the same time, we seem a long way from governments like the UK taking steps to sanction or isolate them.

If one had looked at Latin America just a couple of years ago, it looked totally hopeless. Take Bolsonaro, what he did to the average Brazilian, the impoverishment, the racism, the anti-indigenous atrocities, the Amazon, the authoritarian tendencies. And [in] Colombia, it had been going on for decades. But look what's happening now: progressive governments, increasingly with socialist tendencies, are winning across Latin America. So it's not fate. Palestinians for seventy-five years have said: we will never accept being under a settler colonial apartheid system.

We will not just exist, we will resist; we will have life with dignity, with freedom, with justice and full equality. Otherwise, it's not worth living. We need everyone to have that patience and perseverance and a strategic, goal-oriented method of working. Principles alone do not bring results. We've got to be ethical, first and foremost, but we've got to be strategic too. We've got to know how to pick our battles,

what to target, what not to target, when to let go, when to intensify the struggle. And that's what we do in the Palestinian movement. We don't believe in long lists for boycotts. Who's going to boycott 100 companies at the supermarket? Six Che Guevaras in London? That's ineffective.

But you go after a JCB, a Barclays and make them pay the price for their complicity. It's that balance between ethical action and strategic effectiveness. Without it, you cannot build power. As you rightly said, no government will just deliver justice to us. We've got to struggle to win it from them.

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No Moses in siege

Mohammed El-Kurd

2021

Extracted from RIFQA, republished here with permission.

On July 16, 2014, four boys—aged between nine and fourteen—were killed by Israeli naval fire while playing soccer on a beach in Gaza City.

Was it because there were no more graves in Gaza
that you brought us to the beach to die?

Was it because rubbing us in our houses,
like our cousins, like our futures, like our gods,
would be a bore?

Was it because our cemeteries need cemeteries and
our tombstones need homes?

Was it because our fathers needed more grief?

We were limbs in the wind,
our joy breaking against the shore.
Soccer ball in between our feet
we were soccer in between their feet.

No place to run. No Moses in siege.
Waves stitched together, embroidered, weaved
un-walkable, indivisible, passage—implausible,
on most days we weep in advance.

We looked up to the clouds, got up on clouds.
Here, we know two suns: earth's friend and white phosphorus.

Here, we know two things: death and the few breaths before it.

What do you say to children for whom the Red Sea doesn't part?

About the contributors

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Notes

Editors' foreword

- 1 The editors would like to express sincere thanks to Charlotte Heltai and John McDonald at Haymarket Books, Maria Khoury at the *Journal for Palestine Studies* and Stephen Bennett at the Institute for Palestine Studies, Rafeef Ziadah, Sherene Seikaly, and Laleh Khalili, for their help and feedback on the table of contents, and to all of the publications that granted the reproduction rights to the contents within. Special thanks to Tom Greenwood for designing the beautiful cover on an entirely unreasonable timeline. Above all, thanks to all of the authors within, who wrote during a time that has been filled with loss, grief and unspeakable horror.

Chapter 9. Is the sky crying?

- 1 An earlier and slightly shorter version of this essay was published in Arabic under the same title in: *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya*, Issue 137, Winter 2024.

Chapter 12. Hamas and a century of resistance

- 1 The Israeli propaganda functioned in full scale from day one spreading what have been proved fabricated stories such as the beheading of babies. Even the initial figure of casualties, 1400, was later reduced and the percentage of soldiers and policemen of the reduced figure, 1200, kept changing. Early investigations into what really happened have revealed

that many Israeli civilians were killed by Israeli helicopter and artillery which indiscriminately fired at Hamas fighters and Israeli civilians. See more in [this Haaretz report](#) on 18 November, 2023.

- 2 Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice* (Washington DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000), p. 304.
- 3 Erik Skare, *A History of Palestinian Islamic Jihad: Faith, Awareness, and Revolution in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 51–57.
- 4 Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*, pp. 32–6.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 36–41.
- 6 Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*, pp. 267–311.

Chapter 15. The end of colonial government

- 1 Thanks to Reem al-Botmeh, Zeynep Gambetti, Lynne Huffer, and Basit Kareem Iqbal for their engagement and comments on this text.

Chapter 18. The enemy trinity

- 1 Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie and Sobhi Samour (2013), 'Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine', *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2, (1), p. 3.
- 2 It is worth noting that the emergence of Palestinian nationalism in the first decades of the 20th century was part of a wider Arab nationalist milieu across the region. Izz-al-Din Al Qassam, a central figure of the movement in the 1920s and 30s, for example, was born in Syria, educated in Egypt, supported the Libyan independence struggle against the Italians, and participated in a Syrian uprising against the French, before being expelled to Palestine where he once again became active against colonial and imperial control.
- 3 The connection is more than a rhetorical one. Hundreds of the infamous 'Black and Tans' auxiliary force used to suppress the Irish national liberation struggle between 1918 and 1921 formed the core of the Palestine gendarmerie. See, for example, [David Cronin](#).
- 4 Quoted in Moshe Machover (2012), *Israelis and Palestinians: Conflict and Resolution*, Chicago: Haymarket, p.282.

- 5 Important military figures in Israel's later history were trained in the squads, such as Yigal Alon (the architect of the occupation and settlement of the West Bank) and Moshe Dayan.
- 6 Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler (2002), *The Global Political Economy of Israel*, London: Pluto, p. 346
- 7 Adam Hanieh (2013), *Lineages of Revolt: Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East*. Chicago: Haymarket, p.35.

Chapter 21. The shifting dynamics of Palestinian resistance

- 1 Israeli Minister of Labour, Yigal Allon, presented a plan to the Israeli cabinet in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 War and the seizure of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights. He proposed settlement and annexation of large sections of occupied Palestinian land. (This and subsequent notes were added by the ISJ editors.)
- 2 In 1967, the conquest of the OPT left millions of Palestinians under direct Israeli rule. This created a dilemma for the Israeli ruling class (at the time composed largely of Ashkenazi Jews). The Israeli leadership claimed that Israel was a "democracy," even though the state had been created through the mass expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948. Integrating the remaining Palestinian residents of the OPT into Israel as citizens would, over time, they claimed, result in a Palestinian majority and the erasure of the Israeli state's "Jewish character."
- 3 Smotrich's official biography boasts of his role as co-founder of Regavim, a pro-settler movement that initiates court cases against supposedly "illegal" construction by Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank. Its aim is the dispossession of Palestinians. Among Regavim's [recent](#) targets was the primary school at Jubbet ad-Dib in the West Bank, which was demolished by the Israeli authorities in May 2023.
- 4 Sheikh Jarrah is a Palestinian neighborhood in Jerusalem where Palestinian families have been facing harassment and attempts to evict them by Israeli settlers for decades. In 2021, protests by Palestinians against the attempted eviction of eight Palestinian families [triggered](#) a general strike and mass mobilizations across the whole of historic Palestine.

Chapter 22. Bread, freedom and an Arab Palestine

- 1 Nasser, Gamal Abdul, and Walid Khalidi. "Nasser's Memoirs of the First Palestine War." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, no. 2 (1973)

Chapter 23. Ink, gas and water: Jordan's peace with Israel

- 1 The history between the Hashemites and Israel can be traced back to the early twentieth century. Jordan conversed with Zionist leaders before 1948, had fought against Israel in the 1948 war, annexed the West Bank in 1950 and ruled over it until the 1967 war, when Israel occupied it. As such, Israel and Jordan have always had limited contact prior to signing the peace accords. For more background, see Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Mary C. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the making of Jordan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); w); Maan Abu Nuwar, *The Jordanian-Israeli War 1948–1951: A History of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* (Great Britain: Ithaca Press, 2002).
- 2 In 2022, Jordan has [stipulated](#) a new electoral law and political parties law as part of its political reform agenda.
- 3 Both parties were formed in 2022, clearly as a response to the regime's political reforms agenda. Namaa was founded in September 2023 by previous state's men, ministers, and business leaders. Al Ghad party was founded in April 2022 and describes itself as "a neutral, centrist party on the Jordanian scene, aiming to encourage the youth to engage in political work."
- 4 It was not until 15 November that the UNSC passed a resolution calling for "urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip." The US, Russia, and the United Kingdom abstained from voting.
- 5 In 2023, Jordan received \$1.2 billion in Economic Support Funds, of which \$845 million as a direct cash transfer to the Jordanian government and \$425 million in Foreign Military Financing. U.S. assistance to Jordan accounts for over 40% of the total amount of official aid the kingdom receives annually.

Chapter 24. Reality denial: the war to resuscitate the myth

- 1 “From the 650,000 dunums held by Jewish organizations in 1920, of the total land area of 26 million dunums, the figure at the end of 1946 had reached 1,625,000 dunums—an increase of about 250 percent and Jewish settlement had displaced large numbers of Palestinian Arab peasants.” Government of Palestine, *A Survey of Palestine—Supplement*, p. 30. Quoted in [UN report](#).
- 2 See Bresheeth-Žabner, H. *An Army Like No Other: How the IDF Made a Nation*, (Verso 2020), pp. 72–74
- 3 Ibid, p. 72
- 4 Ibid, pp. 72–3
- 5 The latest [example](#)
- 6 Bresheeth-Žabner, H. *An Army Like No Other*, p. 251.
- 7 There is currently no official English version of this document, but it was published on the *Siha Mekomit* [website](#) and is available in its entirety in Hebrew.
- 8 Masalha, Nur, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Tradition, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine*, Zed Books, 2007, p. 48.

Chapter 25. Israel, fascism, and the war against the Palestinian People

- 1 The first half of this essay was originally published as ‘The War on Gaza and Israel’s Fascism Debate’, *Verso* blog, 19 October 2023; the second half was delivered as a contribution to a webinar panel with Abdaljawad Omar Hamayel, co-organized and chaired by Nadia Bou Ali at the American University Beirut, as part of the seminar series *For Palestine: Analyzing Settler Colonialism and the Return of Fascism*.
- 2 Hannah Arendt, ‘New Palestine Party: Visit of Menachem Begin and Aims of Political Movement Discussed’, *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), p. 417.
- 3 See Rachel Havrelock incisive and wide-ranging study, *The Joshua Generation: Israeli Occupation and the Bible* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). On the place of Jewish fundamentalism in settler-colonialism racism in Israel see also Nadav Carmel-Katz, ‘From Colonialism to Racism’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1981),

170–178, and Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*, new ed. (London: Pluto, 2004).

- 4 On the Kohelet Policy Forum, a conservative, right-wing think tank supported by wealthy US donors, see Eytan Avriel, “The American Billionaires Behind the Far-right Attempt to Destroy Liberal Israel,” *Haaretz*, 15 January 2023.
- 5 Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials (eds), *The US Antifascism Reader* (London: Verso, 2020), 271.
- 6 See my “The Long Shadow of Racial Fascism’, *Boston Review*, 28 October 2020, and *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism and the Politics of Crisis* (London: Verso, 2023).
- 7 Abraham Serfaty, *Écrits de prison sur la Palestine* (Paris: Arcantère Editions, 1992), 81.
- 8 The nadir in this respect is probably the letter co-authored by Jürgen Habermas and Rainer Forst, published on the website of the *Normative Orders* research centre at Frankfurt’s Goethe Universität under the highly symptomatic title “Principles of solidarity’, on 13 November. But the bad faith and historical distortion displayed in public statements like those of Seyla Benhabib (published by Bard University’s Hannah Arendt Centre on November 4) or Bruno Karsenti, Luc Boltanski et al. ([‘Un génocide à Gaza ? Une réponse à Didier Fassin’](#), *AOC*, 13 November 2023) do not inspire great confidence in what today passes for “critical theory’.
- 9 Nurit Peled-Elhanan, “The Nazification of Palestinians in Israeli Schoolbooks”, *Shuddhashar FreeVoice*, issue 36: War, 1 November 2023. Peled-Elhanan was recently [suspended](#) from her academic post (and later reinstated) for quoting Jean-Paul Sartre in a faculty WhatsApp chat in the aftermath of the 7 October attacks.
- 10 *Davar*, 12 June 1961, quoted by Peled-Elhanan in “The Nazification of Palestinians in Israeli Schoolbooks”, *Shuddhashar FreeVoice*, issue 36: War, 1 November 2023.
- 11 Sai Englert, “Smoke and Mirrors: Rising Israeli ‘Fascism’ or Forgetting the Labour Zionist Past”, *Middle East Critique*, 28:3 (2019): 289–305.
- 12 Quoted in F. el-Manssoury, “Review of Uri Davis, *Israel: An Apartheid State*”, *Pakistan Horizon* 42.2 (1989), 146.
- 13 Avishai Ehrlich, “The crisis in Israel, danger of fascism?’, *Khamsin* 5, 10 July 1978. This is a translation with a brief postface of an article Ehrlich

had published in 1976 in issue 3 of *Khamsin* (which was published in French at the time by Editions Maspero).

- 14 Ghassan Kanafani discusses “the rapid emergence of fascist patterns in the society of Jewish settlers” in *The 1936–1939 Revolt in Palestine* (New York: Committee for a Democratic Palestine, 1972). For multiple uses of fascism—not just with reference to Zionism but also Jordanian and Lebanese authorities and parties—see also the PFLP’s English-language publications *PFLP Bulletin* and *Democratic Palestine*, or the political communiqué of the nineteenth “Intifada” session of the Palestine National Council (Algiers, 15 November 1988): “The Council notes with considerable concern the growth of the Israeli forces of fascism and extremism and the escalation of their open calls for the implementation of their policy of annihilation and individual and mass expulsion of our people from their homeland, and calls for intensified efforts in all arenas to confront this fascist peril. The Council at the same time expresses its appreciation of the role and courage of the Israeli peace forces as they resist and expose the forces of fascism, racism, and aggression; support our people’s struggle and their valiant intifada; and back our people’s right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state. The Council confirms its past resolutions regarding the reinforcement and development of relations with these democratic forces” (*Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question*, www.palquest.org). On the place of Nazism and the destruction of the European Jews in revolutionary Palestinian discourse, see Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 221–243.
- 15 Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism* (London and New York: Verso, 2019), 17.
- 16 See James Q. Whitman’s, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).
- 17 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (London: Earthscan, 2003), 99, 106–7.
- 18 This is not to say that the theological warrant for ethnocidal ideations is irrelevant. As Rabbi Jill Jacobs has observed, “it remains common for Israeli extremists to view Palestinians as modern-day Amalekites. In 1980, the Rabbi Israel Hess wrote an article that used the story of Amalek to justify wiping out Palestinians. Its title has been translated as “Genocide: A Commandment of the Torah,” as well as “The Mitzvah of Genocide in

the Torah.”” Jacobs’s views are reported in Noah Lanard, “The Dangerous History Behind Netanyahu’s Amalek Rhetoric’, *Mother Jones*, 3 November 2023. See also Peter Beinart, “Purim After Hawara’, *The Beinart Notebook*, 6 March 2023.

- 19 Antony Loewenstein, *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World* (London and New York: Verso, 2023), 207.
- 20 See also Walid Habbas, “Shrinking the Conflict: Debunking Israel’s New Strategy’, *Al Shabaka*, 6 March 2023.
- 21 As the Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network Coordinator Abeer Butmeh has recently observed: “We will see these effects on soil, water, marine habitat, air and, most importantly, on human health. Currently, Israel has cut off the water resources in Gaza and Gaza has run out of drinkable water ... Palestinians live under two threats: Israeli occupation and climate change ... We cannot combat the effects of climate change as long as Israel has restrictions. As Palestinians, we are trying to find different solutions to adapt to climate change. As Palestinians, we have the right to water from our own water resources. We are struggling to achieve this. Despite all these restrictions, we will continue to work to find a solution. We are doing our best to achieve climate justice in Palestine, but there is no climate justice under occupation.” Yeter Ada Seko, “Israeli attacks worsen Gaza’s vulnerability amid climate change’, *Anadolu Agency*, 29 October 2023.

Chapter 26. Three new realities for American Power after 7 October

- 1 Mearsheimer, John J. and Walt, Stephen M. (2007) ‘Iraq and Dreams of Transforming the Middle East’, in *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, pp. 229–262.
- 2 Hersh, Seymour M. “Watching Lebanon.” *The New Yorker*, 21 August 2006.
- 3 Mearsheimer, John J. and Walt, Stephen M. (2007) ‘Iraq and Dreams of Transforming the Middle East’, in *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, p. 77.
- 4 Sharp, Jeremy Maxwell, *US Foreign Aid to Israel*, Washington DC: Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, 2015–2018, accessed 1

Mar 2023.

Chapter 28. Gaza's imperial boomerang

- 1 Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders: advocacy networks in international politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998, 2.

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