POMEPS
STUDIES
51

The War on Gaza and Middle East Political Science

April 2024

Project on Middle East Political Science

Contents

The Project on Middle East Political Science

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York. For more information, see http://www.pomeps.org.

The Middle East and Middle East Studies after Gaza

Marc Lynch, George Washington University

The attack by Hamas across the security perimeter surrounding the occupied Gaza Strip on October 7 killed over 1200 Israelis, with hundreds more captured and held as hostages. In response, Israel unleashed one of the most destructive campaigns in modern history. Its systematic bombardment of a densely populated urban area has killed at least 35,000 Palestinians, the vast majority of them women, children and the elderly, with countless thousands more buried under the rubble of collapsed buildings. Nearly the entire population of 2.2 million has been displaced into extreme conditions, with no hope of returning to completely destroyed homes. Their dispossession – at an extraordinary pace and scale, as discussed by Fiona Adamson and Kelly Greenhill in this collection – has raised profound fears among Palestinians and across the region of another *Nakba*. The comprehensive siege placed on Gaza by Israel, and its refusal to allow the entry of adequate humanitarian assistance, has resulted in historically unprecedented famine, creating not only the rapid onset of starvation but also the conditions for the spread of infectious disease. The extremity of Israel's destruction of Gaza, and the accompanying rhetoric from senior officials, has been such that the International Court of Justice ruled that there was a plausible case for it to constitute genocide. Settler provocations in the West Bank, backed by key figures in Israel's extreme right-wing coalition, have escalated with the spotlight on Gaza. These horrors directly affect scholars who have dedicated their lives to studying the Middle East, whether or not they currently reside in Gaza. As Ibrahaim Rabaia and Lordes Habash of Birzeit University document in their contribution to this collection, the assault manifestly includes higher education, with virtually every university in Gaza targeted for destruction.

This special issue of POMEPS Studies offers a platform for scholars to think through what feels like a moment of rupture for the Middle East, for Middle East Studies, and for long-standing assumptions about the region's politics. Put bluntly, Gaza no longer exists, not in its previous form. While Hamas remains organizationally resilient and likely to survive Israel's campaign, Gaza's people have suffered beyond imagination and its infrastructure pulverized beyond hope of repair. The Palestinian Authority and its President Mahmoud Abass have seen their already feeble popularity crater alongside their manifest inability to do anything to protect Palestinians from the onslaught. As the horrors of October 7 and war fever have pushed Israeli politics relentlessly to the right, a vast chasm has opened between the worldview of most Israelis, who polling suggests largely believe that the war on Gaza is justified, and much of the rest of the world, which cannot imagine anything which could justify such atrocities. Despite the empty rhetoric of American officials speculating on "day after" plans, whatever dim hopes of a two state solution for Israeli-Palestinian peace remained before October 7 have rather conclusively ended.[1] Tensions between Israel and Iran still threaten to escalate into full-scale war, whether directly or in theaters such as Lebanon. American support for Israel in its war has eroded the willingness of Arab civil society activists to work with the United States, as Hamzeh Hadad notes in Iraq and as the political scientists Annelle Sheline observed in her explanation of her principled resignation from the State Department.[2] In their contributions to the collection, Curtis Ryan and Kristian Ulrichsen offer subtle analyses of the limits and degrees of protest dynamics in Jordan and changing policy in the Gulf.

Not all would agree with the idea of a seismic change, of course: Israel has bombarded Gaza before, they argue, international tribunals are routinely ignored, Arab public opinion is often outraged to little effect, full-scale regional war has thus far been contained, self-interested Arab regimes will inevitably return to their pursuit of normalization with Israel and security agreements with

the United States. Ultimately, no Arab leaders, they argue based on long experience, will ultimately sacrifice their self-interest for Palestine, no matter how intensely public opinion mobilizes in its defense, and none of the security-obsessed regimes will be overthrown. Biden, they argue, proved masterful in orchestrating a collective regional response to protect Israel from Iranian missiles and is laying the groundwork for a post-Gaza renewal of American-led regional order. I am skeptical. We shall see.

October 7 and its aftermath have also upended academia and the production of knowledge about the Middle East so central to the POMEPS mission. The polarization around Gaza on campus has transformed into a national culture war centered on alleged antisemitism, with nuance obliterated in the heat of the political fray and institutional power bearing down hard to silence criticism of Israel's war boiling up from below. Congressional hearings on campus antisemitism which led to the dismissal of the presidents of Harvard and Penn brought the issues facing many campuses – including heated student and faculty confrontations, pressure from external groups, media and donors and draconian efforts by administrations to police or suppress protests – into a national spotlight. These pressures have only accelerated. In the week since I began writing this essay alone, the University of Southern California barred its valedictorian from speaking at commencement because of her pro-Palestinian views, tenured professor Jodi Dean was removed from her classroom at Hobart and William Smith College after publishing an essay celebrating Palestinian resistance, senior political theorist Nancy Fraser was stripped of a fellowship in Germany for signing an open letter criticizing Israel's war on Gaza, police assaulted a student protest at Pomona College, and Columbia University's President was brought before yet another Congressional hearing where she defended her campus by bragging about how draconian her crackdown had been on pro-Palestinian mobilization. Meanwhile, faced with such brazen and relentless assaults on freedom of speech, Congress busied itself passing a resolution declaring the slogan "from the river to the sea" to be antisemitic.

What can political science or political scientists do in the face of such unrelenting horror on the ground and in their own backyard? In his extraordinary contribution to this collection, Alexei Abrahams bemoans the failure of the academic community to influence the course of events. It is difficult to not share his frustration and pain as our collective expertise and efforts to engage with the public seemingly fail to stop the carnage. Shortly before Israel began its invasion of Gaza, I published a short article in Foreign Affairs with the subtle title "Invading Gaza Will Be a Disaster For Israel"; I've published several other widely read articles since dealing with Gaza.[3] It has made little difference. Many others have published articles, spoken at public events, or otherwise shared expertise, with equally little evident impact on policy. As bad as the United States has been, many European countries have been worse. Germany, as Janis Grimm and Benjamin Schuetze explain in their contributions to this collection, has virtually criminalized criticism of Israel, with draconian actions taken against those who have attempted to speak out. In the Czech Republic, as Jakub Zahora, Jakub Kolacek and Tereza Plistilova report, academic experts make virtually no impact at all, while on the issue of Yemen, as Eleonora Ardemagni argues, only those who support prevailing narratives about Iran get a hearing.

Those interventions have come at a cost, though, to countless individuals and to the core principles and norms of academic freedom. A month after October 7, the Middle East Scholar Barometer which I administer with Shibley Telhami found truly shocking levels of self-censorship about Israeli-Palestinian issues among academics.[4] That's because the level and degree of repression aimed at scholars with pro-Palestinian views has reached extraordinary levels. Most casual news consumers are aware of the sensationalistic Congressional hearings which led to the dismissal of the presidents of Harvard and Penn, or perhaps of the turmoil at Columbia University, the banning of Students for Justice in Palestine at George Washington University and many other campuses, the dismissal of Indiana University Professor Abdelkadir Sinno for organizing a teach-in, or the doxxing trucks with photos of students and faculty deemed anti-Israeli driving around campuses.

The stories which have hit the headlines barely scratch the surface. In his contribution to this collection, Nader Hashemi offers his personal experience with such pressures. The Middle East Scholars Barometer survey produced hundreds of such stories of repression and censorship, while a task force which I have been chairing for the Middle East Studies Association has received an unending stream of reports of canceled lectures, censored or secretly videotaped classrooms, silenced faculty, and hostile media attacks. These campaigns have often been fought in the name of combating antisemitism, a noble and appropriate mission on its own merits but one which becomes fraught when criticism of Israeli policies is equated with antisemitism. Efforts to legally adopt the controversial IHRA definition which equates criticism of Israeli policies with antisemitism has an even greater chilling effect on speech.[5] A well-organized campaign has shaped the narrative of an alleged rising tide of antisemitism on campus, producing shocking numbers that present a highly distorted view of actual campus dynamics by including a wide range of minor incidents (tearing down posters or "feeling unsafe"). While there are certainly intensely polarized clashes between some Jewish students and some pro-Palestinian activists, the overwhelming weight of institutional power has been deployed against the latter. Small wonder that 98% of untenured Middle East faculty say that they self-censor when addressing issues related to Israel and Palestine.

It is far too easy to skim over all this as an exercise in "free speech" abstractions. But the sheer mental and emotional toll of these attacks should not be minimized. It has become alarmingly normalized that faculty working on the Middle East should simply expect to be the subjects of levels of abuse that would not be tolerated in virtually any other workplace environment, and that they should accept limitations on their academic freedoms and freedom of speech which would be accepted by virtually no other academics. Scholars who publish or speak about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially, routinely receive emails and letters full of often unspeakably vile abuse – often cc'd to their department chairs, deans, and even the board of trustees. Many are the target of online smear campaigns, with snippets of publications or selectively edited video clips used to stoke outrage and hate. Since October 7, others have been the target of doxxing, with their personal and family information publicized in order to facilitate harassment, or in especially egregious cases their faces and names emblazoned on trucks driving around campuses. Even if such cases do not ultimately manifest in disciplinary action or lost jobs, they take an enormous physical, mental, and emotional toll – and, likely as intended, raise the costs and fears about the value of engaging in such research or public speaking at all.

Too often, college and university administrators are silent, weak, or even complicit in these abuses, encouraging their faculty to keep silent or subjecting them to internal investigations or pre-emptive punishments such as removal from the classroom rather than defending them. Tenure is not the protection it should be, nor are long-defended norms of academic freedom which should be obviously applicable but are routinely discarded when it comes to Palestine. Nor will the law likely help, when there is state and federal legislation moving in the direction of criminalizing criticism of Israel through the implementation of the IHRA definition of antisemitism as well as broader state-level interference with higher education in states such as Texas, Florida, Ohio, and Indiana. It is not hyperbole to say that teaching Middle East politics could rapidly become as personally and legally risky as offering abortions.

Campus politics surrounding Israel and Palestine have long been distinctive, of course, with decades gone by full of politicized attacks on Middle East Studies, attempts to get Arab and Palestinian faculty fired, and so forth. But it is important to recognize that the current assault on Middle East Studies intersects with a broader right wing attack on higher education, this time centering on all forms of progressive thought and practice such as critical race theory, gender studies, or anything deemed "woke"; it should be lost on no-one how quickly and easily the successful assault on Harvard President Claudine Gay transitioned from alleged failures on antisemitism to transparently dishonest allegations of plagiarism. For some

involved in the current academic war zone, Israel is the only issue, but for others antisemitism is only the leading edge with which to divide defenders of higher education and find support from alleged liberals for draconian repression of the academy.

The effects on students, faculty and researchers on the Middle East in the United States and in most European countries will be felt profoundly downstream, very much to the detriment of public discourse, academic knowledge, and policy expertise. Scholars fearing the consequences will steer clear of Israeli-Palestinian topics, those who speak out face blacklists and the risk of hostile tenure letters, and many who are soured on the campus experience may quietly leave the academy. That slow hollowing out of Middle East Studies would have incalculable costs for academic knowledge, public discourse and policymaking – all of which would quite well serve the interests of those who would prefer that Middle East policy not incorporate such expertise.

One issue which is developing beneath the surface is the impact of the war on Middle East academic professional networks. In a recent discussion on my podcast, Alexander Cooley of Barnard College observed how boycotts of Russian academics following the invasion of Ukraine crippled long-running academic networks, partnerships and institutions.[6] Academic boycotts of Israeli institutions were already a leading topic of controversy in our field long before Gaza, endorsed by multiple professional associations including the Middle East Studies Association and the American Anthropological Association. Formal and informal boycotts of Israeli scholars have become increasingly common among those outraged by Gaza, with Palestinian and other scholars refusing to participate alongside Israeli counterparts. On the other side, Palestinian and Arab scholars have faced significant exclusions and pressures within other academic networks. Both should be of concern to our field. According to a recent survey of Israeli academics, high percentages of those involved in international partnerships and research networks fear exclusion as a result of the global mobilization against Israel's war on Gaza, whether through the revocation of invitations to participate in events or through difficulties in publishing because of their Israeli citizenship.[7] Whether those struggles should be understood as validation of the power of academic boycotts, a quintessential form of nonviolent activism recently endorsed by the Middle East Studies Association, or as a disastrous sidelining of one of the most liberal and anti-occupation sectors of Israeli society represents yet another of the dilemmas confronting Middle East Studies which will continue to intensify. Those fighting for academic freedom and human rights must support all who suffer from their violation, not just those on their side.

The ferocity of the attempted repression of views critical of Israel since October 7 may seem to be a show of strength by those seeking to impose narrative conformity but should in fact be read as a sign of weakness. Genuinely hegemonic views do not require the active use of power to enforce them. And public attitudes and discourse are clearly changing. While it is impossible to say whether academic writing and speaking has mattered much compared with TikTok influencers or the circulation of graphic video evidence of atrocities in Gaza, it is clear that very significant changes are happening at the level of public opinion and political activism. A March 2024 Pew Research Center survey found that younger adults were far more critical than older Americans of Israel's war, with an equal number of the youth (34% each) saying that Israel and Hamas had valid reasons for fighting. 60% of young Americans in that survey said that they had a favorable view of the Palestinian people, compared to only 46% who said the same about the Israeli people – and only 24% said the same about the Israeli government.[8] This generational divide helps to explain why the Biden administration's full-throated support for Israel's war has opened an unprecedented rift within the Democratic Party which could tip the upcoming Presidential election.

Stephen Zunes, in his paper in this collection, notes the truly exceptional nature of this wave of pro-Palestinian activism in the United States in relation to the decades of such action which came before, as it draws in far wider constituencies and achieves something like hegemonic

status among youth and progressives. That activism is not confined to campuses, but they are often ground zero for mobilization and for national scrutiny. Zunes, like Claudia de Martino in her discussion of Europe, worries about the intersection of such activism with real antisemitism, particularly as frustrated activists look for who to blame for political inaction and bridle at the weaponization of discourses of antisemitism and the invocation of the Holocaust to silence discussion of what they see as an actual genocide happening in real time. More broadly, the vast divide between political discourse and attitudes at the popular level and at the level of institutional politics suggests that academics working on these issues may need to rethink outreach and engagement strategies which primarily target government and official policy audiences.

This POMEPS collection originated as an open call for papers for scholars affected by or invested in these urgent issues, in an initial effort to give a platform and a voice to those in our network who have grappled with these trends. We kept the call intentionally broad, asking potential authors to reflect on the effects of October 7 and the Gaza War on politics or scholarship. As it turned out, most of the contributors wanted to talk about academic freedoms and the conditions of public discourse in their countries – perhaps because of how profoundly they felt this crisis, perhaps because of the availability of other platforms to discuss the war itself. European scholars, especially in Germany, were especially keen to contribute, understandably given the frenzy which has overtaken discussion of Israel and Palestine and led to the veritable criminalization of criticism of Israel and the forced cancelation of a wide range of events, scholars, and activists for their pro-Palestinian speech. There are so many more topics which merit exploration, here and elsewhere; we received no submissions focused on the experience of Israeli academics, the implications of the ICJ ruling for studies of international law, the political theory of violence and resistance, the technical definition of genocide, the unprecedented nature of the humanitarian crisis engineered by Israel's blockade, the fallout for Lebanon, and so much more. The issues confronting our field have never been more urgent and the need for academic networks and institutions to rise up to defend it has never been greater.

Endnotes

1 Marc Lynch and Shibley Telhami, "The Two State Mirage: How to Break the Cycle of Violence in a One State Reality," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2024).
2 https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/27/opinions/gaza-israel-resigning-state-department-sheline/index.html
3 Marc Lynch, "An Invasion of Gaza Would Be a Disaster for Israel," *Foreign Affairs* 14 October 2023 (online only: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/middle-east/invasion-gaza-would-be-disaster-israel)
4 Marc Lynch and Shibley Telhami, "Scholars Who Study the Middle East Are Afraid to Speak Out," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 December 2023, available at https://www.chronicle.com/article/scholars-who-study-the-middle-east-are-afraid-to-speak-out; Marc Lynch and Shibley Telhami, "The Middle East Scholars Barometer," *MENA Politics* 7, 1 (2024).
5 https://lawfare.fmep.org/resources/defining-criticism-of-israel-as-antisemitism/
6 https://abuaardvark.substack.com/p/reading-middle-east-political-science
7 https://young.academy.ac.il/News/NewsItem.aspx?nodeId=955&id=634
8 https://www.pewresearch.org/2024/03/21/majority-in-u-s-say-israel-has-valid-reasons-for-fighting-fewer-say-the-same-about-hamas/

The Hidden War on Higher Education:
Unmasking the 'Educide' in Gaza

Ibrahim S.I Rabaia, Birzeit University[1] and Lourdes Habash, Birzeit University[2]

Introduction

Since October 7, 2023, there has been a dramatic escalation in Israeli official and public rhetoric targeting Palestinian educational institutions, describing them by centers for educating and producing terrorism. Palestinian higher education institutions (HEIs) in Gaza have been directly targeted by Israel during the war, resulting in the prolonged destruction of 11 out of Gaza's 19 Higher Education Institutions (HEI).[3] The destruction included 4 out of 6 major universities in Gaza and killed, as of February 13, more than 450 academic and administrative university staff.[4]That number includes three university presidents, seven deans, and 64 professors.[5] On October 11, the Islamic University was completely destroyed by Israeli aircraft. The headquarters of Al-Azhar University has been shelled in Gaza city, along with its branch in AL-Megraqa south of Gaza City on October 11 and 21. On December 7, Al-Israa University was destroyed and used as operation and detention center. On December 16, two main buildings of Al-Aqsa University were entirely destroyed, alongside the partial destruction of the others. Likewise, several buildings of Al-Quds Open university were partially destroyed, including the Gaza branch and the North Branch.[6]

The attacks on Gazan Higher Education have been justified in terms of Israel's discourse of fighting terrorism. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emphasized education in a speech expressing the desire to establish a new authority in Gaza which would not "teach terror". This speech[7] aligns with the long-standing colonial policy that has governed the Palestinian higher education sector since the occupation of the West Bank (WB) and Gaza in 1967.[8] Israeli authorities have constructed fragility in the Palestinian higher education sector and created "Bare Education" [9] in all components of that sector. That has included physical attacks well before 2023. Since 2008, the higher education institution (HEI) in Gaza Strip has been targeted, with the bombing and destruction of the central laboratories of the Islamic University justified by the claim that laboratories are "used to manufacture and develop rockets and that their halls are used for meetings of Hamas leadership in Gaza."[10]

The incitement against the University escalated after being granted a seat in UNESCO in 2012, when the Israeli Ministry of foreign affairs accused the Department of Chemical Engineering of the University of supporting the Qassam Brigades; the university clarified that it did not have any section or specialization in that particular area. In 2014, the University was bombed by F-16 aircraft, under the pretext that it was "collecting donations to Hamas and forming a military operational center for the Qassam on the rehabilitation, training, development and production levels."[11] In 2014 alone, approximately 12 higher educational institutions in Gaza were targeted by the occupation. In 2018, Al-Azhar University was attacked, causing the destruction of several of its colleges.

The situation has deteriorated drastically in the ongoing war. Over the course of five months, approximately 78,000 Gazan university students have been deprived of continuing their education. The targeting of higher education has been deliberate and systematic; 94 professors were targeted and killed by Israeli occupation, while well-known universities such as Al-Azhar and Al-Islamiah were the focus of devastation. These leading higher education institutions have been utterly dismantled, leaving no trace behind. The remaining universities in Gaza have also suffered heavy damage, exacerbating the disastrous impact on higher education.

One can analyze the systematic targeting of Gaza through various lenses, one of which is the concept of Spacio-Cide, as described by Sari Hanafi.[12] Spatial cleansing works to facilitate the "voluntary" transfer of the Palestinian people by targeting Palestinian space. This paper attempts to track the eradication of higher education in the Gaza Strip, under the Israeli occupation. While spatial cleansing partially defines the comprehensive cleansing of the education sector in Gaza, the paper contends that the occupation's practices go beyond this, encompassing the creation of sustained vulnerability, the elimination of opportunities for recovery, and the removal of educational personnel through both targeted killings and "voluntary" displacement. As a result, the structure of higher education in the Gaza Strip is facing educide, following decades of implementing a de-development and cleansing strategy against the education sector.

Background: De-developing HE in Gaza

The higher education sector in Gaza witnessed significant growth after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA). In 1994, there were seven higher education institutions in Gaza, comprising four institutes and three universities. By 2017, this number had expanded to 28 institutions, including 8 universities and 20 colleges. According to statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), by 2017, approximately 80% of the 87,000 students enrolled in higher education institutions in Gaza were studying at universities, while the remaining 20% were enrolled in colleges. The annual statistical book published by the MOHE in 2022[13] revealed that out of the 53 registered and recognized higher education institutions in Palestine,18 were located in Gaza.[14] This highlights the significant presence and contribution of Gaza's higher education sector within the broader Palestinian higher education landscape.

Since 2008, Israeli military operations in Gaza have specifically targeted those higher education institutions, causing substantial physical destruction. During the 2008-2009 war, the Israeli Air Force destroyed six university buildings.[15] In the 2014 Israeli war against Gaza, the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR) reported significant losses in the higher education sector, estimated at around $10 million. According to the PECDAR report, three universities endured the greatest form of this destruction. Al-Azhar University suffered the complete destruction of three buildings, resulting in losses estimated at $3 million. The Islamic University experienced damage to two buildings, amounting to approximately $4 million. Additionally, the University College of Applied Sciences faced the destruction of classrooms, scientific laboratories, the central library, the computer center, and electricity generators, with estimated damages valued at $2.5 million.[16] Some estimations claimed that the total losses in 2014 were $33 million.[17] These targeted attacks on higher education have had desolating impact on educational infrastructure, hindering academic progress, and impeding the development of future generations in Gaza.

The previous Israeli operations and the blockade on Gaza had left the higher education sector in a vulnerable state for the past 17 years. The combination of infrastructure and equipment obsolescence, limited electricity supply, restrictions on financial transactions, and scarce resources has hindered the development of this sector and severely limited reconstruction efforts following each Israeli operation.[18] The Israeli government has implemented a comprehensive and multi-dimensional hermitic blockade, which has had detrimental effects on various aspects of life in Gaza, including education. As a result, the higher education sector has experienced de-development, as it faces numerous challenges and contradictions. While local attempts were made to build and improve educational infrastructure, Israeli actions have caused physical and non-tangible destruction, undermining these efforts.[19]

The 17-year blockade and resulting de-development have imposed various structural limitations on the higher education sector in Gaza in term of:

De-mobility: HEI in Gaza were forced to design their plans and programs based solely on local capacities, with limited and uncertain interaction with regional

and international partners, including universities and specialized institutions. This isolation has hindered Gaza's participation in exchange programs, as students and academic staff are unable to travel outside of Gaza, while foreign staff face restrictions in visiting Gaza universities. Consequently, the capacities and quality of higher education institutions in Gaza have been undermined.

Furthermore, the connection between higher education institutions in Gaza and their counterparts in the West Bank has been severed due to de-mobility. It is worth noting that the situation of higher education institutions in the West Bank is also challenging, characterized by restrictions imposed by Israel on the employment of foreign academics in universities, limiting their work to five years and imposing a ceiling of 100 professor and 150 students.[20]

Since 2000, Israeli authorities have imposed strict restrictions on Gazan student who wish to pursue their education abroad. Most of their travel requests have been rejected, severely limiting their opportunities. In 2015, Israel introduced measures to "ease" travel restrictions by granting 50 permissions to Gazan students who wanted to study in the West Bank. However, later on, the Israeli authorities froze this action. These measures caused a significant decrease in the number of Gazan students studying in the West Bank over the years. In 1998, students pursuing their education in the West Bank were approximately 1,000 students. However, the number has dwindled to few dozen due to the ongoing travel restrictions.[21]

De-mobility impacts extend the limitations on student travel; it affects infrastructure and teaching materials of higher education institutions. Importing essential items such as laboratory equipment and books has been prohibited, further hindering the progress of academic activities. The Islamic university is an obvious example, where Israeli attacks led to the destruction of approximately 74 laboratories. Engineering faculty research projects have come to a halt due to university's inability to import necessary items needed, despite the urgent need for equipment replacement. Likewise, since 2005, Al-Azhar University has been unable to import new publications to its library collection, resulting in limiting students' and faculty's access to current and relevant resources.[22]

These conditions posed significant challenges to higher education community in Gaza. The 2014 war on Gaza emphasized the dire circumstances students and their lecturers confront, with limited possibilities to escape, and inadequate shelters to protect them from life-threatening situations. Since 2007, the experience of life threating situations has been constantly repeated, forcing the higher education community to prioritize survival. During 2014 war, disastrous impact on higher education sector was indisputable, with roughly 407 students and 9 staff members including academics and administrative were killed, in addition to 1,128 students suffered injuries.[23]

Financial dilemmas: The financial capacities of Gazan families declined significantly due to the blockade and increasing unemployment since the second intifada in 2000. The financial resources of higher education institutions in Gaza have been directly affected by these factors. The main financial sources for these institutions are students' tuition fees and Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) annual allocations. Yet, since 2016, MOHE allocations have been abandoned, exacerbating the financial dilemma faced by these institutions.

The retreat of financial resources has caused a significant decrease in the number of students enrolled in the main three universities in Gaza: Al-Azhar University, Al-Islamiah University, and the University College of Applied Sciences. The total number of students attending these universities decreased from 45,000 in 2010 to 3,000 in 2019. As a consequence of declining registration rates and accumulated dept, a cancellation of several degrees and departments has been enforced.[24] A significant structural financial dilemma in higher education institutions occurred due to the notable decline in the enrollment rate, where only 20% to 40% of students have been able to pay their fees in recent years. An average of 30,000 graduates

were unable to receive their certificate by January 2023 due to financial reasons.[25] In 2019, the average debt of universities reached $30 million, correspondingly, intermittent payments of salaries have been done, besides replacing salaries with unstable financial rewards. This drove universities to rely on part time employment in order to manage their financial challenges.[26]

The HEIs in Gaza after October 7

The wholesale destruction of Gaza's Higher Education Institutions has received significant international criticism, including in South Africa's case alleging genocide to the International Court of Justice. On January 23, 2024, following the bombing of Al-Israa University, United States demanded an official explanation for targeting the university. Israeli response claimed by the Chief of Staff of Israeli army, announced an investigation into the incident, stating that preliminary investigation revealed that "Hamas had been utilizing the university and its surroundings for terrorist operations against the military."[27] However, no official results from the investigation were released thereafter.[28] Afkhai Adre, the Arabic spokesman for the Israeli Army, claimed that the Israeli Army had "destroyed a number of buildings containing Hamas infrastructure at Al-Azhar University".[29]

However, according to Omar Al-Hendi, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the University, the destruction of the University was not an isolated incident but rather part of a larger campaign targeting HE sector since long before the war, which involved the killing of academics and students, preventing travel and preventing the recruitment of academics, restrictions on scientific research, etc.[30]

Educide

South Africa's application to ICJ shed light on the systematic educide characterized by Israel's predetermination to target and destroy higher education institutions in Gaza. This destructive practice led to the loss of universities and to a tragic death of esteemed Palestinian academics. The Israeli Professor Neve Gordon expressed his concern, stating "academia has been destroyed" in Gaza as part of an "educide." Gordon warned that "the damage of three months will take 10 to 20 years to recover from."[31] In its application to the ICJ, South Africa detailed the systematic targeting of Higher Education in Gaza:

> "Israel has targeted every one of Gaza's four universities — including the Islamic University of Gaza, the oldest higher education institution in the territory, which has trained generations of doctors and engineers, amongst others, destroying campuses for the education of future generations of Palestinians in Gaza. Alongside so many others, Israel has killed leading Palestinian academics, including: Professor Sufian Tayeh, the President of the Islamic University — an award-winning physicist and UNESCO Chair of Astronomy, Astrophysics and Space Sciences in Palestine — who died, alongside his family, in an airstrike; Dr Ahmed Hamdi Abo Absa, Dean of the Software Engineering Department at the University of Palestine, reportedly shot dead by Israeli soldiers as he walked away, having been released from three days of enforced disappearance; and Professor Muhammad Eid Shabir, Professor of Immunology and Virology, and former President of the Islamic University of Gaza, and Professor Refaat Alareer, poet and Professor of Comparative Literature and Creative Writing at the Islamic University of Gaza, were both killed by Israel with members of their families. Professor Alareer was a co-founder of 'We are Not Numbers', a Palestinian youth project seeking to tell the stories behind otherwise impersonal accounts of Palestinians — and Palestinian deaths — in the news"[32].

The entangled principles of de-development, spatial cleansing, and educide paint a grim picture of the hidden war against education. Over the years since 2007, there has been an escalation of policies in spatial cleansing and de-development which have laid the ground for Israel's attack on education in Gaza. De-development can be seen through the systematic restriction imposed on educational institutions, which disrupts the immediate access to education, alongside undermining the long-

term development of this sector. Also, by preventing the movement of scholars and limiting their ability to engage in international academic collaborations, the occupying forces systematically isolate the Palestinian education system, hindering its growth and development.

Spatial cleansing involves the deliberate destruction and targeting of physical spaces tied to higher education. This means that university buildings, laboratories, and other essential facilities are intentionally demolished, effectively disrupting and dismantling the higher education sector. Spatial cleansing, which also includes the forced displacement and removal of Palestinians from their homes, performs a crucial position inside the educide process. By uprooting people from their familiar environment, spatial cleansing irrupts the educational process, inflicting a ripple effect all the education system. Displaced students are deprived from getting access to universities and hindering their academic progress. Spatial cleansing illuminates the systematic nature of the occupation's policies, which extend beyond mere military actions. The deliberate eradication of these vital spaces demonstrates a concerted effort to stifle intellectual and educational growth among the Palestinian population.

The destruction of the educational system not only denies people their right to an education, but also jeopardizes society's intellectual and human capital of the entire society. It stifles the potential and ambitions of Palestinian people by methodically eliminating teachers and pupils, thereby extending a cycle of control and oppression. By concentrating on faculties and universities, Israel not only bodily dismantles the infrastructure, it also targets Palestinian national identity and its history. This intentional destruction denies Palestinians satisfactory education, perpetuating a cycle of educational deprivation and marginalization and hindering their ability to build a brighter future. This hinders the collective advancement and development of society as a whole.

Conclusion

The progression from spatial cleansing and de-development to educide accurately describe the intentional techniques employed to undermine the progress and potential of the Palestinian humans. It is a calculated strategy, designed to assert control and suppress the Palestinian by destroying spaces where critical thinking and the exchange of ideas flourish. These three elements work together as a strategy to systematically demolish the higher education sector and deny Palestinians their fundamental right to education. Furthermore, it seeks to erase the collective memory, cultural heritage, intellectual growth of the Palestinian people. By maintaining control and stifling any form of resistance or intellectual advancement, it effectively hampers Palestinian access to knowledge and intellectual development.

These measures collectively are a serious blow to Gaza's HE system. The loss of lives and destruction of universities are all factors of the educide. Educide has far-reaching effects since it caps societal growth and advancement. Educide in Gaza encourages a vicious circle of oppression and control, and foster violations of human rights, necessitating acknowledgement and addressing of such phenomenon.

Endnotes

[1] The Department of Political Science, Birzeit University, irabaia@birzeit.edu

[2] The Director of Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies, Birzeit University, lhabash@birzeit.edu.

[3] Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils condemns the Israeli attack and targeting the scientific intuitions. WAFA. 22/12/2023. https://www.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/86868

[4] Shms: The Israeli destruction of the schools and universities in Gaza, is systematic de education policy. Shams. 07/11/2023 https://www.shams-pal.org/?p=5795 .

[5] An updated list of the names of professors and academics killed by Israel's genocidal military campaign in Gaza Strip. the official MOHE page on Facebook.

[6] Israel's demolition of educational institutions, cultural objects in Gaza is additional manifestation of genocide. Euro-mid Human Rights Monitor. 16/02/2024. https://2u.pw/uuP16x0

[7] Ben Gvir calls to kill "The candy distributors" and Netanyahu challenges international pressures to end the war. Al-Jazeera. 12/11/2023. https://2u.pw/4TDdPRC.
[8] Rahmah Hussein. How Israel Destroyed High Education Sector in Gaza?.7ibr. 24/01/2024. https://2u.pw/zI2BVlM
[9] For more information about bare education in Palestine refer to the article "Exception of the Exception: Palestinian «Bare» Education under Colonialism in Palestine" in Omran , issue 9 : 33 summer 2020. This article demonstrates the ways through which the Israeli colonisation has affected the structure of the Palestinian education in the Occupied Territories since 1967.
[10] Saad Al-Waheidi. The Islamic University of Gaza.. A History of Israeli Targeting. Al-Jazeera. 03/11/2023. https://2u.pw/zcpz9Gx .
[11] Saad Al-Waheidi. Ibid.
[12] Sari Hanafi. (2009). Spacio-cide: colonial politics, invisibility and rezoning in Palestinian territory. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 2(1), 106-121.
[13] By 2022, around 10 HEI in Gaza were not recognized by the MOHE, some were branches for universities in the West Bank, such as Al-Quds Open University.
[14] Higher Education Statistical yearbook (2021-2022). (Ramallah: MOHE, 2022). P.29.
[15] Rahmah Hussein. How Israel Destroyed High Education Sector in Gaza?.7ibr. 24/01/2024. https://2u.pw/zI2BVlM
[16] Pecdar: $22 Million the losses of Public Schools and Universities in Gaza. Maan News. 02/09/2014. https://www.maannews.net/news/724870.html
[17] Rahmah Hussein. Ibid.
[18] Rahmah Hussein. Ibid.
[19] Mona Jebril (2023) Between construction and destruction: the experience of educationalists at Gaza's universities, Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 53:6, 986-1004, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2021.1987190
[20] A Palestinian University Refuses the Israeli Restrictions on employing and registering foreigners in WB. Al-Jazeera. 13/03/2022. https://2u.pw/EJINLSx .
[21] Freedom of Movement Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. UNHR. (Annual Report). February 2016. .https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/PS/SG_Report_FoM_Feb2016.pdf, P.11.
[22] Situation of the Right of Higher Education in Gaza under Blockade. Mezan. (Report) May 2010. https://www.mezan.org/uploads/files/11343.pdf
[23] : Sansom Milton, Ghassan Elkahlout & Sultan Barakat (2023) Protecting higher education from attack in the Gaza Strip, Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 53:6, Pp. 1024-1042. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2021.1987192
[24] Financial crises ravage Gaza universities and warnings of imminent collapse. Al-Jazeera. 23/07/2019. https://2u.pw/rlgAcol
[25] National Campaign to Demand a Reduction in University Fees. https://www.facebook.com/edu.palstine/
[26] Financial crises ravage Gaza universities and warnings of imminent collapse. Ibid.
[27] With Photos and Videos: BBC Records the Destruction of Most Gaza's Universirties. BBC Arabic. 10/03/2024. https://www.bbc.com/arabic/articles/czqz1w49j41o
[28] Emanuel Fabian. IDF says it is probing demolition of campus in Gaza last week, after US voiced ire. Time of Israel. 21/01/2024. https://www.mako.co.il/news-military/2024_q1/Article-6528ae7f23c2d81026.htm
[29] Israel: We destroyed Hamas infrastructure at University in Gaza. Sky News Arabia. 08/12/2023. https://2u.pw/E2iroSz .
[30] Al-Israa University Page on Facebook. 24/01/2024. https://www.facebook.com/israaedu
[31] Patrick Jack. Academia in Gaza 'has been destroyed' by Israeli 'educide'. The Times Higher Education. 29/01/2024. https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/academia-gaza-has-been-destroyed-israeli-educide
[32] Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel). ICJ. 28/12/2023. https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20231228-app-01-00-en.pdf

Organized Forced Migration, Past and Present:
Gaza, Israel-Palestine and Beyond

Fiona B. Adamson, SOAS, University of London & Kelly M. Greenhill, Tufts University and MIT

Almost two million people have been forcibly displaced, and more than 30,000 reportedly killed, in Gaza since October 7, 2023.[1] The Gaza Strip itself is the product of earlier waves of organized forced displacement, and the ongoing war has featured multiple proposals by Israeli ministers and other prominent actors for the mass transfer of Gazans out of the territory.[2] Proposals for mass population transfers are nothing new to the broader region, which has long been shaped by state-led forms of demographic engineering. This history, including the vigorous debates and conflicting interpretations of forced displacement around Israeli state formation and the Palestinian *Nakba* or 'catastrophe,' offers a valuable and instructive lens through which to view current developments.

In this essay, we reflect on how the simultaneously paradigmatic and exceptional case of Israel-Palestine relates to broader patterns of population transfers, exchanges, expulsions, repatriations and exodus in the region and beyond – phenomena that we collectively refer to as organized forced migration. Our reflections are based on an ongoing dataset-building research project, which examines organized forced migration as a geopolitical tool used by state elites and other actors for purposes such as empire-building, colonization, nation-state building, foreign-policy bargaining, war-making, and even contemporary regimes of "migration management."[3] Excavating the phenomenon's legacies and practices, and integrating the Israel-Palestine case into regional and global histories of organized forced migration opens up space for broader discussions on Israel-Palestine – both past and present – and can shed light on significant dynamics and processes that have shaped, and continue to shape, the regional (and global) order.

What is Organized Forced Migration?

Organized forced migration can be distinguished from other types of migration as it is deliberately orchestrated by state and other actors.[4] In our research, we identify five types of organized forced migration. *Transfers* (or *resettlements*) are state-driven movements of groups of people from one state or region to another (often geographically-distant) region or state, most frequently based on identity markers, such as race, ethnicity or religion, but sometimes on identity-blind economic factors. *Exchanges* are state-driven cross-border movements of two populations in opposite directions at about the same time. *Repatriations* are state-driven cross-border movements of people designed to return them to their country of origin or citizenship. *Expulsions* are involuntary state-driven cross-border movements of people with little regard to where the people end up. *Exoduses* are state-driven flights of populations achieved through indirect means.

The boundaries between these categories are fluid and, in many cases, overlap. For example, expulsions and exoduses are often quite difficult to distinguish: in some cases, there is clear historical documentation of a government order for mass deportations and expulsion, and identifiable actions, such as direct physical removal, the confiscation of property, or denaturalization/the removal of citizenship. In other cases, policies are implemented using indirect means, such as the use of intimidation and violence by third parties or special units, extreme policies of forced assimilation, or ongoing state-sponsored harassment and intimidation. The term *repatriation* (or return) is frequently used in cases of ethnic transfers in which populations are transferred back to a "home" that they have never lived in or perhaps even visited. This applies to many historical cases of transfers based on ethnic

or religious criteria, but such misnomers are still used today. Notably, these terms are all employed to describe politically contentious events and dynamics in the Israel-Palestine context, but also have a longer history and broader applicability in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and beyond.[5]

Interconnected Histories of Organized Forced Migration

Organized forced migration as a tool of state-building and statecraft in the MENA region pre-dates European colonization: population transfer and resettlement (*sürgün)* was used by the Ottoman Empire as a means of empire-building from its earliest days for a range of economic and strategic reasons.[6] In the nineteenth century, imperial rivalries led to transfers of populations back and forth across the borders of the Russian, Ottoman and Persian empires.[7] Large-scale expulsions of Tatar and Circassian populations from the Russian Empire were strategically dispersed and settled by the Ottomans, as were Muslim expellees from the Balkans.[8] Simultaneously, European empires also used organized forced migration during this period: expulsions and transfers to and from Algeria were used by France as a means of colonizing, redistributing populations and managing political dissent.[9] Italy similarly used forced transfer in Libya in the early 20th century.[10]

Organized forced migrations were also common in the 1912-13 Balkan Wars and World War I (WWI).[11] In Anatolia, for instance, hundreds of thousands of Armenians, Assyrians and other Christian minorities were killed or forced out of Anatolia in highly organized massacres and expulsions.[12] Population transfers and exchanges formed a key part of the post-WWI settlement. The Lausanne Convention of 1923, which marked the end of the Ottoman Empire, included a population exchange between Greece and Turkey and resulted in the forcible relocation of approximately 1.5 million people.[13] Overseen by the newly-formed League of Nations, Lausanne was widely viewed as the first compulsory exchange of populations authorized by international law – although it was certainly not the first diplomatically-agreed exchange in the region.[14]

Nevertheless, Lausanne set a precedent. In the following decades, proposed and actual transfers proliferated and were used by European powers, the League of Nations, and post-Ottoman states, among others. In the newly-formed Republic of Turkey, expulsions of minorities, including Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Kurds and other related groups from Eastern Turkey and the border regions of Syria and Iraq — which were now under British and French mandates — continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s.[15] The same period saw a variety of realized and unrealized population transfer proposals, such as relocating Armenian refugees to Soviet Armenia and Assyrian refugees to far-flung locations such as Brazil.[16] The 1930s and 1940s featured widespread organized forced migration across Europe, instigated by fascist, communist and liberal actors alike. Bilateral transfer treaties within Europe and the former Ottoman space were concluded throughout the 1930s, forcibly displacing hundreds of thousands.[17] The Nazi *Heim ins Reich* transfers; Stalinist mass transfers in the Soviet Union; and US and UK-led post-WWII Potsdam Treaty transfers of Germans and Poles created mass displacements that collectively uprooted tens of millions of people across Eurasia.[18]

Organized Forced Migration and Israel-Palestine

Population transfers and exchanges were also historically prevalent in Zionist thinking and international diplomacy around Palestine. Numerous schemes designed to transfer Jews to locales across Africa, Latin America and elsewhere had been investigated or proposed by the British, German, and American governments, as well as Zionist leaders themselves.[19] Ideas about population transfer and exchange also shaped visions of Jewish state-building in Palestine, with the Greek-Turkish exchange and other mass transfers viewed as models for removing Arab populations.[20] Some Zionists who had originally advocated for co-existence in Palestine switched over time to supporting population transfer as an aspect of state-building, following the growth in acceptance and implementation of organized population transfers across Europe.[21]

Organized forced migrations, transfers and systematic persecutions of Jews and others in Europe provided the background to mass settlement policies in Palestine. This included not only the rescue of European Jews suffering under the Nazi oppression, but also the development of plans by Zionists to encourage rapid migration as a means of altering the demographic balance in Palestine and creating a "political fact" of a Jewish majority as a prelude to state creation.[22] At times, the boundaries between voluntary and organized forced migration were blurred – as with the facilitated deportation of Zionist convicts from the Soviet Union to Palestine in the 1920s, or the controversial 1933 Transfer Agreement negotiated between Nazi Germany and Zionist organizations, which operated until 1939.[23] An organized population transfer was included in Britain's 1937 Peel Commission plan for Palestine, and US President Franklin D. Roosevelt considered transfer schemes for Arabs from Palestine during World War II.[24] Roosevelt's interest in organized forced migration was further reflected in a top-secret research project on transfers and resettlement – the M (for "Migration") Project. Advisors to the project included experts and advocates for population transfer, including the Revisionist Zionist, Joseph Schechtman, who went on to serve on the unofficial Transfer Committee set up in 1948 to oversee land clearings and expulsions of Arabs that accompanied Israeli state formation.[25]

The demographic policies of the then dominant states in the international system were viewed as models for state development by Zionist leaders. These included future Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, whose plan for building a Jewish state in Palestine included changing the demographic balance in the region through a "radical 'state plan' of a swift population transfer" of one million Jews to Palestine within an 18-month period.[26] What later became known as the "Million Plan" included provisions to transfer Jews from Arab countries to Palestine, creating a new category of "Mizrahi Jews" as a means of counterbalancing the potential effects of the loss of Jews in Europe.[27] The principles laid out in the plan provided a basis for clandestine transfer and settlement operations carried out by Mossad Le'Aliya Bet, an arm of the Zionist paramilitary organization Haganah, which later became a branch of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, following the creation of the state of Israel.[28]

Early transfers of Jews from Arab countries and elsewhere in the world involved bilateral diplomacy, financial deals, and high levels of Israeli and external involvement – as well as elements of duress and resistance by the populations who were moved.[29] The transfer of Yemenis in the early 1950s was negotiated by Israel, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and the governments of Aden and Yemen. Framed as a "rescue mission" at the time, it led to hundreds of Yemeni deaths and was marked by state abductions of Yemeni babies who were reallocated to Ashkenazi couples.[30] Mossad and the JDC were also involved in the transfer of Jews from Iraq in what are known as the Ezra and Nehemiah operations.[31] Operation Yachin, conducted in the 1960s, transferred Moroccan Jews to Israel. The movement was facilitated by the Mossad and accompanied by bilateral arrangements that included monetary payments from the Israeli Foreign Ministry to Morocco.[32] Similar financial deals were struck elsewhere – the resettlement of 100,000 Jews from Romania to Israel between 1948-51 led Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu to boast that Jews were one of the state's "most important export commodities."[33]

Displacements of Jews from across the Middle East have been variously framed or understood as rescues, transfers, expulsions, exodus, or population exchanges. The "population exchange thesis" has been promoted by some Israelis as a counterpoint to Palestinian claims for compensation or return – i.e. by labelling Jews from Arab countries as "refugees" and framing their transfers as part of a unified process of "exchange."[34] In this respect, Ben Gurion's "Plan Dalet," -- the military plan to take control of Mandatory Palestine described by some as the "blueprint" for expulsions of the Palestinians – provided the demographic counterpoint to the Million Plan.[35] The subsequent organized forced migration of Palestinians, which occurred concomitantly with the establishment of the Israeli state, and which has alternatively been characterized as expulsion or exodus, marked the

beginning of the ongoing and still unresolved Palestinian refugee crisis.[36] Expulsions and displacements continued to occur after 1948, throughout the 1949-1956 period of Israeli state-building.[37]

The occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights following the 1967 Six-Day War led to a further exodus of Palestinians from the occupied territories, as well as proposals from within the Israeli government to reduce the population of the Gaza Strip by raising "international and Jewish money" to fund a transfer of the population and cast it as an exchange "like Greece and Turkey."[38] In the period since 1967, ongoing "forcible transfers" in Israel-Palestine have led to the expulsion of over 14,000 Palestinians from East Jerusalem via residency revocations. These involuntary movements have been accompanied by the use of other demographic engineering policies, such as the building of settlements in Gaza (subsequently dismantled in 2005, following the withdrawal of Israeli military forces) and the West Bank.[39] As recently as 2020, then US President Donald Trump's Abraham Accords included a proposal for a forced Arab population transfer.[40] There have been numerous calls by actors in Israel for an organized population transfer and resettlement of the Gaza Strip since the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7.[41]

Organized Forced Migration, Past and Present

The case of Israel-Palestine is simultaneously quite exceptional but also paradigmatic. Across the MENA region and beyond, organized forced migration has frequently been used as a tool of state-building and statecraft in ways both related and unrelated to the Israel-Palestine issue. Egypt, for example, expelled British, French and Israeli passport holders, as well as large segments of its native Jewish community, in retaliation for the 1956 Suez crisis and, quite possibly, to influence British and Israel foreign policy behavior.[42] During the 1990-91 Gulf War, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled or fled from Kuwait when Yasser Arafat expressed support for Saddam Hussein and attempted to link Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait with Israeli and Syrian withdrawals in Palestine and Lebanon.[43] At the same time, Saudi Arabia expelled a million Yemenis as a means of penalizing Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh for his support of Iraq and to signal its desire that Yemen rethink its position.[44] Organized forced migration has been used in the MENA region as a tool of colonization (e.g. by Morocco in Western Sahara), and decolonization (e.g. by Algeria in 1962 following independence, and by Libya in 1970), as well as wielded as a tool in geopolitics and international rivalries (e.g. Algeria and Morocco in 1975; Iraq and Iran in 1980; and Libya and Tunisia in 1985).[45]

Population transfers and exchanges featured in the still-unresolved 1974 conflict in Cyprus (a former Ottoman territory and British colony), and is just one case of the serial orchestrated expulsions of "Turks" and "Greeks" that occurred in every decade between the 1950s and 1990s, such as the expulsions of tens of thousands by Turkey in 1955 and 1967 and hundreds of thousands from Bulgaria in 1950-51 and 1989.[46] Strategies of organized forced displacement have also been used extensively in Turkey's conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), as well as in the Syrian Civil War.[47] Population transfers continue to be used by Turkey in its occupation of Northern Syria – a situation that has been described as a "new Gaza."[48]

The extent to which the current situation in Gaza and Israel-Palestine is shaped by both the legacies and ongoing practices of organized forced migration is exceptional in many respects: 85% of the population of Gaza has been forcibly displaced since October 7th, and displacement has been accompanied by the highest daily death rate of any 21st century conflict so far, with the vast majority of deaths being civilians, women and children.[49] Furthermore, the use of organized forced migration in the Israel-Gaza war is occurring in the context of the broader historical trajectory of Israeli state-building, in which strategies, practices and discourses of population transfer, expulsion, exchange, exodus and "return" have all played highly significant roles. In several other respects, however, these same features of the Israel-Palestine case are also distressingly common: organized forced migration has been used as a geopolitical tool of state-building and statecraft far more than the

literature in political science has reflected, and in ways that are also not reducible and limited to settler colonialism.[50] This suggests the need for adopting a broader analytical framework that accounts for its prevalence and significance in the case of Israel-Palestine, across the MENA region, and beyond.

Acknowledgements: The authors thank Yehonatan Abramson, Jeremy Cutler and Nathaniel George for their helpful comments and acknowledge financial support from the Gerda Henkel Foundation Grant no. AZ 02/FM/23.

Endnotes

1 "Gaza Toll Tops 30,000 as Over 100 Killed in Aid Convoy Violence," *Associated Press,* March 1, 2024; Les Roberts, "The Science is Clear: Over 30,000 People Died in Gaza. *Time* March 15, 2024: https://time.com/6909636/gaza-death-toll/; Nadia Hardman, "Most of Gaza's Population Remains Displaced and in Harm's Way," *Human Rights Watch* December 20, 2023: https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/20/most-gazas-population-remains-displaced-and-harms-way; Becky Sullivan, "Almost Two Million are Displaced in Gaza: Tents for Makeshift Homes Dwindling," *National Public Radio* January 22, 2024: https://www.npr.org/2024/01/22/1225795019/almost-2-million-people-are-displaced-in-gaza-tents-for-makeshift-homes-dwindlin;

2 See for example, Amy Teibel, "An Israeli Ministry, in a "Concept Paper," Proposes Transferring Gaza Civilians to Egypt's Sinai," *Associated Press* October 31, 2023: https://apnews.com/article/israel-gaza-population-transfer-hamas-egypt-palestinians-refugees-5f99378c0af6aca183a90c631fa4da5a; Katherine Hearst, "Israel-Palestine War: Israel Reportedly Proposed Writing off Egypt's Debts for Hosting Gaza Refugees," *Middle East Eye* October 31, 2023; https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-war-netanyahu-lobbied-eu-push-egypt-accept-gaza-refugees; Nettanel Slyomovics, "Israeli Rightists are Trying to Reframe a Gaza Population Transfer as a 'Moral Act.' *Haaretz* November 17, 2023: https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-11-17/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/israeli-rightists-are-trying-to-reframe-a-gaza-population-transfer-as-a-moral-act/0000018b-d914-d423-affb-fbb7ddd30000; Israel Working to Expel Civilian Population of Gaza, UN Expert Warns. United Nations, December 22, 2023; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/12/israel-working-expel-civilian-population-gaza-un-expert-warns; Shalom Yaroshami, "Israel in Talks with Congo and Other Countries on Gaza 'Voluntary Migration' Plan," *The Times of Israel* January 4, 2024: https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-in-talks-with-congo-and-other-countries-on-gaza-voluntary-migration-plan/;

3 Fiona B. Adamson and Kelly M. Greenhill. 2023. Deal-making, Diplomacy and Transactional Forced Migration. *International Affairs* 99 (2): 707-725.

4 Christopher M. Goebel. 1992. A Unified Concept of Population Transfer, *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 21: 29-53. For an excellent general overview of migration in the MENA region see Rawan Arar, Laurie Brand, Rana B. Khoury, Noora Lori, Lama Mourad and Wendy Pearlman. 2022. "Migration and Displacement," in Marc Lynch, Jillian Schwedler and Sean Yom, eds., *The Political Science of the Middle East*: *Theory and Research Since the Arab Uprisings* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 232-255.

5 This includes a long history of expulsions of Jews in different contexts. See, for example. Benjamin Z. Kedar. 1996. Expulsion as an Issue of World History. *Journal of World History*, 7(2): 165–80; Laura Robson. 2017. *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition and the Making of the Modern Middle East* Oakland: University of California Press Matthew Frank. 2017. *Making Minorities History: Population Transfers in Twentieth-Century Europe* Oxford: Oxford University Press. For a recent dataset on mass expulsions, see Meghan Garrity. 2022. Introducing the Government-Sponsored Mass Expulsion Dataset. *Journal of Peace Research*, 59(5): 767-776.

6 Fatma Müge Göçek. 1995. Population Transfers in Mediterranean History: The Ottoman Empire in the Fourteenth-Seventeenth Centuries. *The Mediterranean Historical Review* 68: https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/gocek/articles/

7 Charles King. 2004. *The Black Sea: A History* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 207-15; Farid Shafiyev. 2018. *Resettling the Borderlands: State Relocations and Ethnic Conflict in the South Caucasus* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press; Michael A. Reynolds. 2011. *The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1919.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

8 Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky. 2024. *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* Stanford: Stanford University Press; Isa Blumi. 2013. *Ottoman Refugees, 1878-1939* London: Bloomsbury; Nesim Şeker 2013. Forced Population Movements in the Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic: An Attempt at Reassessment Through Demographic Engineering. *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 16; Kemal H. Karpat. 1985*. Ottoman Population, 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

9 Fiona B. Adamson. 2024. Entangled Migration States: Mobility and State-Building in France and Algeria. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50 (3): 597-616 (p. 603); Chahrazade Douah and Mélissa Godin, The Algerians of New Caledonia, *Frontlines Magazine* May 2, 2022: https://newlinesmag.com/essays/the-algerians-of-new-caledonia/.

10 Francesca di Pasquale. 2018. The "Other" at Home: Deportation and Transportation of Libyans to Italy During the Colonial Era (1911-1943). *International Review of Social History* 63: 211-231.

[11] The Balkan Wars in particular led to large-scale expulsions and exodus of Muslim populations. See, e.g. Blumi 2013; Pekesen, Berna. 2012. *Expulsion and Emigration of the Muslims from the Balkans*. European History Online: http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/europe-on-the-road/forced-ethnic-migration/berna-pekesen-expulsion-and-emigration-of-the-muslims-from-the-balkans

[12] Ronald Grigory Suny. 2011. *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. Heather Rae. 2002. *State Identities and the Homogenisation of Peoples.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 124-164.

[13] Onur Yildirim. 2006. *Diplomacy and Displacement: Reconsidering the Turco-Greek Exchange of Populations.* New York: Routledge; Asli Iğsiz. 2018. *Entangled Legacies of the Greek-Turkish Population Exchanges* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

[14] Umut Özsü. 2014. *Formalizing Displacement: International Law and Population Transfers.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; Christa Meindersma. 1997. Population Exchanges: International Law and State Practice—Part 1, *International Journal of Refugee Law* 9 (3): 335–364. Previous exchanges had occurred between Bulgaria and Turkey, and Bulgaria and Greece.

[15] Tachijan Vahé. 2009. The expulsion of non-Turkish ethnic and religious groups from Turkey to Syria during the 1920s and early 1930s. *Mass Violence & Résistance,* [online]: http://bo-k2s.sciences-po.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/expulsion-non-turkish-ethnic-and-religious-groups-turkey-syria-during-1920s-and-early-1930s, ISSN 1961-9898

[16] Robson 2017, 65-104; Adamson and Greenhill 2023.

[17] Frank 2013, 87; Vladimir Solonari. 2010. *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania* Washington DC., Johns Hopkins University Press, 32.

[18] Peter Gatrell. 2013. *The Making of the Modern Refugee.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; Alfred De Zayas. 1988. A Historical Survey of 20th Century Expulsions', in Anna C. Bramwell, ed. *Refugees in the Age of Total War*. London: Routledge.

[19] See, e.g. Adam L. Rovner. 2014. *In the Shadow of Zion: Promised Lands Before Israel.* New York: New York University Press; Laura Almagor. 2022. *Beyond Zion: The Jewish Territorialist Movement.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

[20] Nur Masalha. 1992. *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of Transfer in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948* Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1992; Benny Morris. 2004. *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (2nd edition, ch. 2); Chaim Simons. 1988. *International Proposals to Transfer Arabs from Palestine, 1895-1947* Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House.

[21] Gil S. Rubin. 2019. "Vladimir Jabotinsky and Population Transfers Between Eastern Europe and Palestine," *The Historical Journal* 62 (2): 495-517.

[22] Ari Barell and David Ohana, 2014: 'The Million Plan': Zionism, Political Theology and Scientific Utopianism. *Politics, Religion and Ideology*: /doi: 10.1080/21567689.2013.849587, p. 10.

[23] Ziva Galili and Boris Morozov. 2006. *Exiled to Palestine: The Emigration of Zionist Convicts from the Soviet Union, 1924-1934* Abingdon: Routledge; David Yisraeli. 1972. The Third Reich and the Transfer Agreement, *Journal of Contemporary History* 6: 129–148

[24] Robson 2017, 112ff.; Samuel Halperin and Irvin Oder. 1962. The United States in Search of a Policy: Franklin D. Roosevelt and Palestine. *The Review of Politics* 24 (3): 320-341.

[25] Laura Robson. 2024. *Human Capital: A History of Putting Refugees to Work* London: Verso: 111-139, 181-182. See also Mark M. Mazower. 2009. *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[26] Barell and Ohana, 2014, p. 16.

[27] Ibid., p. 3; Gil Eyal. 2006. *The Disenchantment of the Orient* Stanford: Stanford University Press: 86-89.

[28] Devorah Hakohen. 2003. *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and Its Repercussions in the 1950s and After*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 33.

[29] See, e.g. Ella Shohat. 1988. Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Perspective of Its Jewish Victims. *Social Text* 19 (2): 1-35; Tom Segev. 1988. *1949: The First Israelis* New York: Simon and Schuster.

[30] Esther Meier-Glitzenstein. 2011. Operation Magic Carpet: Constructing the Myth of the Magical Immigration of Yemenite Jews to Israel *Israel Studies* 16 (3): 149-173. Joseph B. Schechtman. 1952. The Repatriation of Yemenite Jewry, *Jewish Social Studies* 14 (3): 209-225 (p. 221); Ofer Aderet, Hundreds of Yemenite Children were Abducted in State's Early Years, Says Israeli Cabinet Minister. *Haaretz* July 31, 2016: https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2016-07-31/ty-article/hundreds-of-yemenite-kids-were-abducted/0000017f-f067-dc28-a17f-fc773c230000.

[31] Abbas Shiblak. 1986. *The Lure of Zion: The Case of the Iraqi Jews* London: Al Saqi; Avi Shlaim. 2023. *Three Worlds: Memoirs of an Arab-Jew* London: One World.

[32] Emanuela Travisan Semi. 2015. Double Trauma and Manifold Narratives: Jews' and Muslims' Representation of the Departure of Moroccan Jews in the 1950s and 1960s. In Glenda Abramson, ed. *Sites of Jewish Memory: Jews in and From Islamic Lands.* London: Routledge 45-63.

[33] James Koranyi, "People have been used as bargaining chips before – by Romania's Nicolae Ceausescu," *The Conversation* March 1, 2017: https://theconversation.com/people-have-been-used-as-bargaining-chips-before-by-romanias-nicolae-ceau-escu-73141.

[34] Michael R. Fischbach. 2008. Palestinian Refugee Compensation and Israeli Counterclaims for Jewish Property in the Arab Countries. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38 (1): 6-24; Yehouda Shenav. 2002. Jews from Arab Countries and the Palestinian Right for Return: An Ethnic Community in Realms of National Memory. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (1): 27-56; Yehouda Shenhav. 1999. The Jews of Iraq, Zionist Ideology, and the Property of the Palestinian Refugees of 1948: An Anomaly of National Accounting. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 31 (4): 605–30.

[35] Ilan Pappe. 2006. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* London: Oneworld Publications; Walid Khalidi. 1988. Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18 (1): 4-19; Rashid Khalidi. 2020. *The Hundred Years War on Palestine* London: Profile Books, 72-3.

[36] See, for example, Morris. 2004; Pappe, 2006; Tom Segev. 2001.*One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate:* London: Picador; Efraim Karsh. 2010. *Palestine Betrayed* New Haven: Yale University Press.

[37] Morris 2004, p. 536. Segev 1998, p. 63; Benny Morris. 1993. *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956; Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation and the Countdown to the Suez War*. Oxford Clarendon Press.

[38] Ilan Pappe. 2017. *The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories.* London: Oneworld, 54-55.

[39] Jonathan Rynhold and Dov Waxman. 2008. Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza, *Political Science Quarterly* 123 (1): 11-37; Human Rights Watch, "Israel: Jerusalem Palestinians Stripped of Status," August 8, 2017: https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/08/israel-jerusalem-palestinians-stripped-status; Amnesty International, *Israel's Apartheid System Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity* (Section 6.1, Forcible Transfer, p. 219ff): https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/; Ibrahim Husseini, "The Quiet Expulsion of Arabs From Jerusalem," *The New Arab* December 28, 2022: https://www.newarab.com/analysis/quiet-expulsion-palestinians-jerusalem.

[40] Jo-Ann Mort, "The Trump-Netanyahu Plan to Force Arab Population Transfer," *New York Review of Books,* February 3, 2020; https://www.nybooks.com/online/2020/02/03/the-trump-netanyahu-plan-to-force-arab-population-transfer/

[41] Yair Rosenberg, "The Right Wing Israeli Campaign to Resettle Gaza," *The Atlantic* December 22, 2023: https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/12/israel-right-wing-settler-gaza-netanyahu/676943/; Margherita Stancati, "Israel's Right Plots a 'New Gaza' without Palestinians." *Wall Street Journal* January 29, 2024.

[42] Michael M. Laskier. 1995. Egyptian Jewry under the Nasser regime, 1956–70. *Middle Eastern Studies,* 31 (3): 573-619; Kelly M. Greenhill, forthcoming, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, Foreign Policy*, second edition Ithaca: Cornell Studies in Security Affairs.

[43] Philip Mattar. 1994. The PLO and the Gulf Crisis. *Middle East Journal* 48 (1)1: 31–46.

[44] Kelly M. Greenhill, 2010, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, Foreign Policy* Ithaca: Cornell Studies in Security Affairs; Bruce Reidel, "Saudi Arabia and the Civil War Within Yemen's Civil War." August 14, 2019. Brookings: https://www.brookings.edu/articles/saudi-arabia-and-the-civil-war-within-yemens-civil-war/.

[45] Jacob Mundy. 2012. Moroccan Settlers in Western Sahara: Colonists or Fifth Column? *The Arab World Geographer* 15 (2): 95–126; Pamela Ballinger. 2016. Colonial Twilight: Italian Settlers and the Long Decolonization of Libya. *Journal of Contemporary History* 51 (4): 813-838 (p. 836); Claire Eldridge. 2017. The Empire Returns: "Repatriates" and "Refugees" from French Algeria, in Matthew Frank and Jessica Reinisch, eds, *Refugees in Europe 1919–1959: A Forty Years Crisis?* London: Bloomsbury, 195–212; Algeria and Morocco: A Troubled History. *Middle East Eye* August 26, 2021: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/algeria-morocco-relationship-tense-history; Randa Farah. 2009. Refugee Camps in the Palestinian and Sahrawi National Liberation Movements: A Comparative Perspective. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38 (2): 76–93. Christopher Dickey, "Tunisian-Libyan Border Tense After Expulsions." *The Washington Post* September 12, 1985: https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/09/13/tunisian-libyan-border-tense-after-expulsions/070a52ca-e60e-457f-a29f-8ea9f15d9da7/; Zainab Saleh. 2013. On Iraqi Nationality: Law, Citizenship and Exclusion. *The Arab Studies Journal* 21 (1): 48-78; Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration*.

[46] Oded Haklai and Neophytos Loizides, eds. 2015. *Settlers in Contested Lands: Territorial Disputes and Ethnic Conflicts.* Stanford: Stanford University Press; Spyros Vryonis. 2005. *The Mechanism of Catastrophe: The Turkish Pogram of September 6-7, 1955, and the Destruction of the Greek Community of Istanbul.* New York: Greekworks; Huey Louis Kostanick. 1955. Turkish Resettlement of Refugees from Bulgaria, 1950-1953. *Middle East Journal* 9 (1): 41-52. Tomasz Kamusella. 2020. Between Politics and Objectivity: The *Non*-Remembrance of the 1989 Ethnic Cleansing of Turks in Communist Bulgaria, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 22 (4): 515-532.

[47] Fiona B. Adamson 2023. Migration Governance in Civil War: The Case of the Kurdish Conflict. *European Journal of International Security* 8 (4): 513–30; Adam G. Lichtenheld. Beyond Ethno-Sectarian "Cleansing": The Assortative Logic of Forced Displacement in Syria. In Marc Lynch, Refugee Movements in the Middle East, *POMEPS Studies* 25, 2017, 42-48.

[48] Asli Aydintaşbaş, "A New Gaza? Turkey's Border Policy in Northern Syria." *European Council on Foreign Relations,* May 28, 2020: https://ecfr.eu/publication/a_new_gaza_turkeys_border_policy_in_northern_syria/; Fehim Tastekin, "Turkey's Occupation of Northern Syria Includes Population Transfers," *Al-Monitor,* May 7, 2020: https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/05/turkey-syria-population-transfers-tell-abyad-irk-kurds-arabs.html.

[49] UN Security Council, SC/15564, January 12, 2024: https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15564.doc.htm; Oxfam, "Daily Death Rate in Gaza Higher than Any Other 21st Century Conflict." January 11, 2024: https://www.oxfam.org.uk/media/press-releases/daily-death-rate-in-gaza-higher-than-any-other-major-21st-century-conflict-oxfam/; Marc Lynch and Sarah Parkinson. A Closer Look at the Gaza Casualty Data. *Good Authority* December 14, 2023: https://goodauthority.org/news/gaza-casualty-data/.

[50] For discussions of Israel-Palestine in the context of settler colonialism, see: Rashidi 2020; Neve Gordon and Moriel Ram. 2016. Ethnic Cleansing and the Formation of Settler Colonial Geographies. *Political Geography* 53: 20-29; Lorenzo Veracini. *Israel and Settler Society.* London: Pluto Press, 2006. Maxime Rodinson. 1973. *Israel: A Settler-Colonial State?* Monad Press: New York. See also Lachlan McNamee. 2023. *Settling for Less: Why States Colonize and Why They Stop.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

The Wretched of Political Science and the Fanonian Shift

Alexei Abrahams, Canadian Media Ecosystem Observatory, McGill University

For those of us who research the Palestinian struggle, the violence of the past months has been uniquely devastating. It has delivered a verdict, legible only to us, that says our collective research agenda is a failure. That for all our articles and books and lectures and painstakingly acquired knowledge, we were unable to divert history from this trajectory, doomed like Cassandra to watch helplessly as the horror unfolds. We have managed to save no-one: not the men, women, or children of Gaza; not our colleagues who lived and taught there, nor even their libraries or ancient artifacts. What could possibly have been the purpose of all our years studying Palestine if not to avert a scenario such as this? And since we could not, then what frankly is the point of us, except to line the neglected shelves of yet another library, until it too is razed?

But in this moment of existential doubt there is the opportunity for rebirth. What has transpired in Gaza should awaken us to renew our commitment to Palestinians, to reassess the intended audiences of our work, and to refocus our intellectual energies on those questions which are most practical and morally urgent. Because what has happened in Gaza must not happen to Palestinians *ever* again. And together we can write the science of that. This future is already in the making, and I will draw positive attention to a few examples of which I am aware.

Ignored Experts

The moral bankruptcy of Western policy on Gaza over the past six months is surpassed only by its non-instrumentality. No-one I have read since October, from specialists on Israel-Palestine, to Middle East experts, to conflict scholars, to IR theorists, can figure out what the Biden administration possibly imagines to be the value of Israel's campaign – neither for Israel, nor certainly for the United States and its allies. Its own civil servants within the State Department appear equally dumbfounded and aghast; one with a doctorate in political science even resigned in protest. Many of the most respected scholars of this conflict are employed at universities and research institutions across the United States. Despite being readily at hand, the White House has refused to solicit their advice. Thus, those who have considered this context the longest and most carefully of anyone, are left out in the cold, forced to compete alongside everyone else for attention in op-eds or on Twitter threads.

The ignoring of experts on the Palestinian issue, and indeed on Middle Eastern political questions more generally, is of course hardly a new pattern, and it has seemingly engendered a complementary fatalism among scholars. At a reception a few years ago at an AALIMS conference (Association for Analytic Learning about Islam and Muslim Societies), after I had described my research agenda to some fellow attendees, a senior scholar of Middle East political science took me aside and told me with a paternalistic smile that we scholars cannot really change anything about the world. Perhaps, he said, we can read a book and better ourselves. But as for achieving real political change? Forget it! Had I been feeling satirical I might have intoned "*...ya waladii*" as an appropriately lugubrious coda. But the verse that I kept to myself was William Blake's: *expect poison from standing water*. I took my leave of him as quickly as I could. Of course, his sentiments were directly at odds with POMEPS' mission to "[increase] the public and policy impact of MENA scholarship". Nevertheless, I have heard many scholars in the community share the same sentiment in not so many words.

As a convert to political science from economics, I have never quite habituated to this defeatism. Economists, perhaps more than any other social scientists, tend to have the ear of policymakers (think of the CEA, Federal Reserve, or the recent wave of nudge units). With that kind of access and influence comes a culture of optimism, in which it is assumed that what scholars discover today

has every possibility of becoming policy tomorrow. Say what you will, such a culture imbues research with energy, excitement, urgency, even a sense of responsibility – that what a scholar does is not merely for their edification or career advancement, but may well affect the trajectory of people's lives.

Political scientists, by contrast, are generally far more pessimistic than their counterparts in the so-called dismal science. They see policy makers as self-interested actors and motivated reasoners, for whom programmatic policy is a secondary concern. These two differing views collided in my dissertation research on Palestine, where I set out to measure the impacts on Palestinian unemployment of Israeli checkpoints and barriers deployed in the West Bank. My job market paper on this subject was thorough and careful, and recently won paper of the year at PSRM. But when it came to advising policymakers, I found no audience. The Palestinian Authority (PA) has no power to dismantle Israeli checkpoints or barriers. The Israeli government, meanwhile, is at best indifferent, at worst pleased, to know that their security measures have deleterious impacts on the Palestinian economy. By the end of economics grad school, I was a sad convert to political science.

Insofar as this pessimism about policymakers holds true, it breaks the linkage from scholarship to policy making. It is also incredibly demoralizing for junior scholars. Over a month into the recent carnage, I witnessed a depressing exchange on Twitter between two seasoned researchers describing how they had left off studying the Israel-Palestine Conflict and Middle East politics after becoming frustrated that their work seemed to make no impact on American foreign policy. Based on what I have learned from interacting with scholars in the POMEPS community, I believe this is merely the tip of the iceberg of attrition as scholars either leave the field, hedge their research agenda to include areas where there is greater hope of influencing policy, or generally limit their ambitions to the boundaries of the academy. Those who persist with trying to influence policy on Palestine often face harassment and doxxing, or even disciplinary action within their institutions.

But the world can and does change, sometimes quite dramatically, thanks to the efforts of small groups of determined activists. Like others over the past months, I have found myself thinking of Frantz Fanon, who not only fought a liberation struggle, but narrated and analyzed it in real time. What is to stop scholars of the Palestinian struggle from finding and linking up with activists, and designing their research agenda around the science of liberation? Perhaps that senior scholar at AALIMS meant to say that we cannot change the world if we restrict ourselves to polite repertoires of resistance, and if we limit our ambition to influencing Western policymakers and their clients. The world, however, is so much wider than all that now.

Policy-relevant Research in a Multipolar World: the Fanonian Shift

In the foreword to *Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre identifies in Frantz Fanon's writing a profound shift in audience. Until Fanon, the colonized had written to decry the crimes of empire, to beseech the metropole, to appeal to its conscience. Even today, much scholarship and advocacy on Palestine runs along these same pre-Fanonian lines. Scholars document the horror of apartheid and occupation, hoping to move Western policymakers to intercede. Activists implore the West to impose a ceasefire in Gaza. Such behavior is characteristic of a unipolar mindset, in which we suppose that power is monopolized by a single global hegemon. Accordingly, positive change happens only if the hegemon favors it, and so we must make our case politely and appeal to their conscience or self-interest.

But in Fanon, Sartre detected a new current. Fanon inhabited a multipolar world and understood that power was not monopolized by Europeans alone. Although the old powers still featured in his writing, they appeared as objects. He was talking past them, to Algerians and his comrades across Africa fighting for decolonization. "The Third World finds *itself* and speaks to *itself*", as Sartre lucidly summarized it. Fanon chose as his audience the "wretched" and dignified them with agency. Instead of

addressing the colonial administrators, he treated activists across the Third World as the policymakers, and within his expertise as a psychiatrist and revolutionary, he offered a diagnosis of their predicament, and prescribed treatments.

Now, as we transition into a multipolar world, Fanon's audience shift carries renewed relevance. Writing exclusively for Western policymakers no longer makes sense. Their hegemony has brought death to Palestinians – fast these days in Gaza, slow in the West Bank. But now the wretched will not wait for peace and justice to be bestowed from above, the overflow of imperial munificence. Now they will vote with their feet. They will shrug off Western hegemony, forming alliances with each other and with other nodes of power. In a multipolar world, Israel's security will be the outcome, not the precondition, of peace with the Palestinians.

What will this Fanonian shift look like for POMEPS scholars, or specifically for those of us who study Palestine? In a few months, POMEPS will release an issue on Fanon, reflecting a widening recognition of the liberatory potential of his thought. In a related spirit of inquiry, I was invited a few years back to participate in a special issue of Middle East Law and Governance, organized by Diana Greenwald and edited by Wendy Pearlman, consisting of essays on Palestine centering Palestinian society. The issue, published in late 2022, drew upon original data to reflect on what Palestinians themselves say and think and want, and how through civil society they are seizing agency to advance their interests without waiting for permission from above.

As the special issue suggests, this Fanonian shift does not necessarily imply a shift in representation. Dana El Kurd and Yara Asi, both of whom are Palestinian, contributed to the special issue; but the majority of the authors were non-Palestinian. This is okay! Fanon himself was not Algerian, nor even African. Unlike Fanon, however, most of the contributing scholars were not embedded in the region, nor were they activists themselves. This is also fine, so long as scholars continue interfacing with activists to keep their science grounded. Along with my coauthor, Etienne Maynier, I contributed an essay that aimed to shed light on Palestinian civil society's vulnerability to cyber espionage, and to encourage greater vigilance. In the wake of publication, we made a deliberate effort to connect with Palestinian civil society, and ultimately a number of organizations were alerted and advised to update their security. We consciously framed the paper as speaking to Palestinian civil society as the policymakers, affirming their agency to take steps to improve their own security without needing to wait for the permission or intercession of an outside power. All of which is to say, the essence of Fanon's maneuver has nothing per se to do with your identity or what you represent, and everything to do with your target audience. Ask yourself, "whom does my science empower?"

For scholars looking to write research on the Palestinian struggle directly relevant to activists, there are at least two urgent research agendas to consider. Firstly, the atrocities of 10/7 have exposed a rift among proponents of the Palestinian struggle over what should or should not be countenanced within the tactical repertoires of resistance. Of course, international law allows for certain kinds of resistance while disallowing others; but international law itself is a figment of unipolarity, and in any case was only ever selectively enforced. In a multipolar world, the relevant concern is efficacy, not legality, and this plays directly into the skill set of political scientists. The relevant efficacy of different tactics, from protests to civil disobedience to sabotage, and all along the continuum of violence, can and should be evaluated empirically, as part of supporting evidence-based activism. And relevant to 10/7: tactics also ought to be evaluated according to the kind of future reconciliations upon which they may foreclose.

Secondly, social movements are known to collapse from infighting and betrayal, and the Palestinian movement is no different. A research agenda addressing the causal channels of internecine conflict is badly needed. Why do movements devolve into internecine fighting? How can activists detect when that is happening, and mitigate it? For example, towards this, Dana El Kurd and I are scraping the social media posts of Palestinian activists and using an LLM to detect incidents of 'cancellation' and ideological

outbidding known to fragment and demobilize, and then testing whether such divisive acts of speech correlate with movement structure. Indeed, in such a data-rich era, it makes no sense that activists should remain in the dark as to the patterns and trends of their movement, and scholars can make themselves useful in this regard.

Though the past months weigh heavily on our hearts, they also prompt us to revisit our assumptions about the role we play as political scientists of the Palestinian struggle and the Middle East more generally. The rules-based order has been dealt a terrible blow, and if we truly wish to prevent Palestinians from falling victims to such violence again, we need to look beyond the eroding unipolar order. Science is never apolitical, but as the balance of power continues to shift regionally and globally, scholars have an opportunity to correct the asymmetries with which political science of the Middle East and Palestine has tended to be written. Western policymakers now constitute just one category among many. Courting their favor now constitutes just one option among many. Ignored in the metropoles of a faltering order, we scholars can look further afield, to affirm and be affirmed by the agency of those heretofore treated as objects of history.

On Academic Integrity and Historic Responsibility:
Shrinking Spaces for Critical Debate in Germany after October 7

Jannis Julien Grimm, Freie Universität Berlin

There is no doubt that October 7 and its aftermath represent a critical juncture that has altered the horizon of the thinkable and possible. This brutal episode has introduced a sense of liminality into a structural context that was already being described as untenable, reshaping the conditions of possibility for future interactions in this conflict. References to October 7 as a point of no return for the Arab-Israeli conflict and for the (already precarious) rules-based order capture this consequential nature of the present moment.[1] Actualizing divergent historically mediated traumata, the October 7 massacre and Israel's brutal retaliation have radically anchored those living and witnessing them in the 'now' while 'the past and the future became less present'.[2] Prior imaginations of a potential peaceful future and everything that was invested into making them real seem to have lost much of their meaning. Instead, the future is now open again. In this sense, October 7 has paradoxically both opened and closed spaces of imagination and debate. While freezing the dominant debates in the post-Oslo era on institutionalized pathways towards a two-state solution, it has reignited new ones on the meaning and implications of a people's rights to exist and to resist.

This ambivalent effect has become particularly visible at academic institutions – and hardly anywhere more so than in Germany: On the one hand, the siege on Gaza and genocide accusations against Israel by the state of South Africa and various scholars of genocide[3] have put the need for regional and historical conflict expertise as guidance for German foreign policy decisions into sharp relief. On the other hand, selective empathy, symptoms of moral panic, and a violent discourse marked by the disciplining of critical voices and a wrangling over terminology to describe the suffering inflicted on civilians have hindered scholars in their ability to provide much needed context and analytical depth to a highly emotionalized and polarizing public debate.

At German universities, where discussions about the normative and practical implications of unprecedented violent escalation ought to take place, the spaces for critical debates had been shrinking even before October 7. The Middle East and North Africa as a region may have experienced a surge of academic attention in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. But scholarship on the conflict in Palestine and Israel has steadily decreased, as discussing Israeli violations of international law has become a discursive minefield that few dare to enter. Since the vicious campaign against Muriel Asseburg, one of Germany's most distinguished Middle East experts in early 2023,[4] many researchers have refrained from speaking publicly about Israel/Palestine. The demarcation of limits for acceptable critique of the siege on Gaza, including by influential public intellectuals,[5] have only reinforced this trend.

This has exposed the few who still do even more. As I write this article, I too find myself weighing words carefully. That is not to say that no critical discussions are taking place at academic institutions anymore. They are, as they always have. But many scholars have retreated to counterhegemonic and subaltern spaces outside of the limelight to argue without fear of repercussion. Both associations and private individuals have collected a worrying number of incident where researchers and academic faculty were limited to freely share and discuss their research and ideas related to Palestine and Israel.[6] The documented repercussions range from retaliatory discharge to the suspension of funding, to the cancellation of events and deplatforming of critical voices. Most prominently, the Max Planck Society terminated its contract with renowned anthropologist Ghassan Hage over a controversial poem he had posted on social media. Other examples include from the cancellation of movie screenings in solidarity with Palestinians, the postponing of events with thematic or geographic reference to the

Middle East, and the disinvitation of speakers for their political stances. Tensions between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli student bodies have also intensified. This has caused the suppression of student events in solidarity with Gaza on campus, setting a dangerous precedent for the securitization of protest at academic institutions. After the brutal attack on a Jewish and Pro-Israeli student activist, the Berlin senate is now planning to reauthorize universities to impose penalties up to the exmatriculation of students under certain provisions – a prerogative previously abolished in a 2021 Higher Education reform. Proposed in a fast-track procedure, the draft law has been criticized for potentially providing a gateway to policing students' political participation. Given its vague formulation, critics fear that the law might provide a pretext to penalize all sorts of contentious activities, from the disruption of events, to protest on campus, to controversial posters and public statements.[7]

Cultural institutions, traditional hosts of academic events, and media outlets, have also supported deplatforming – if only to avoid becoming part of a turf war, for which they possess neither the stamina nor expertise. In their efforts to avoid debates on Gaza, however, many of them overshoot the mark: In the past months, it has become difficult to find venues for events that have something to do with the Middle East (including on issues totally unrelated to Palestine or Israel). Likewise, it has never been harder for conflict scholars, courted by media when it came to writing about Ukraine or Syria, to publish their expertise on an ongoing war. Gatekeeping has complicated an honest discussion of Germany's direct involvement in Israeli war efforts – and potentially war crimes – through its diplomatic support and weapons deliveries. But it has also precluded secondary analyses of the damage done to Germany's credibility by its unconditional stance with Israel and its opposition to a ceasefire.[8]

New discursive frontiers

This sharply curtailed public sphere has caused a concentration of German debates on Gaza on questions of legitimacy and discussions of international norms and provisions for legitimate warfare, while marginalizing or ostracizing those who dare to note that these guiding principles are clearly not guiding warfare in Gaza. Azmi Bishara has aptly captured this disjuncture between abstract debates and empirical realities in his critique of Jürgen Habermas' controversial intervention into public discourses on Gaza. Instead of criticizing the brutal war that is actually being waged, commentators have overwhelmingly argued about a hypothetical war in Gaza, which is in full compliance with international humanitarian law. Drawing its legitimacy from a principled right to self-defense, this ideal version of Israel's war in Gaza can be determined as proportionate and just, regardless of its actual impacts, and independent of the civilian death toll, the scale and scope of aerial bombardment, and the number of reports of war crimes committed by Israeli soldiers. Similar principled justifications, detached from brutal realities of this war, are also at the basis of efforts to deny or relativize the war crimes committed by Hamas operatives in the Kibbutzim and at the Nova Festival. Among German academics, however, such attempts have remained marginal, at best.

In these discourses, October 7 has functioned as what Laclau has referred to as an "empty" or "floating" signifier,[9] a symbolic container that is filled with a variety of contingent meanings by contending actors. These mutually exclusive ascriptions have become symbolic markers of antagonism in a variety of debates, including on the hierarchization of victimhood and human life, on the threshold of genocide, and on the normative boundaries of legitimate warfare and resistance: Was October 7 an act of resistance or antisemitic terrorism? Is the Israeli siege on Gaza a justified war of self-defense or "a textbook case of genocide"[10]? Free Palestine from Israel occupation or from Hamas?

How these questions are answered is more than a matter of personal opinion. It has immediate and tangible consequences by inspiring different solidarities, delineating political camps, and constituting the limits of acceptable responses, including at academic institution. Laclau describes this as the emergence of an "internal frontier"[11]

which conditions what aspects of the social reality unfolding in Gaza are perceived and addressed, and which ones are neglected. October 7 may have created a need for differentiated debate. But amid this dichotomization of public discourse, there has been little room for addressing these questions with the necessary analytical depth.

Scholars of Middle East politics in particular have felt a heavy pressure to position themselves publicly. This pressure has only intensified with the calls by prominent politicians and intellectuals to unequivocally stand with the Israel in its war against Hamas. Many academic institutions have internally communicated unease with one-sided declarations of solidarity. Publicly, however, they heeded these calls to avoid being singled out in a public discourse that has put the refusal to take sides on a level with tacit opposition against Israel. In doing so, they not only solidified a problematic binary depiction of the conflict in Gaza, which reduces its empirical and moral complexity. They also undermined the essential role of universities as spaces of knowledge exchange and dialogue among diverse perspectives, in defiance of partisan logics.

From prejudgement towards explanation

Working against oppression constitutes a moral imperative for researchers, but fundamentally scholarship is not about taking sides. The closure of discursive spaces and the public rush to judgement highlight the risks when scholars turn advocates. Academic interventions cannot stop at value judgement. It should question such simplifications of social reality and situate the unfolding events in Gaza in larger conflict trajectories and logics of violence. Contextualization and comparison – to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, to the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, etc. – does not deny the uniqueness of the current moment. It merely shows that not all the dynamics at play are extraordinary: Conflict scholars have shown time and again how many armed actors use shocking violence and terror tactics as central elements of an asymmetric war of attrition against an superior force.[12] They have identified the targeting of hospitals as a particularly worrying signal of civilian victimization in a variety of conflicts.[13] They have demonstrated the devastating effects of parental harm on victimized communities.[14] And they have illustrated how conflict parties aiming to dominate the public narrative come to treat warfare as a performance for their respective audiences, to the detriment of civilian populations.[15] Through this thematic expertise, social scientists are uniquely situated to explain why critical junctures are interpreted in so vastly different ways, and to highlight the structural conditions in which the images of bulldozers toppling the walls and fences around Gaza on October 7 were instinctively met with elation by people in Gaza and by Arab populations, while they horrified audiences in the Global North.

Such differences can partly be explained by proximity, which has exposed Arab populations to a much greater extent of psychological stress[16] – a social effect that mirrors the higher emotional impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Germany and Eastern European states in February 2022. But they also result from disparate perceptions of the status quo ante October 7: While described by many commentators as a frozen conflict that had entered the stage of conflict management, for Palestinians this label did not describe the reality of life under occupation and continued threat of settler violence. Likewise, how the "Peace to Prosperity" initiative and the gradual Arab-Israeli normalization process were marketed as effective steps towards peace, hardly resonated with Arab publics, where 81% doubt the seriousness of the United States' commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state.[17] These divergences crucially set the stage and provided the resonance structure for the Hamas attack on October 7. They also continue to shape the responsivity of conflict parties to international interventions into the ongoing war, and to proposals for the day after which all fall short of providing a pathway to a Palestinian state – a precondition for sustainable peace.

As stated by Wendy Pearlman, the tendency "to divorce politics from its social context feeds misunderstanding and misguided policies."[18] Whether we like them or not, reasoned assessments of available options and constraints drive and condition armed conflict – and explanation

cannot be equated with justification, as too often happens in our toxic discourse.[19] Their understanding is essential for an informed debate about policies that could end the slaughter in Gaza without perpetuating violence potentials in the future. Understanding without justifying, however, has become increasingly harder with the polarization of public discourse. At German universities, there has been little room for discussing the multiple realities through which October 7 and its aftermath are experienced. Interviews I conducted in the frame of my research on the transformative impact of October 7 highlight how Jewish Israelis in the diaspora were reminded of antisemitic pogroms in Eastern Europe by the murder and abduction of entire families, and by the participation of civilians in these atrocities. These tales of violence are deeply engrained in Israel's collective memory.[20] For Palestinians, in turn, the death and destruction brought by Israeli bombardments and evacuation orders recalled prior IDF campaigns on Gaza as well as the horrors the Nakba – a historic analogy that has only become more tangible with the forced displacement of a staggering 85 per cent of Gaza's population. But pointing out the necessity to acknowledge both of these realities has subjected scholars to allegations of "academic antisemitism" and of trivializing the massacres of October 7.[21]

Talking about Gaza, talking about ourselves

In some ways, the debate in Germany is not even about Israelis and Palestinians. It has centered on the implications of Germany's "Staatsräson". Formulated as a core pillar of German state doctrine by Angela Merkel at the Knesset in 2008, the term describes the recognition that Germany, in light of the Shoah, bears a collective responsibility to protect and safeguard Jewish life and thus affirms its commitment to fight antisemitism domestically and abroad. In arguments premised on this doctrine, the people who are starving and dying in Gaza are merely a sidenote, as the situation in the Middle East is reduced to the state of Israel and those threatening it. In other words: "The only actor in Gaza is Hamas. And if Hamas is not the only actor, then the alternative actor must be Israel. In either narrative, the Palestinian people disappear."[22]

The collective ignorance of the catastrophe unfolding in Gaza resulting from this self-referential debate is perfectly exemplified by the outrage over declarations of solidarity with Palestine at the 2024 Berlinale festival. While most Germans reject the Israeli war on Gaza as disproportionate,[23] commentators not only attacked filmmakers as antisemites for using words like "apartheid" and "genocide" in their speeches. They also scolded their audience for applauding and not speaking up. "You were there. And you did not object," one prominent publicist wrote in his critique of the Berlinale audience,[24] failing to see how these words effectively captured how Germany's official stance on Gaza has been perceived globally.

Notably, critics are not denying Germany's historic responsibility. What they challenge is the German government's exclusive authority to define the boundaries of this responsibility, and the fact that it has made the state of Israel its principal referent, thus neglecting the multiplicity of Jewish voices. They furthermore criticize that the sedimentation of this specific understanding of state reason has served to externalize responsibility for modern forms of antisemitism. As Klaus Holz has recently argued, "we prove our anti-antisemitism by focusing on Israel-related antisemitism. [..] From this follows that being pro-Israeli is eo ipso anti-anti-Semitic."[25] This premise may be theoretically questionable and factually incorrect. But it undergirds several resolutions to set binding limits for the critique of Israel, such as the Bundestag's BDS resolution and the adoption of the controversial IHRA definition by the ministers of education and cultural affairs of all German states.

Finally, critics posit that the focus of German memory culture on the extermination of Europe's Jews prevents the recognition of other atrocities – past or present – caused, facilitated, or tolerated by Germany. This critique of memory culture as the culprit of Germany's moral blindness when it comes to the Middle East resonates with a controversy about the uniqueness of the Holocaust that has polarized the German academy for years, and has been termed as "Historikerstreit 2.0".[26] While the first Historikerstreit concerned the comparability of

the Holocaust and Stalinist terror in the late 1980s, its relation to non-European and colonial history has been at the center of this second iteration. When the German announcement to intervene at the International Court of Justice on behalf of Israel actualized this debate, this turf war became the terrain that those contextualizing and historicizing the war on Gaza found themselves in.

A solipsistic sense of moral superiority

Some observers have pathologized the vicious attacks against these authors as symptoms of a "national guiltwashing" in which compunction merely functions as a pretense to cover up authoritarian policies in the present.[27] These narratives are not fully convincing though. They misrepresent the fragile relation of Germans to their past as mere strategic calculus, and neglect the genuine, albeit selective, sense of responsibility that is deeply engrained in German society. Furthermore, they inadvertently echo revisionist calls to end "guilt culture" by which Germany's radical right has sought to trivialize Nazi crimes and relativize Germany's responsibility for its past. This explains why the "guilt" argument has been met with overwhelming rejection including from the antiimperialist German left.

A more convincing argument, by contrast, may be that of Frank Trentmann, who has argued in his history of "The Germans, 1942-2022" that Germans have always had a "stunning capacity for self-deception" that shaped how they were able to repress and disregard their role in the fascist destruction of Europa.[28] The pride of having overcome a dark past, which developed out of the successful postwar reconstruction and the institutionalization of a much-lauded memory culture, may have prevented broader reflection on the questions what lessons we want to derive from our past. It may also prevent Germans from seeing that it is currently not incorporating the role of moral paragon that it has grown used to over the past decades. Yet, exploring this question has proven a tightrope walk for academics in Germany. When drawing on analytical vocabulary that has been employed to describe National Socialist crimes, scholars have to fear accusations of relativizing those very crimes. Like prior cataclysmic events, in time, this critical juncture will produce an analytical language that can aptly capture the essence of the present moment. Until then, the use of historically shaped terminology is not only natural but necessary to make sense of a reality that is hard to grasp. This is particularly the case when concepts – from colonialism to genocidal intent, to apartheid – have a solid foundation in political theory, peace and conflict studies, and international law.

Threats to the academic integrity

In a recent essay, Samuli Schielke has noted, "We are biased in war, we are more moved by the suffering of some people than others. That is difficult to change. But a minimum level of decency demands that we do not forbid others to feel sad and angry about the killing of so many people."[29] Likewise, as scholars we are situated in different intellectual histories. We find analytical lenses and concepts more or less convincing, and more or less transferrable from one specific historical context to another. But whether concepts, such as settler colonialism, genocide, and apartheid, but also antisemitism or terrorism, are productive lenses to study October 7 and the siege on Gaza must remain the subject of argumentation. Doubt and dispute, rather than prejudgment and premature affirmation or condemnation are at the heart of social sciences.

At the very least, academic communities must thus resist those who are denouncing the mere analytical use of specific concepts as a marker of ideology or political identity. Rather than "exighophobia, the fear of socio-historical explanation,"[30] what is needed is argument in good faith about the value of these perspectives. Ultimately, the question whether the Israeli everyday structural violence of Israel's occupation[31] amount to the crime of apartheid and whether Hamas' atrocities or Israeli policy in Gaza qualify as genocidal will likely be answered by international courts that were founded precisely to make that assessment. Until then, it should be possible to analyze parallels where they impose themselves and

highlight divergences where historical categories do not fit. Controversial concepts, which have already exposed sharp divisions in the field of violence and genocide Studies,[32] may remain the object of contention, but their discussion should not be off limits.

Furthermore, we ought to revisit the historical origins of these concepts – in Germany and elsewhere. The Holocaust, Porajmos, the Holodomor, or Germany's ethnic cleansing of the Slavic people were undoubtedly incommensurable crimes. As were the European colonial projects, the racial segregation regimes in the United States, or Apartheid in South Africa. History does not repeat itself – at least, not in exactly the same shape. But their idiosyncratic uniqueness of these and other violent episodes must not prevent scholars from exploring continuities to contemporary forms of displacement, discrimination, and devastation. As Jürgen Zimmerer has argued, rather than asking ourselves whether past crimes were unique, the question should be *which* of their aspects were,[33] and which ones can give us a better understanding of violent dynamics in the present. Comprehension of the atrocities of October 7 and the victimization of Gaza's civilian population requires a thorough reconstruction of their enabling conditions and anticipated consequences. Some of these parameters may indeed have historic counterparts.

Germany, with its commitment to a value-driven and feminist foreign policy has a special responsibility to tolerate such critical projects. We ought to embrace them as opportunities to question ourselves and ask whether our heritage, rather than giving us a better awareness, might not actually make us blind to some of the most abhorrent forms of oppression of our times. German universities, with their legacy of facilitating past genocides and their post-war commitment to independent and critical inquiry, in turn, have a responsibility to provide and protect the spaces where such reflections can take place. The must enable scholars to compare and contextualize, and to intervene into public discourses, free from accusations and repercussions. Both are currently not living up to their responsibilities.

Endnotes

1 Agnès Callamard, "Gaza and the End of the Rules-Based Order," *Foreign Affairs*, February 15, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/gaza-and-end-rules-based-order?utm_medium=social&utm_source=bluesky_posts&utm_campaign=blue_soc.

2 Rima Majed, "Living Revolution, Financial Collapse and Pandemic in Beirut: Notes on Temporality, Spatiality, and 'Double Liminality,'" *Middle East Law and Governance* 12, no. 3 (December 17, 2020): 310, https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-12030003.

3 The Journal of Genocide research has published a discussion of the central arguments made by these scholars in its forum "Israel-Palestine: Atrocity Crimes and the Crisis of Holocaust and Genocide Studies," https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjgr20/0/0.

4 Amir Tibon, "Why Israel Is Attacking Germany's Top Middle East Expert," *Haaretz*, July 10, 2023, sec. Israel News, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-07-10/ty-article/.highlight/why-israel-is-attacking-germanys-top-middle-east-expert/00000189-3e8f-d145-a1e9-3fff6a260000.

5 Azmi Bishara, "The War on Gaza Politics, Ethics, and International Law," Public Lecture (Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, November 28, 2023), 8, https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/Lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/azmi-bishara-lecture-the-war-on-gaza-politics-ethics-and-international-law-en.pdf.

6 See "German Academics Publish 'Archive of Silence' Listing Instances of Censorship on Palestine," BRICUP, accessed March 8, 2024, https://bricup.org.uk/article/german-academics-publish-archive-of-silence-listing-instances-of-censorship-on-palestine/; Nora Ragab, "No Country for Palestinians: A Chronicle of Suppression and Resistance in Germany," Untold, February 16, 2024, https://untoldmag.org/no-country-for-palestinians-a-chronicle-of-suppression-and-resistance-in-germany/; "University Repression since October 7, 2023" (2024), https://www.zippyshare.day/skoiO7UXzup79A3/preview.

7 Eva Murašov, "Uni-Präsidenten Befürchten Willkürjustiz," *Tagesspiegel*, March 11, 2024, https://archive.is/NI3uc; Landesastenkonferenz - LAK, "Gegen Die Wiedereinführung Des Ordnungsrecht Über Die Studierenden in Berlin! – 17. BerlHG Novelle Verhindern," Referent_innenRat der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, March 12, 2024, https://www.refrat.de.

8 See Jannis Grimm and Stephan Roll, "Human Rights Dialogue with Arab States: Argumentation Patterns of Authoritarian Regimes as a Challenge for a Values-Based Foreign Policy," 2023, https://doi.org/10.18449/2023C41.

9 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London, UK: Verso, 1996), 36–46; Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London, UK; New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 129 ff.

10 Raz Segal, "A Textbook Case of Genocide," Jewish Currents, March 9, 2024, https://jewishcurrents.org/a-textbook-case-of-genocide.

11 Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 74.

[12] Martyn Frampton, "The Moral Parameters of Violence: The Case of the Provisional IRA," *Journal of British Studies* 61, no. 1 (January 2022): 138–61, https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2021.122.

[13] Regine Schwab, Werner Krause, and Samer Massoud, "The Bombing of Hospitals and Local Violence Dynamics in Civil Wars: Evidence from Syria," HiCN Working Paper Series, November 28, 2023, https://hicn.org/working-paper/403/.

[14] Rebekka Friedman and Hanna Ketola, "Violations of the Heart: Parental Harm in War and Oppression," *Review of International Studies* 50, no. 2 (March 2024): 393–412, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210523000499.

[15] Ora Szekely, *Syria Divided: Patterns of Violence in a Complex Civil War* (Columbia University Press, 2023).000 lives and displaced over half of the country's population since 2011—is an enormously complex conflict. The combatants include a wide array of state and nonstate forces, both Syrian and international. Adding to the war's complexity, its many participants understand and explain the war in a range of different ways. For some, it is a fight for dignity and democracy; for others, a sectarian or communal conflict; still others see it as a fight against terrorism or a consequence of foreign interference.Ora Szekely draws on sources including in-depth interviews, conflict data, and propaganda distributed through social media to examine how these competing narratives have shaped the course of the conflict. Mapping out the broad patterns of violence among combatants and against civilians, Szekely argues that the competition to control the narrative in the eyes of important audiences at home and abroad has not only influenced the choices of participants, it has also—shaped in part by the use of social media—led many to treat warfare as a kind of performance.An insightful analysis of the forces fueling a brutal civil war, Syria Divided offers new perspectives on the performative aspects of violence, the weaponization of social media, and key features of twenty-first-century warfare.","ISBN":"978-0-231-55598-2","note":"page: 296 Pages","publisher":"Columbia University Press","source":"Columbia University Press","title":"Syria Divided: Patterns of Violence in a Complex Civil War","title-short":"Syria Divided","author":[{„family":"Szekely","given":"Ora"}],"issued":{„date-parts":[[„2023",8]]}}}],"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}

[16] Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, "Arab Public Opinion about the Israeli War on Gaza" (Doha: Doha Institute, January 10, 2024), https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/Lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/arab-opinion-war-on-gaza-full-report-en.pdf.

[17] Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

[18] Wendy Pearlman, "Putting Palestinian Agency First," *Middle East Law and Governance* 14, no. 3 (October 14, 2022): 294, https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-14030003.

[19] Dana El Kurd, "Support for Violent Versus Non-Violent Strategies in the Palestinian Territories," *Middle East Law and Governance* 14, no. 3 (October 14, 2022): 331–65, https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-14030005.

[20] Meron Mendel, "Retraumatisierung einer ganzen Gesellschaft," tagesschau.de, January 14, 2024, https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/asien/israel-hamas-terror-angriff-100.html.

[21] Felix Klein, "Akademischer Antisemitismus: Hierarchien des Hasses; Felix Klein," *FAZ.NET*, February 20, 2024, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/karriere-hochschule/akademischer-antisemitismus-hierarchien-des-hasses-felix-klein-19531381.html.

[22] Wendy Pearlman, "The Erasure of Palestinian Society," *New Lines Magazine* (blog), February 20, 2024, https://newlinesmag.com/argument/the-erasure-of-palestinian-society/.

[23] RND, "ARD-Deutschlandtrend: Der Hälfte der Deutschen geht Israels Vorgehen in Gaza zu weit," Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland, March 7, 2024, https://www.rnd.de/politik/ard-deutschlandtrend-der-haelfte-der-deutschen-geht-israels-vorgehen-in-gaza-zu-weit-NBGRU2K5VJNHVL2WLMDTFQK64I.html.

[24] Michel Friedman, "Michel Friedman zum Hass auf der Berlinale: Danke für nichts," Süddeutsche.de, February 27, 2024, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/michel-friedman-zum-hass-auf-der-berlinale-danke-fuer-nichts-1.6401863.

[25] Klaus Holz and Jens Bisky, "In Der Sisyphos-Situation," Soziopolis, February 27, 2024, https://www.soziopolis.de/in-der-sisyphos-situation.html.

[26] Michael Rothberg, "Lived Multidirectionality: 'Historikerstreit 2.0' and the Politics of Holocaust Memory," *Memory Studies* 15, no. 6 (December 1, 2022): 1316–29, https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980221133511.

[27] Omar Sabbour and Students for Palestine, "German Guiltwashing in Times of Genocide," Al Jazeera, February 27, 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/2/27/german-guiltwashing-in-times-of-genocide.

[28] Frank Trentmann, *Out of the Darkness: The Germans, 1942-2022* (London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2023).

[29] Samuli Schielke, "Der Skandal um Ghassan Hage," Zenith, February 23, 2024, https://magazin.zenith.me/de/gesellschaft/forschung-deutschland-und-der-gaza-krieg.

[30] Ghassan Hage, "Gaza and the Coming Age of the 'Warrior,'" 2023, https://allegralaboratory.net/gaza-and-the-coming-age-of-the-warrior/.

[31] Amjad Iraqi, "How the News Cycle Misses the Predominant Violence in Israel-Palestine," +972 Magazine, February 2, 2024, https://www.972mag.com/structural-violence-media-israel-palestine/.

[32] Martin Shaw, "Inescapably Genocidal," *Journal of Genocide Research* 0, no. 0 (2024): 1–5, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2023.2300555.

[33] Jürgen Zimmerer, "Decent People Must Take a Stand!," Qantara, February 5, 2024, https://qantara.de/en/article/gaza-war-challenges-germanys-culture-remembrance-decent-people-must-take-stand.

Supporting plausible acts of genocide:
Red lines and the failure of German Middle Eastern Studies

Benjamin Schuetze, Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (ABI) Freiburg, Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), Germany

Since the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on January 26, 2024, it is official that Germany, the perpetrator of the largest genocide ever deliberately executed, is one of the primary supporters of what the principal judicial organ of the United Nation has described as plausibly amounting to genocide.[1] German support for Israel's onslaught on Gaza stretches from an intervention in front of the ICJ; a 10-fold increase of German military exports to Israel,[2] including tank ammunition;[3] an unparalleled crackdown on pro-Palestine protests due to 'possible antisemitism';[4] the decision to not approve new funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in Gaza in light of unsubstantiated Israeli claims that employees had aided Hamas;[5] and the assurance of unconditional support for Israel by effectively the entire German political elite – as expressed in the unanimous parliamentary approval of a motion that assures Israel of Germany's 'full solidarity and any support needed'.[6]

It is hard to overestimate the scale of human suffering that Germany's unconditional backing of Israel has enabled and caused, and continues to do. First and foremost, Germany has willingly made itself complicit in the killing of – at the time of writing – at least 31,045 Palestinians, including more than 12,300 children, in the destruction of more than half of Gaza's homes and all of Gaza's universities, and in the forced displacement of more than 85% of the total population of Gaza.[7] It would take four times the space of this essay to merely spell out the first names of all Palestinian children killed by the Israeli military over the past months. While German political and military support for Israel is nothing new, the audacity with which German politicians and members of the public legitimise said support with claims of moral authority, even in the face of overwhelming evidence of Israeli war crimes, and criminalize any criticism of those crimes, is new. The latter include indiscriminate attacks on civilians, deliberate starvation, looting, torturing and genocidal language.[8] Evidence for it is abundantly available for everybody to see, including via videos, tweets and testimonies by Israeli soldiers, who proudly record themselves blowing up Palestinian homes in honour of the birthdays of their loved ones, and who use tanks to deliberately run over civilians alive, mutilate dead bodies, and shoot unarmed civilians.[9]

This is remarkable because for decades Germany has celebrated itself for its culture of remembrance and its acknowledgment of responsibility for the Holocaust. However, Germany's culture of remembrance is first and foremost about Germany itself and about desired self-understandings. German atonement for the Holocaust did not emerge from, nor does it go hand in hand with, a full and unconditional embrace of international human rights, regardless of the current government's claims of pursuing a value-based foreign policy. The ongoing colonial amnesia and widespread ignorance vis-à-vis 'Germany's other genocide' – the killing of 75,000 Herero and Nama in today's Namibia – are a case in point.[10] Germany's almost exclusive focus on the Holocaust has enabled blatant ignorance of German colonial crimes. Insistence on the Holocaust's singularity or exceptionality – while emotionally understandable given its monstrous scale – is analytically problematic, as it takes the Holocaust out of 'normal history', separating it, as remarked by Raz Segal, from 'the piles of bodies and destroyed cultures that European imperialism and colonialism […] had left around the world in the preceding few centuries,'[11] and ignoring the prevalence of genocidal tendencies in Germany long before 1933, as well as racist continuities that stretch until today. Also, as stated by Michael Wildt, it 'blocks an appropriate culture of remembrance, which should be open and 'multidirectional.'[12]

The dominant understanding of the Holocaust is centred around the elimination of six million European Jews. This narrative sidelines and relegates to lesser importance the

German mass killing of people with disabilities, LGBT people, and Soviet prisoners of war, as well as the Romani genocide (*porajmos*).[13] This narrow definition of the Holocaust is a crucial first step in constructing Israel, the self-proclaimed homeland of all Jews worldwide, as 'the Holocaust's happy ending for Germans,' as pointedly stated by German Jewish journalist Emily Dische-Becker.[14] For German political elites, Israel appears to constitute a source of redemption. Anything that challenges this and/or Israel's own supposed moral authority might potentially open the floodgates to the uncomfortable realisation that antisemitism, racism and genocidal tendencies have shaped and continue to shape German politics much more profoundly than merely for the twelve years of Nazi rule.

The main character in Germany's culture of remembrance are not the victims of past German crimes, but Germany itself, and desired self-understandings that revolve around German innocence, civilisation and moral authority. These are protected at all costs. While the monstrosity of the Holocaust is clearly irreconcilable with this, the open acknowledgment of said monstrosity and the almost exclusive centring of Germany's institutionalised culture of remembrance around it has bizarrely been turned into just another sign of Germany's moral superiority.[15] The process of doing so requires simple answers to complex questions, such as the mentioned narrow definition of the Holocaust, the equation of Judaism with Israel, and the repression of dissenting Jewish voices, as well as various acts of silencing, open disregard and omission, such as the mentioned colonial amnesia. Together, they facilitate easily implementable political acts and rituals that supposedly provide continuous evidence of Germany's moral superiority, in reality however merely illustrate the extent to which German society and politics is deeply German-centric and marked by structural racism.

In this context, a number of red lines have emerged. Their combined effect is the continuous upholding of images of German redemption, civilisation and moral authority, irrespective of German support for what could plausibly amount to genocide. Since the October 7 Hamas attacks, these red lines have solidified at lightning speed, and are increasingly reminiscent of authoritarian contexts. One such red line is the use of well-established academic terminology, such as 'genocide', 'Nakba', 'settler colonialism' and 'apartheid'. Comparisons of ongoing Israeli violence to the war crimes committed by Nazi Germany constitute another marked red line, as illustrated by the cases of Masha Gessen and Ghassan Hage.[16] Further, observation of a Palestinian right to resist Israeli occupation, and support, but also already merely indicating understanding for the non-violent Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) movement can be added as a third distinct red line. A fourth one concerns the question of contextualisation. Contextualisation, which is distinctively different from legitimisation, is arguably to quite some extent what social science research fundamentally is about. German mainstream discourse, however, not only insists on framing Israel's ongoing horrific war on Gaza within the context of Hamas's violent assault on October 7, it effectively seeks to legitimise the former by continuously centring the latter. This becomes all the more problematic as the insistence on the need for contextualisation is deployed selectively. References to the context of decades of Israeli occupation, within which both the Hamas attacks and the ongoing war on Gaza occur(red), are thus mostly avoided.

The upholding of these red lines and the associated discursive protection of German moral authority in the face of active political and material support for Israeli war crimes draws on a number of highly disturbing intersecting dynamics. These are based on the dangerous and factually incorrect equation of Judaism with Israel, and include the externalisation of German antisemitism onto Arabs, the criminalisation of pro-Palestine activism and Palestinian identity, the normalisation of Islamophobia, and a full-scale attack on postcolonial approaches. When it comes to responding to these worrying trends, there is no beating around the bush: we must state directly that German Middle Eastern Studies as a discipline has failed. Despite better knowledge and safe job contracts (at least in the case of the not insignificant number of Germany-based professors of Islamic law, Arabic language, and history, geography, economics and politics of the Middle

East and North Africa), German Middle Eastern Studies excels in acquiescence, silence and/or absence from public engagement. This is not to say that individual scholars have not publicly taken a principled stance – but the field as a whole has failed its most existential challenge.

Jannis Grimm has argued that, in Germany, showing empathy for both Israeli and Palestinian victims of political violence 'is a tricky balancing act', and insisted that, in light of increasingly polarising debates, 'universities must remain places of dialogue'.[17] The November 2023 statement 'Principles of solidarity,' in which Nicole Deitelhoff, Rainer Forst, Klaus Günther and Jürgen Habermas expressed the narrow limits of their solidarity, by fundamentally refusing to even engage ongoing discussions among genocide scholars about whether the legal standards for genocide have been met,[18] was followed, in early December, by a much more balanced analysis by Hanna Pfeifer and Irene Weipert-Fenner.[19] Both this article and the one by Grimm are important contributions, but primarily argue in favour of a more differentiated and balanced discussion. While both articles were, in the German context, much needed interventions, the ICJ decision and the escalating death toll among Palestinians warrant more critical assessments. The arguably most powerful latest intervention by a Germany-based Middle Eastern Studies scholar dates back to summer 2023, when Muriel Asseburg, in an interview, observed that many Palestinians accuse 'the West' of double standards, insisted on the legitimacy of certain forms of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation, and expressed her understanding of BDS.[20] While Asseburg immediately became the target of a defamation campaign, including accusations of antisemitism by the Israeli embassy, she, luckily, also received significant official and public backing. Whether she would have received such support after October 7 is troublingly unclear.

It is clear that public interventions that challenge the above-mentioned red lines come at a cost. Given the scale of the dynamics that we are currently bearing witness to, each and every one of us, however, must do more to resist. This counts all the more for Germany-based Middle Eastern Studies scholars and/or political scientists, including this author, but especially for those on permanent contracts. This is not to say that all of the aforementioned dynamics can easily be overturned by a discipline that is seen as exotic by the mainstream and, when compared to others, remains rather small. Still, the relative silence of Germany-based professors of Middle Eastern studies, especially politics, is deeply troubling. It testifies to a widespread tendency to remain passive, to best avoid the topic of Israel/Palestine, and to certainly not seek to proactively impact public debate by adopting what may be seen as a controversial position.

But if an ICJ decision about the plausibility of Israel committing genocide does not make a scholar publicly speak out against unconditional German support for Israel, what will? What purpose does a state-funded expert in Arabic language have, who remains stuck in the ivory tower when politicians representing that state contemplate the generic prohibition of Arabic slogans at public protests?[21] What purpose has a renowned scholar of Ottoman and/or Arab history who fails to publicly speak out against the open distortion and/or negation of simple historical facts in state-funded exhibitions?[22] What purpose have scholars working on decoloniality, who are only decolonial in funding applications, or selectively on those topics where there is no controversy to be feared? What about an expert of MENA politics, who remains silent when politicians from the biggest German political party suggest withdrawing citizenship from anti-Semites, but in doing so only mean those with dual citizenship, i.e. Arab immigrants?[23] There is no lack of expertise, there is a lack of courage to take a principled stance against the large-scale dehumanisation of Arabs and Muslims, and the ongoing mass murder of Palestinians.

Given the extent to which almost all German political parties have adopted Islamophobic and/or anti-Arab discourses,[24] public engagement by Germany-based scholars studying Islam, the Arab world, and/or postcolonial politics is not anymore an option, but a duty. Resistance must occur on a number of fronts, including defending academic freedoms much more proactively, and imparting knowledge about the Arab world to German

society at large, as well as to politicians and decision-makers in particular, who far too often still lack even basic knowledge of politics in the Arab world and orientalise it. The public showing of exhibitions about the Nakba,[25] and the establishment of more school and university exchange programs with the Arab world are only some examples of what is highly needed.

A key reason behind the silence of German Middle Eastern Studies is the widespread but incorrect and dangerous equation of Israel with Judaism and, relatedly, of antizionism with antisemitism, and the concomitant levels of self-censorship when it comes to publicly discussing Israel/Palestine. The German parliament's designation of the BDS movement as anti-Semitic and public adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism – as opposed to the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism,[26] which provides much clearer guidance to identify and fight antisemitism – have heavily restricted freedom of speech on Israel/Palestine.[27] With its heavy focus on Israel, the IHRA definition helps gradually redefine antisemitism so that Germany can now, in light of its unconditional support for Israel and in light of initiatives like Strike Germany, bizarrely portray itself as victim of antisemitism.[28] Contrary to this, the state-condoned repression of Jewish voices in solidarity with Palestine however only barely conceals the German establishment's own antisemitism.[29]

Antisemitism is thriving in Germany. For instance, 'Jew' is widely used as an insult in schoolyards.[30] Last year it was leaked that the Deputy Minister-President of Bavaria circulated an anti-Semitic pamphlet in his school days. Despite this, his party was re-elected with an increase of the vote. According to official figures, 83% of recorded violent anti-Semitic acts in Germany in 2022 were committed by the far-right.[31] It goes without saying that antisemitism must be fought no matter the context. If, however, critique of Israeli politics is almost automatically met with accusations of antisemitism, something is seriously going wrong.[32] This development has reached a point whereby the German mainstream has increasingly adopted the generic labelling of any critic of the occupation as anti-Semites, similar to, among other actors, the Israeli far-right.[33] It is hard to top the absurdity of non-Jewish German bureaucrats accusing Jews in solidarity with Palestine of antisemitism.[34]

Besides the active silencing of Jewish voices in the name of fighting antisemitism, German authorities have gone so far as to enable Berlin schools to prohibit mere indicators of Palestinian identity, such as the wearing of the *Kuffiyah* and the use of 'free Palestine' stickers or slogans.[35] The police in North Rhine-Westphalia started circulating an information brochure to regional schools, in which it states that accusing Israel of committing a genocide may constitute hate speech and may thus be indictable as a criminal offense.[36] If the ICJ was based 200 km further east of The Hague, its judges might face legal issues. In Germany, using well-established academic terminology, quoting the principal judicial organ of the UN and/or merely being Palestinian is widely interpreted as support for terrorism and/or antisemitism. According to an initiative for research on antisemitism based at the University of Trier, 'Stop the genocide in Gaza' is an anti-Semitic slogan.[37] Local Berlin authorities introduced a brochure to school programs that trivialises the Nakba. An exhibition on the establishment of Israel, officially supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism, claims that the primary reason for Palestinian expulsion and flight in 1948 was 'general fear of the threat of war,'[38] instead of deliberate ethnic cleansing, as is historically proven.[39] Among other places, the library of the University of Freiburg hosted this exhibition, which also reproduces the colonial trope of an empty Palestine that was available for Jewish colonisation. The term settler colonialism, which effectively is, as stated by the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) a 'descriptor of the policies of dispossession and displacement implemented by the Israeli state against Palestinians,'[40] evokes similar reactions as the term apartheid, which the German government rejects outright, despite Amnesty International (among many other human rights organisations) providing ample evidence for its applicability in the case of Israel/Palestine.[41]

The criminalisation and/or public condemnation of terminology such as 'genocide', 'Nakba', 'settler colonialism'

and 'apartheid' renders meaningful conversations about Palestine practically impossible. An ever-growing archive of cancelled public events, awards and/or job contracts gives testimony to the scale of ongoing attacks on academic freedom.[42] The idea that Israel could be a perpetrator of genocide fundamentally clashes with the German state's self-understanding as defender of international human rights and its embrace of Israeli security as part of its own reason of state. As a consequence, German politicians and mainstream media fiercely police the use of the above terminology and almost instinctively insist on Israel as victim of genocide. As such, it can be portrayed as both the logical recipient of unconditional support and an easy source for moral redemption. Discursive framings matter, plausibly genocidal acts don't.

Thus far, the most powerful and vocal resistance to the German state's direct support of plausible acts of genocide comes from outside the political establishment. Creative artists, as well as Arab and Jewish activists, journalists, lawyers and intellectuals have been among the most prominent voices of dissent.[43] Instead of providing such critical Arab and Jewish voices with a platform, mainstream debate is, with a few exceptions, characterised by the silencing of Arab voices and the policing of Jewish ones, i.e. the integration of those who are pro-Zionist, and the turning of Anti-Zionist ones into passive objects to be patronised. At the core of public German debate are (non-Jewish) Germans who seek to speak on behalf of minorities, and who police Jewishness, anti-Semitism, and what is deemed to be acceptable terminology. Just as the 'Antideutsche' 'weaponise the fetishisation of Jews through their obsessive Zionism,' as stated by Rachael Shapiro,[44] the far-right use their support for Israel as entrance ticket into the mainstream.

In theory, German Middle Eastern Studies would be well equipped to offer a counterweight to the above-described developments. However, fear of reprisals and the curious persistence of the belief that scholarship can and should be apolitical have thus far prevented any form of more vocal public engagement by the German Middle Eastern Studies Association (DAVO). This institutional silence has only helped worsen an already toxic German public debate on the Arab world at large and Palestine, Palestinian suffering and the Palestinian right to resist Israeli occupation in particular. While promising efforts are under way to hopefully soon establish a DAVO Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF), akin to similar already existing committees operated by both BRISMES and MESA, the level of institutional and individual reluctance is considerable. What is certain is that if/when established, a DAVO CAF would have a lot of work to do.

Endnotes

1 International Court of Justice (ICJ), 2024, 'Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)', 26 January 2024, summary, https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-sum-01-00-en.pdf.

2 Reuters, 2023, 'German military exports to Israel up nearly 10-fold as Berlin fast-tracks permits', 8 November 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-military-exports-israel-up-nearly-10-fold-berlin-fast-tracks-permits-2023-11-08/.

3 Middle East Monitor, 2024, 'Germany approves supply of tank shells to Israel amidst Gaza conflict', 17 January 2024, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240117-germany-approves-supply-of-tank-shells-to-israel-amidst-gaza-conflict/.

4 ZDF heute, 2023, 'Zahlreiche Verbote von Pro-Palästina-Demos', 13 October 2023, https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/deutschland/israel-palaestina-demonstrationen-deutschland-verbot-100.html.

5 Auswärtiges Amt, 2024, ‚Gemeinsame Erklärung des Auswärtigen Amts und des Bundesministeriums für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung zu UNRWA', 27 January 2024, https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2641704; The Guardian, 2024, ‚UNRWA staff accused by Israel sacked without evidence, chief admits', 9 February 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/09/head-of-unwra-says-he-followed-reverse-due-process-in-sacking-accused-gaza-staff.

6 Deutscher Bundestag, 2023, ‚Solidarität mit Israel', 10 October 2023, https://www.bundestag.de/israel-solidaritaet.

7 Aljazeera, 2024, ‚Israel-Gaza war in maps and charts: Live tracker', 27 February 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker; Aljazeera, 2024, 'How Israel has destroyed Gaza's schools and universities', 24 January 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/24/how-israel-has-destroyed-gazas-schools-and-universities.

8 Amnesty International, 2024, ‚Israel/OPT: New evidence of unlawful Israeli attacks in Gaza causing mass civilian casualties amid real risk of

genocide', 12 February 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/israel-opt-new-evidence-of-unlawful-israeli-attacks-in-gaza-causing-mass-civilian-casualties-amid-real-risk-of-genocide/; The Guardian, 2024, 'Israel is deliberately starving Palestinians, UN rights expert says', 27 February 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/27/un-israel-food-starvation-palestinians-war-crime-genocide; Alessandra Bajec, 2024, 'How Israeli soldiers are engaged in widespread looting in Gaza', *The New Arab*, 18 January 2024, https://www.newarab.com/analysis/how-looting-israeli-soldiers-gaza-widespread; Amnesty International, 2023, 'Israel/OPT: Horrifying cases of torture and degrading treatment of Palestinian detainees amid spike in arbitrary arrests', 8 November 2023, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/israel-opt-horrifying-cases-of-torture-and-degrading-treatment-of-palestinian-detainees-amid-spike-in-arbitrary-arrests/; United Nations, 2023, 'Gaza: UN experts call on international community to prevent genocide against the Palestinian people', 16 November 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/gaza-un-experts-call-international-community-prevent-genocide-against.

[9] See Middle East Eye, 2023, 'Israeli soldier gifts explosion in Gaza to his daughter', Youtube, 26 November 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZ7NpSCpzSA; Reliefweb, 2024, 'Israeli tanks have deliberately run over dozens of Palestinian civilians alive', 4 March 2024, https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/israeli-tanks-have-deliberately-run-over-dozens-palestinian-civilians-alive-enar; Middle East Monitor, 2024, 'Unarmed Palestinian fatally shot by Israeli sniper despite white flag in Khan Yunis', 24 January 2024, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240124-unarmed-palestinian-fatally-shot-by-israeli-sniper-despite-white-flag-in-khan-yunis/.

[10] Exberliner, 2020, 'Historian Jürgen Zimmerer on Germany's other genocide', 12 March 2020, https://www.exberliner.com/politics/jurgen-zimmerer-interview/.

[11] Segal, Raz, 2024, 'Opinion: Why International Court of Justice ruling against Israel's war in Gaza is a game-changer', *Los Angeles Times*, 27 January 2024, https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2024-01-27/icj-israel-south-africa-gaza-genocide-court-ruling.

[12] Wildt, Michael, 2023, 'What does Singularity of the Holocaust Mean?', *Journal of Genocide Research*, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2023.2248818.

[13] Wiedemann, Charlotte, 2022, *Den Schmerz der Anderen Begreifen* (Berlin: Propyläen), p. 67 and p. 107.

[14] Dische-Becker, Emily, quoted in Jackson, James, 2023, 'Critics question the backstory of one of Germany's leading counter-extremists', *Hyphen*, 3 July 2023, https://hyphenonline.com/2023/07/03/critics-question-the-backstory-of-ahmed-mansour-one-of-germanys-leading-counter-extremists/.

[15] Wiedemann, Charlotte, 2022, *Den Schmerz der Anderen Begreifen* (Berlin: Propyläen), p. 271.

[16] Fitzpatrick, Matt, 2024, 'As the war in Gaza continues, Germany's unstinting defence of Israel has unleashed a culture war that has just reached Australia', The Conversation, 13 February 2024, https://theconversation.com/as-the-war-in-gaza-continues-germanys-unstinting-defence-of-israel-has-unleashed-a-culture-war-that-has-just-reached-australia-223329.

[17] Grimm, Jannis Julien, 2024, ‚Universities must remain places of dialogue', *Qantara*, 15 February 2024, https://qantara.de/en/article/german-academia-and-war-gaza-universities-must-remain-places-dialogue.

[18] Deitelhoff, Nicole, Rainer Forst, Klaus Günther & Jürgen Habermas, 13 November 2023, *Normative Orders*, https://www.normativeorders.net/2023/grundsatze-der-solidaritat/.

[19] Pfeifer, Hanna & Irene Weipert-Fenner, 2023, ‚Israel-Gaza: A German War Discourse', *PRIF blog*, https://blog.prif.org/2023/12/07/israel-gaza-a-german-war-discourse/.

[20] See interview with Muriel Asseburg, 'Nahost-Expertin Muriel Asseburg über Israel & Palästina', *Jung & Naiv*, 27 June 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=333rt6aUVnE.

[21] Zacher, Tobias & Martin Teigeler, 2023, ‚Essener Islamisten-Demo: Reul will Deutsch als Demo-Sprache', *WDR*, 9 November 2023, https://www1.wdr.de/nachrichten/landespolitik/innenausschuss-demos-100.html.

[22] See for instance DEIN e.V., '1948: Die Ausstellung. Wie der Staat Israel entstand', https://www.1948-web.de/.

[23] CDU/CSU, 'Antisemiten dürfen keinen Platz in unserer Gesellschaft haben', Pressemitteilung, 17 November 2023, https://www.cducsu.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/antisemiten-duerfen-keinen-platz-unserer-gesellschaft-haben.

[24] Mustafa, Imad, 2023, *Der Islam gehört (nicht) zu Deutschland: Islam und antimuslimischer Rassismus in Parteiensystem und Bundestag* (Bielefeld: transcript).

[25] See for instance 'Die Nakba: Flucht und Vertreibung der Palästinenser 1948', https://www.lib-hilfe.de/infos_ausstellung.html.

[26] 'The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism', https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/.

[27] The German Rectors' Conference called for the adoption of the IHRA definition at all German universities, 'Kein Platz für Antisemitismus', *Entschließung der HRK-MItgliederversammlung*, 19 November 2019.

[28] Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 2024, ‚Folgen des Boykottaufrufs Strike Germany: Berlinale-Absage und Verlagstrennung', 19 January 2024, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/folgen-des-boykottaufrufs-strike-germany-berlinale-absage-und-verlagstrennung-dlf-kultur-0fe5ce84-100.html.

[29] Flakin, Nathaniel, 2024, 'German Elites are redefining Antisemitism so they can be the victims', *Portside*, 20 January 2024, https://portside.org/2024-01-20/german-elites-are-redefining-antisemitism-so-they-can-be-victims.

[30] Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland, 2019, ‚"Du Jude" als Schimpfwort auf dem Schulhof?', 25 October 2019, https://www.zentralratderjuden.de/aktuelle-meldung/artikel/news/du-jude-als-schimpfwort-auf-dem-schulhof/.

[31] Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2023, ‚Politisch motivierte Kriminalität erreicht neuen Höchststand', 9 May 2023, https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/kurzmeldungen/DE/2023/05/fallzahlen-pmk-2022.html.

[32] See also 'Offener Brief jüdischer Intellektueller: Die Freiheit der Andersdenkenden', *TAZ*, 22 October 2023, https://taz.de/Offener-Brief-juedischer-Intellektueller/!5965154/.

[33] Falah Saab, Sheren, 2024, 'On Israeli TV, You're an Antisemite if you dare mention the Occupation', *Haaretz Today*, 26 February 2024, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/haaretz-today/2024-02-26/ty-article/.highlight/on-israeli-tv-youre-an-antisemite-if-you-dare-mention-the-occupation/0000018d-e60c-de64-afff-f67f1cee0000. See also various German media reactions to the 2024 Berlin International Film Festival.

[34] See for instance the cancellation of the Hannah Arendt prize award ceremony for Masha Gessen and the prohibition of Jewish Palestine solidarity protests in Berlin, '"Gefahr der Volksverhetzung": Berliner Polizei untersagt jüdische Kundgebung am Oranienplatz', *Tagesspiegel*, 14 October 2023, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/berliner-polizei-untersagt-judische-kundgebung-am-oranienplatz-unmittelbare-gefahr-von-volksverhetzenden-antisemitischen-ausrufen-10624429.html.

[35] RBB TV, 2023, 'Berliner Schulen können Tragen von Palästinenser-Tüchern verbieten', 13 October 2023, https://www.rbb24.de/politik/beitrag/2023/10/berlin-israel-senatsverwaltung-guenther-wuensch-schulfrieden-palaestinenser-tuecher-free-palestine-.html.

[36] Polizei Nordrhein-Westfalen LKA, 2023, ‚Nahost-Konflikt: Informationsbroschüre für Schulen, Lehrkräfte und Eltern', December, https://muenster.polizei.nrw/sites/default/files/2024-01/231227_lka_informationsbroschure-nahostkonflikt.pdf.

[37] Initiative Interdisziplinäre Antisemitismusforschung, 2024, ‚Statement der IIA zu einem antisemitischen Graffiti auf dem Campus der Universität Trier', January, https://www.uni-trier.de/universitaet/fachbereiche-faecher/fachbereich-iii/faecher/geschichte/studium-und-lehre/initiative-interdisziplinaere-antisemitismusforschung/aktuelles/stellungnahmen/pressemittteilungen.

[38] DEIN e.V., '1948: Die Ausstellung. Wie der Staat Israel entstand', https://www.1948-web.de/.

[39] Pappe, Ilan, 2007, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: Oneworld Publications).

[40] BRISMES, 2024, ‚Statement on Settler Colonialism, Decolonisation and Antisemitism', 19 February, https://www.brismes.ac.uk/files/documents/19022024_BRISMES_Settler_Colonialism_Statement.pdf.

[41] Amnesty International, 2022, 'Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians', 1 February, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/.

[42] Archive of Silence – Cancellation & Silencing Public List, 2024, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Vq2tm-nopUy-xYZjkG-T9FyMC7ZqkAQG9S3mPWAYwHw/edit#gid=1227867224.

[43] Some of the most prominent voices are Nadija Samour, Hebh Jamal, Hanno Hauenstein, Ghassan Hage, Masha Gessen, Deborah Feldman and Amro Ali.

[44] Shapiro, Rachael, 2024, 'German memory culture, anti-Semitic Zionists and Palestinian liberation', *Aljazeera*, 1 March 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/3/1/german-memory-culture-anti-semitic-zionists-and-palestinian-liberation.

Teaching the Middle East after October 7:
Reflections on Academic Freedom, Antisemitism, and the Question of Palestine

Nader Hashemi, Georgetown University

Middle East Studies is in peril. Today, we are facing the biggest threat to academic freedom since the founding of the Association of American University Professors (AAUP) in 1915. Arguably, McCarthyism was worse. While engaging in public intellectual work and teaching the Middle East always involved a degree of risk, these dangers have risen to new levels after October 7, 2023. Topics such as political Islam, US Middle East Policy, Iran and especially the Israel-Palestine conflict, are now subject to an intense new level of scrutiny that impede academic freedom. The sources of these threats are twofold: private interest groups ideologically associated with the American and Israeli Right and university officials who invoke diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) criteria to purportedly protect students from harm.

In this essay, I will draw upon my own experience at the University of Denver and a panel I organized in 2023 at the Middle East Association Conference on "The Ken Roth Scandal at Harvard and Academic Freedom." The aim is to share with colleagues lessons that can help them navigate this perilous new terrain without compromising the freedom to speak, teach and conduct research in areas that reflect our diverse intellectual interests. In assessing this topic, there are a set of common themes and political challenges that recur. They are directly related to accusations of antisemitism and restrictions on academic freedom imposed by university administrators. Identifying these themes and overcoming these challenges are essential to maintaining the integrity and independence of Middle East Studies after October 7.

The Post-October 7 Crisis

The crisis in Gaza has rattled American universities. In January, a lawsuit was filed against Harvard accusing it of tolerating antisemitism and ignoring the civil rights of Jewish students. Similar lawsuits have been filed against MIT, Penn, Brown, and NYU. "Mobs of pro-Hamas students and faculty have marched by the hundreds through Harvard's campus, shouting vile antisemitic slogans and calling for death to Jews and Israel," according to the lawsuit.[1]

Old debates about freedom of speech on campus and academic freedom have been reignited. This time the focus is almost exclusively on Israel/Palestine. Massive media coverage has produced a national debate which intensified in December 2023 after the presidents of Harvard, MIT and Penn testified at a congressional hearing on antisemitism. Two of them subsequently resigned after an embarrassing performance.[2] Instead of being principled on questions of bigotry and free speech, they offered careful lawyerly answers, while refusing to unequivocally affirm that calls for Jewish genocide violated campus policies. A backlash from donors and alumni immediately ensued. To deal with the fallout, antisemitism task forces were set up. As a direct result of these events, the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights is now investigating more than 50 cases of alleged antisemitism.[3] Ignored in this context are two critical facts: 1) the absence of credible evidence that Jews on campus are facing calls for genocide and 2) the unfolding of a plausible US-backed genocide in Gaza while this drama plays out openly supported by the same plaintiffs and a bi-partisan coalition of American lawmakers, including the President of the United States.[4]

Prefiguring our current moment, in 2022, I was subjected to an orchestrated vilification campaign at the University of Denver (DU). Six Colorado Jewish organizations accused me of antisemitism for criticism of the Netanyahu government.[5] This story made local, national, and international news and was fed by a rightwing media frenzy. Death threats and hate mailed ensued. CNN's Jake

Tapper joined in the fray and Republican congressmen promised to investigate DU for treason.[6] The worst part of this scandal was when the Chancellor of DU, after an intense lobbying effort, issued a calumnious public statement that implied I was a threat to Jews on campus.[7] Completely ignored during this drama was the fact I was a leader on campus in raising awareness about rising antisemitism. None of this mattered. Antisemitism wasn't the real issue, insufficient loyalty to Israel was. I subsequently learned my chancellor sought to shut down the Center for Middle East Studies for which I was the acting director.

Threats to academic freedom in the context of Middle East Studies have a long history. After October 7, these threats have significantly increased. Recent events at Barnard College encapsulate the crisis facing Middle East Studies today. When the Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies posted a statement on its website in support of Palestinian rights, it was immediately take down by university administrators on the grounds that it constituted "impermissible political speech."[8] Faculty who have posted pro-Palestinian posters on their office doors have been ordered to remove them and when a group of 20 students held an authorized peaceful pro-Palestine rally on campus, they were summoned before a disciplinary committee. As the *New York Times* reported, Barnard College has been "facing pressure from some donors, alumni and student and faculty to limit some pro-Palestinian speech on the grounds that opposing Zionism or the state of Israel can veer into antisemitism and can make those who support Israel feel uncomfortable."[9]

This vignette is a microcosm of what is happening at other educational institutions. Petitions have circulated calling for the firing of senior faculty.[10] Tenured professors have been suspended for social media posts and in one outrageous case a tenured political scientist at Indiana University was suspended for "alleged mistakes in the filing of a room reservation form" in support of a Palestine solidarity event.[11] Accusations of antisemitism are central to all these cases. Equally important is the role of private interest groups who lobby university administrators with the goal of policing the debate on Israel/Palestine. These groups are connected to conservative political action groups and leading American Jewish organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). The question is how can faculty best respond?

How to Respond?

Public intellectual work in Middle East Studies requires thick skin. It is not for the faint hearted. The more vocal you are, the more you will be scrutinized. Every word you write, every interview you give or lecture you deliver will be closely monitored. The risks are greater for untenured faculty. These risks increase if you are an academic or program director who has convening authority to organize public events or to supervise curriculum. The larger your social media profile, the bigger the target on your back. Inevitably your name will appear on McCarthyite websites like Campus Watch and Canary Mission where out of context quotes will be put on display to present you as un-American, an extremist or an antisemite. In short, be prepared to be attacked, vilified, libeled, and defamed, sometimes by your own institution after they have heavily lobbied by outside pro-Israel groups. The first lesson to be learned: be careful and be vigilant.

Lesson number two: do not underestimate the moral cowardice of senior university officials. Most have little knowledge of the politics of the Middle East, and even less awareness on how antisemitism has been weaponized and redefined to be equated with criticism of the policies of the Israeli government.[12] The goal of outside lobby groups is to police the debate on Palestine/Israel on campus. When administrators are heavily lobbied by donors and alumni, they typically give in to donors' demands, regardless of how ill-founded or unsubstantiated they might be. This is what precisely what happened to Kenneth Roth at Harvard and to me at the University of Denver.[13] It is a common pattern of behavior across the board. There are things, however, that can be done to protect your academic freedom.

At the start of every academic year, seize the initiative

and meet with key university officials and their staff. Specifically set up meetings with the president, provost, relevant deans and DEI coordinators. Key faculty who teach Middle East Studies should join you. Educate them on the background and nature of the Canary Mission, the politics of lobbying on Israel/Palestine, the weaponization of accusations of antisemitism to silence support for Palestinian human rights and critically, the values you expect your university to defend. If criticism of Israel is inherently antisemitic, you should point out by the same warped ethics criticism of Iran, Saudi Arabia or the Taliban is similarly Islamophobic. Criticism of all governments and all politicians is equally valid and should not be dismissed by invoking charges of Islamophobia/antisemitism.

Today, there is a popular view among university administrators, informed by debates on diversity and inclusion, that a key goal of a college education is to protect students from harm. My view is more nuanced, and it echoes Van Jones' succinct formulation: "the point of college is to keep you physically safe but intellectually unsafe, to force you to confront ideas that you vehemently disagree with."[14] This is at the core of a liberal education. It applies today to campus debates and controversies related to Israel/Palestine post October 7th. This principle must be robustly defended.

Lesson number three. Be prepared to undertake unpaid labor to defend your academic freedom. When I was defamed by the University Denver (due to an intense lobbying effort by pro-Israel groups), I looked around campus for resources of support and I found none. I was forced to take time away from my research and teaching to defend my academic reputation. We had no faculty union and our ombudsperson office had permanently closed. I had supportive colleagues, but they had to be mobilized. All of this took time, and it also took a toll on my peace of mind. Luckily, I was a member of MESA and their Committee on Academic Freedom issued an early supportive letter. A close colleague of mine was the AAUP representative on campus. They issued a supportive letter as did the Colorado chapter of the AAUP. I deeply felt the absence of faculty union. In an ideal world, my union representative could defend my integrity with senior university officials based on a collective bargaining agreement. A lesson for all: if you don't have a faculty union, start one.

If you are publicly defamed and targeted in a toxic media environment the natural reaction is to recoil and stay quiet. Self-censorship soon follows as your conscience asks: do I want to be attacked again? Is it worth it? What about my research agenda? I have a mortgage to pay, a marriage to nurture, children to raise – who needs this stress? The instinct is to shut down and refrain from speaking or writing on topics that matter such as the many problems associated with US Middle East policy or the behavior of repressive Western-backed Mideast regimes. Normatively and ethically, this response would be a tragedy for all of us. Ideally, we want to be working in academic contexts, where we don't live in fear; where we can teach, write and research topics that inspire us without fear that someone is watching over us, as though we are living under a dictatorship. Combating this problem requires a work atmosphere where you are fully protected and supported by your university on matters of free speech and academic inquiry.

Finally, there is a moral gray zone that must be considered in the context of Middle East Studies today. The dilemma is how to confront defamatory pro-Israel lobbying efforts that seek to restrict academic freedom/freedom of speech while not contributing to rising antisemitism. In the context of the Ken Roth scandal at Harvard, the ADL argued that criticism of pro-Israel donors "plays into antisemitic myths about power and money" and "implicates Israel and the American Jewish community."[15] This is a serious ethical consideration that scholars of Middle East must not ignore. At the same time the thuggish intimidation tactics that seek to restrict academic freedom must be confronted. Navigating this moral terrain requires a deep sensitivity to the problem of historic antisemitism and its recent resurgence. Critical analysis and discussion of Israel *can* sometimes veer into antisemitism and that can easily be exploited for nefarious ends by unsavory groups. Those of us who teach, write, and work on the Middle East must

always be sensitive to this exploitation. Simultaneously, it must be acknowledged there has been a premeditated and deliberate effort to instrumentalize and weaponize accusations of antisemitism to silence support for Palestinian human rights.

For example, more than fifty years ago, the distinguished Israeli diplomat, Abba Eban, observed that "one of the chief tasks of any dialogue with the Gentile world is to prove that the distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism [i.e., criticism of Israeli state policy] is not a distinction at all. Anti-Zionism is merely the new anti-Semitism."[16] When Jimmy Carter published his book in 2006, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, he was accused of antisemitism by the head of the ADL.[17] More recently, when Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International published their reports on Israeli apartheid, they too were accused by the same American Jewish organizations of fueling global antisemitism.[18] In this context, there are competing moral imperatives that must be addressed and attended to. Rejecting the claim that anti-Zionism equals antisemitism is the place to start.

Conclusion:

In our post-October 7th world, academic freedom in the context of Middle East Studies can no longer be assumed. It must be robustly defended. For anyone unconvinced about the urgency of this problem consider the case of Germany today, where support for Palestinian human rights has been effectively criminalized by the state and where tenured professors have lost their jobs as a result.[19] This is the model of academic life that awaits us here if we do not take steps to defend ourselves and our core academic values.

In 1915, the AAUP published the "Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure." This is the founding document of the AAUP. Academic freedom is defined as "freedom of inquiry and research; freedom of teaching within the university or college; and freedom of extramural utterance and action."[20] All of these core values are under severe threat today at American colleges and universities. If they are not rigorously and robustly defended, the basic idea of a university could be lost.

Endnotes

1 "Lawsuit filed against Harvard, accusing it of violating the civil rights of Jewish students," *Associated Press*, January 12, 2024.

2 While the president of Harvard ostensibly resigned due to accusations of plagiarism, Robert Reich has argued pro-Israel donor pressure was the chief reason. See his essay, "Powerful donors managed to push out Harvard's Claudine Gay: but at what cost?" *The Guardian*, January 3, 2024.

3 Andrew Lapin, "US Department of Education opens new antisemitism probes into universities, schools," *Times of Israel*, January 19, 2024.

4 It stretches credulity to the breaking point to argue that slogans such as "From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free" and "Intifada" are axiomatically genocidal in nature and intent. For background see Nadia Abou El Haj, "Zionism's Political Unconscious," Blog Post, November 17, 2023, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/zionism-s-political-unconscious.

5 I partially recount the story in "Thrashed for Theorizing: Notes on Antisemitism, Israel and the Attack on Salman Rushdie," Jadalliya.com, September 9, 2023, www.jadaliyya.com/Author/11596. I provide more details in this interview with Mouin Rabbani, "The Israeli Lobby and US Academia," Jadalliya Connections Episode 59, www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMQDYXB4zN8. Also see Cass Tingley, "On-air speculation: Academic Freedom and its fallout for one professor at the University of Denver," *DU Clarion*, May 10, 2023.

6 Adam Credo, "Republicans Eye Pro-Iranian Propaganda in US Colleges after Prof Claims Israel Behind Rushdie Attack," *Washington Free Beacon*, August 26, 2022.

7 "University of Denver Statement about Professor Nader Hashemi," Committee on Academic Freedom, Middle East Studies Association, September 2, 2022, https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2022/09/02/university-of-denver-statement-about-professor-nader-hashemi.

8 Sharon Otterman, "Barnard College's Restrictions on Political Speech Prompt Outcry," *New York Times*, January 24, 2024.

9 Ibid.

10 Noah Bernstein, "Petition calling or the removal of MESAAS professor Joseph Massad garners over 47,000 signatures," *Columbia Spectator*, October 17, 2023, https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2023/10/17/petition-calling-for-removal-of-mesaas-professor-joseph-massad-garners-over-47000-signatures/ and Ben Raab and Kaitlyn Pohly, "Petition to out pro-Palestine professor for 'promoting lies and violence' gains 25,000 signatures in just over a day," *Yale Daily News*, October 12, 2023, https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2023/10/12/petition-to-oust-pro-palestine-professor-for-promoting-lies-and-violence-gains-25000-signatures-in-just-over-a-day/.

[11] Jeffrey Isaac, "Indiana University Caves to Political Pressure by Suspending a Tenured Professor," *The Nation*, January 10, 2024 and Kate McGee, "Texas Tech suspends professor over Israel-Hamas war comments," *Texas Tribune*, March 4, 2024.
[12] Steven Friedman, *Good Jew, Bad Jew: Racism, anti-Semitism and the assault on meaning* (New York: New York University Press, 2023).
[13] Michael Massing, "Why the Godfather of Human Rights Is Not Welcome at Harvard," *The Nation*, January 23/30, 2023 and Kenneth Roth, "I once ran Human Rights Watch. Harvard blocked my fellowship over Israel," *The Guardian*, January 10, 2023.
[14] Fareed Zakaria GPS Transcript, December 10, 2023, https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/fzgps/date/2023-12-10/segment/01.
[15] Jonathan Greenblatt, January 6, 2023, https://twitter.com/JGreenblattADL/status/1611472849969074180.
[16] Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: the United States, Israel and the Palestinians* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999), 15.
[17] Matthew Yglesias, "Foxman in a Henhouse," *The Atlantic*, January 16, 2007.
[18] Peter Beinart, "Has the Fight Against Antisemitism Lost Its Way?" *New York Times*, August 26, 2022.
[19] Hebh Jamal, "Pro-Palestinian speech is now effectively banned in German Universities," *Mondoweiss*, December 27, 2023, https://mondoweiss.net/2023/12/pro-palestinian-speech-is-now-effectively-banned-in-german-universities/. The case of Ghassan Hage at the Max Planck Society stands out in this context.
[20] Association of American University Professors, "1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure," https://www.aaup.org/report/1915-declaration-principles-academic-freedom-and-academic-tenure.

Antiwar/Solidarity Activism on Gaza:
New Generation, New Challenges

Stephen Zunes, University of San Francisco

Israel's war on Gaza and the Biden administration's strident support for the massive Israeli assault in the face of widespread violations of international humanitarian law and the international outrage at the civilian death toll has brought a new generation of activists to the fore on campuses and elsewhere across the United States. I have followed campus activism on Palestine as both an observer and occasional participant since the 1970s, and recent months have witnessed a dramatic quantitative and qualitative shift in mobilization.

This essay examines these recent developments, the reasons behind the dramatic growth in pro-Palestinian activism among young activism, and the challenges these movements face from both valid and specious allegations of antisemitism.

These activists, even more so than protesters against controversial foreign policies of previous administrations, are disproportionately young. There is a huge generational disparity regarding political attitudes towards the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the U.S. role, which exceeds even that regarding Vietnam during the famous "generation gap" of the 1960s. A recent poll shows that 72 percent of voters ages 18 to 29 disapprove of Biden's handling of the war on Gaza.[1] That is a higher percentage of young voters than those who disapproved of Bush's handling of the war in Iraq,[2] Reagan's handling of the wars in Central America[3] or even Nixon's handling of the war in Vietnam.[4]

Another poll in December noted how 18-29 year olds sympathized more with Palestinians than Israelis, while those over 65 were seven times more likely to sympathize with Israelis. Similarly, while two-thirds of Americans over 65 thought it "very important" for the United States to support Israel, only 14% of those under 30 agreed.[5] A poll in early March showed that only 38% of Americans age 18-34 have a positive view of Israel, as compared with 71% of those over 55.[6] With the possible exception of LGBTQ+ rights, there is no other political issue in which there is such a direct correlation between age and political attitude.

There are a number of reasons for this. While older Americans remember Israel under social democratic leadership open to territorial compromise, younger Americans have only known Israel under rightwing and overtly racist leadership who openly seek to colonize and incorporate the occupied territories. Younger Americans are more racially and ethnically diverse and therefore more likely to identify with Palestinians against the predominantly white Israeli leadership, including a growing percentage of young Muslims who have become politically mobilized. With young Jews often in the forefront of pro-Palestinian campus activism and nearly half of younger Jews believing Biden is too supportive of Israel,[7] it has become easier for young non-Jews to be openly critical of Israel and U.S. policy without coming across as being motivated by antisemitism.

The older generations of Americans, even among those willing to acknowledge excesses by the Israeli government, saw Zionism as a legitimate national liberation movement of an oppressed people. By contrast, today's youth are not only more cognizant of indigenous rights but, as a result of the mobilizations around Black Lives Matter and greater awareness of institutionalized racism, the Palestinian struggle less in isolation and more part of broader global struggle. Though such a lens, Zionism appears to be more of a colonial-settler enterprise. Indeed, young Americans are less likely to see nationalism itself as progressive force as it was back when it was challenging colonialism and neocolonialism in the Global South, and are more likely to see it as a reactionary force like the nationalist movements which have emerged in Eastern Europe in recent decades.

A related shift is that, unlike during the previous century, they are less likely to see the nation-state as the only vehicle through which a people can assert their collective rights, making Israel appear less central to Jewish identity.

Another change is that, unlike the first several decades of Israel's existence when its primary American support came from the liberal establishment, today Israel's biggest backers are rightwing Republicans and Christian fundamentalists. Up until the 1980s, the Republican Party—in part due to its ties to oil interests and the Arab monarchies—largely took a more balanced perspective on Israel/Palestine than did the Democrats. With the ascent of the Christian Right as a major force in conservative politics in the 1980s and the more recent ties between Netanyahu's Likud and the Trump-led Republican Party, combined with the growing influence of Bernie Sanders and young progressives in the House of Representatives critical of traditional U.S. support for the Israeli government, support for Israel is increasingly seen in terms of a left/right divide.

The growth of the movement against the Gaza War is not exclusively among younger people, of course. Among older liberals and progressives—who had marched against the Vietnam War, the nuclear arms race, apartheid in South Africa, intervention in Central America, and the invasion of Iraq—there had traditionally been a reluctance to address U.S. policy towards Israel/Palestine. That has changed dramatically in recent months, as veterans of these struggles have joined younger activists. Polls now show that 55% of Americans now oppose Israel's war on Gaza, including 75% of Democrats.[8] Similarly, a growing number of mainstream peace groups and multi-issue progressive organizations, which had also traditionally put Israel/Palestine on the backburner, have now pushed the Gaza War front and center on their agenda.

However, it is on college campuses where the movement is most visible and most controversial. Congressional hearings on alleged rampant antisemitism and the failure of universities to crack down on pro-Palestinian protests have led to the resignation of two Ivy League presidents, cancellation of speakers and films, and other suppression of dissent. There are problems with this campus activism which have not been fully confronted. Too young to remember the U.S. war in Iraq and born long after U.S. wars in Central America and Vietnam, many student activists have difficulty seeing U.S. support for Israel in the context of broader U.S. foreign policy in the region and beyond. There is little appreciation for and understanding of previous popular movements against U.S. support for rightwing allies engaged in war crimes. There has therefore been a temptation to see U.S. policy not as a reflection of a long history of pushing false narratives, denigrating international legal institutions and human rights organizations, and defying a broad consensus of the international community, but as some kind of unique aberration singular to Israel.

One problem with this approach is that it builds upon the exaggerated notion that U.S. policy towards Israel/Palestine is rooted primarily in the pro-Israel lobby. The "Lobby", centered around the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and allied organizations, has indeed created a climate of intimidation on Capitol Hill, has sought to censor speakers and other public events critical of Israel, and has generally made it more difficult to challenge U.S. support for the Israeli government. However, the assumption that U.S. policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would somehow be based upon a commitment to international law and human rights, when the U.S. has often failed to uphold these principles in other conflicts involving U.S. allies, is demonstrative of this failure to recognize how U.S. policy towards Israel/Palestine fits into the modern history of U.S. foreign relations.

U.S. support for Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian and Syrian territory is not unique. In the 1970s, the United States vetoed a series of UN Security Council resolutions opposing apartheid South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia. Between 1975-2000, the United States supported Indonesia's 24-year occupation of and repression in East Timor, where U.S.-backed Indonesian forces were responsible for the deaths of up to 200,000 civilians, nearly one-third of that island nation's population.[9]

Today, the United States not only supports Morocco's ongoing occupation of the nation of Western Sahara in defiance of a series of UN Security Council resolutions and landmark decision of the International Court of Justice, it is the only country besides Israel to formally recognize Morocco's annexation of that country, a full member state of the African Union.[10] Freedom House has ranked Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara along with only three other countries as having the least political freedom in the world.[11] In none of those cases was there a powerful domestic lobby forcing the United States to support governments engaged in such flagrant violations of international legal norms.

During the 1980s, the U.S. supported bloody counterinsurgency campaigns in El Salvador, Guatemala, and elsewhere and supported a far-right armed insurgency against the leftist Sandinista government in Nicaragua, all of which primarily targeted civilians. As with Gaza today, there were civilian casualties in the tens of thousands, the United States vetoed a series of otherwise-unanimous UN Security Council resolutions[12] and dismissed rulings by the International Court of Justice.[13] Also, like today, the majority of Americans opposed U.S. policy and demonstrated in the hundreds of thousands, including widespread acts of civil disobedience, only to be largely ignored by Washington policymakers.

Similarly, U.S. support for Israel's war crimes in its bombing of crowded urban areas of the Gaza Strip are not that different than U.S. support for Turkey's bombings of Kurdish towns and villages in the 1990s and of Saudi Arabia's bombing of civilian areas in Yemen just a few years ago Indeed, U.S. support the Saudi war was even more direct—helping the Royal air force with targeting and refueling fighter bombers in flight.[14] There was opposition raised by human rights groups and peace organizations and some unsuccessful efforts by bipartisan members of Congress to challenge U.S. policy, but there was nothing close to the mass movement there is today regarding Gaza.

If seen to be in the strategic interests of the United States, Washington has proven itself quite willing to support the most flagrant violations of international law and human rights by its allies and block the United Nations or any other party from challenging it. No ethnic lobby is necessary to motivate policymakers to do otherwise. As long as the amoral imperatives of realpolitik remain unchallenged, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and elsewhere will not reflect the American public's longstanding belief that U.S. international relations should be guided by humanitarian principles and ethics.

Few of today's young pro-Palestinian activists are aware of this history, however. Though the movement is largely centered in the left, many of them have embraced the analysis pushed by neorealists like John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt,[15] former State Department Arabists, and others unwilling to put forward a more systemic critique of the assumptions of the foreign policy establishment, sometimes referred to as "the blob,"[16] or acknowledge that U.S. support for Israel is part of a well-established pattern of supporting allies engaged in flagrant violations of international legal norms.

While there are certainly reasons to argue that U.S. support for Israel ultimately harms U.S. interests, the overall consensus within the foreign policy establishment that the strategic relationship is of overall benefit.

Israel has successfully prevented victories by radical nationalist and Islamist movements in Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine, while also keeping anti-American regimes like Syria and Iran in check. The militaries of the United States and Israel are inextricably tied. Israel's frequent wars have provided battlefield testing for American arms, and Israel's intelligence service has assisted the United States in intelligence-gathering and covert operations.[17] Israel has also served as a conduit for U.S. arms to regimes and movements too unpopular for openly granting direct military assistance. During the Cold War, this included apartheid South Africa,[18] the Islamic Republic of Iran,[19] the military junta in Guatemala,[20] and the Nicaraguan Contras.[21] More recently, Israel has backed Colombian paramilitaries[22] and various Kurdish militia[23] as well as Moroccan occupation forces in Western Sahara.[24]

Israel has cooperated with the U.S. military-industrial complex on research and development for new jet fighters[25] and anti-missile defense systems.[26] The country has even trained U.S. forces bound for Iraq and other Middle Eastern destinations in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations.[27]

Former Secretary of State Alexander Haig referred to Israel as the United States' "unsinkable aircraft carrier." And Joe Biden once said, "Were there not an Israel, the United States would have to invent an Israel to protect [its] interests in the region."[28] He has repeated version of that phrase subsequently, including as president.

By failing to recognize how U.S. support for Israel's war on Gaza and U.S. support for Israel's rightwing leadership overall is part of a longstanding policy of supporting allied governments regardless of their violations of international legal norms, it opens up antiwar and pro-Palestinian groups to charges that they are unfairly singling out Israel. Similarly, placing most of the blame on powerful Zionist organizations and overstating their influence uncomfortably parallels the historic antisemitic tendency to exaggerate the power of an alleged cabal wealthy Jews controlling the actions of non-Jewish political leaders. While it is certainly not antisemitic to be anti-Zionist, when "Zionist" is used in a manner similar to the old antisemitic tropes (i.e., "Zionist" control of government, the media, finance) it certainly does cross that line. For example, too many young activists assume that the media bias in in favor of U.S. policy supporting Israel is a result of Zionist pressure rather than a general predisposition to support the politics of U.S. allies and militarism overall. Similarly, when a member of Congress takes a right-wing position on virtually any issue, the assumption is that it is a result of their ideological proclivities, while if the same politician takes a right-wing position in relation to the Middle East, many young pro-Palestinian activists will often assume that they are being forced to take such perspectives due to powerful Zionist interests.

In the long history of protests against U.S. policy towards conflicts in the Global South, whether it be support for far rightwing governments engaged in war crimes, such as El Salvador and Israel, or direct military intervention, as with Vietnam and Iraq, it was not uncommon for small far left groups—through manipulation, hustle, and other means—to take a disproportionately visible role in demonstrations and elsewhere. Anti-intervention groups would sometimes become dominated by those who were not just opposed to U.S. culpability in war crimes, but who insisted that true solidarity meant unquestioningly supporting the policies of whatever government or armed group was challenging U.S. imperialism and its allies.

Marching amid an occasional banners praising Marxist revolutionary groups seeking to liberate their country from far-right generals and feudalistic landowners during the 1980s was less awkward and less likely to discourage broader participation than is marching among those praising Hamas and calling for the physical destruction of Israel. While it can certainly be argued that U.S. and Israeli policies are largely responsible for the rise of Hamas and its extremist ideology, uncritical support of any a group which espouses antisemitism and terrorism can seriously harm a movement's ability to widen its appeal.

Part of the problem is that there are segments of the anti-imperialist left who fail to recognize that the leading adversaries of Western imperialism today are not what they were during the Cold War when similar movements challenged U.S. foreign policy. While the national liberation struggles opposed by Washington and its repressive allies during the Cold War were often more militaristic and authoritarian than many American antiwar activists would have liked, there was a sense that they represented progressive alternatives to the rightwing dictatorships and the colonial/neocolonial forces backed by Washington. By contrast, Hamas—like Al Qaeda, ISIS, and other Salafist groups; the Iranian regime and its allies; Putin's Russia; as well as other leading opponents of Western hegemony today—are decidedly reactionary.

Even though the vast majority of student activists are motivated by sincere outrage at Israeli war crimes and U.S. culpability rather than a rigid ideological agenda or

bigotry against Jews, these problems have hampered the effectiveness of campus activism in changing U.S. policy.

The bigger problem, however, is in U.S. policy itself. Recognizing that, despite two-thirds of Americans, including 80% of Democrats, supporting a permanent ceasefire[29] while the Biden administration and all but a few dozen members on Congress are unwilling to take such a stance, many in this new generation are becoming alienated with electoral politics and the two-party system. Not only will the resulting lower turnout among young voters threaten Democratic electoral prospects in November, the frustration at the failure of the political system to respond to constituent demands could contribute to the embrace of more extremist ideologies. Regardless, just as Vietnam did for the Baby Boomers, Central America did for Gen X, and Iraq did for Millennials, the legacy of the October 7 terrorist attacks and the war that has followed will likely have a major impact on Gen Z and their politics in the coming years.

Endnotes

1 Weisman, Jonathan, Ruth Igielnik and Alyce McFadden "Poll Finds Wide Disapproval of Biden on Gaza, and Little Room to Shift Gears," *New York Times*, Dec. 19, 2023
2 Williams, Dana M., and Suzanne R. Slusser, "Americans and Iraq, twelve years apart: Comparing support for the US wars in Iraq," *The Social Science Journal,* Volume 51, Issue 2, June 2014, Pages 231-239
3 Sobel, Richard, "Public Opinion about United States Intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 53, Issue 1, Spring 1989, Pages 114–128
4 Lurch, William L. and Peter W. Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Mar., 1979), pp. 21-44
5 The Economist/YouGov Poll, October 21 - 24, 2023 https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/econTabReport_WzgzhWp.pdf
6 Jones, Jeffrey M. "Americans' Views of Both Israel, Palestinian Authority Down," March 4, 2024 https://news.gallup.com/poll/611375/americans-views-israel-palestinian-authority-down.aspx
7 "Nearly half of young Jewish voters feel Biden overly supports Israel – poll," *Jerusalem Post*, January 9, 2024
8 Jones, Jeffrey M., "Majority in U.S. Now Disapprove of Israeli Action in Gaza," Gallup, March 27, 2024 https://news.gallup.com/poll/642695/majority-disapprove-israeli-action-gaza.aspx
9 Zunes, Stephen "East Timor's Tragedy and Triumph," *Peace Review*, 12:2 (2000) pp. 329-335
10 Zunes, Stephen "Trump's deal on Morocco's Western Sahara annexation risks more global conflict," *Washington Post*, Dec. 15, 2020
11 https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores
12 "U.S. Vetoes U.N. Bid to Condemn Mining of Nicaraguan Port," *New York Times*, April 5, 1984, Section A, Page 8
13 International Court of Justice, "Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. United States of America), 26 November 1984
14 Michaels, Jim, "U.S. military refueling Saudi planes for Yemen airstrikes," *USA Today*, April 8, 2015
15 Mearsheimer, John and Steve Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007
16 Fettweis, Christopher J., "The Beliefs of the Blob," *Orbis*, Volume 67, Issue 1, 2023, pp. 27-44
17 Laron, Guy "When the U.S. Used Israel to Test Out a Weapon – and Dragged It Into War," *Haaretz*, Sept. 7, 2019
18 Kinzer, Stephen "The Secret Arms Deal Between Israel and Apartheid South Africa," Daily Beast, July 14, 2017 https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-secret-arms-deal-between-israel-and-apartheid-south-africa
19 Walcott, John and Jane Mayer, "Israel Said to Have Sold Weapons to Iran Since 1981 With Tacit Approval of the Reagan Administration," Wall Street Journal, November 28, 1986, p. 3
20 Frankel, Glenn "Israeli Economy Depends on Nation's Role as Arms Exporter," *Washington Post*, Dec. 12, 1986
21 Marshall, Jonathan, "Israel, the Contras and the North Trial," *MERIP*, #160 (September/October 1989)
22 "Colombia," *The Database of Israeli Military and Security Export* https://www.dimse.info/colombia
23 "Israel aiding Syria's Kurds, advocating for them with U.S.: official," Reuters, November 6, 2019 https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN1XG2AO/
24 Rickett, Oscar "Pegasus spyware: Western Sahara activist Aminatou Haidar targeted," *Middle East Eye*, 9 March 2022
25 "U.S.-Israel Strategic Cooperation: F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Plane," Jewish Virtual Library https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/us-israel-cooperation-on-the-f-35-joint-strike-fighter-plane
26 Raytheon, "Iron Dome System and SkyHunter Missile," https://www.rtx.com/raytheon/what-we-do/integrated-air-and-missile-defense/irondome
27 Borger, Julia "Israel trains US assassination squads in Iraq," *Guardian*, 8 December 2003
28 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HZs-v0PR44&t=32s
29 Data for Progress, "Voters Agree the U.S. Should Call for a Ceasefire and De-Escalation of Violence in Gaza to Prevent Civilian Deaths," October 20, 2023 https://www.dataforprogress.org/blog/2023/10/19/voters-agree-the-us-should-call-for-a-ceasefire-and-de-escalation-of-violence-in-gaza

Struggling for Relevance?
Academia and Public Debate on Israel/Palestine in the Czech Republic

Jakub Zahora, University of New York in Prague; Jakub Kolacek, Charles University; Tereza Plistilova, Charles University

In early February, a group of Czech public figures and intellectuals issued an open letter criticizing the government's position and policies regarding the Gaza war.[1] Highlighting the disregard for the humanitarian disaster in Gaza and breaches of international law by the Israeli forces, the letter called on the Czech government to actively seek humanitarian relief for Palestinians and a just political solution for Israel/Palestine at large. The document can be read as a culmination of a built-up frustration with Czech foreign policy and mainstream public debate towards the war in the wake of the Hamas attack. While Czechs vocally expressed their sympathy and support for the Israeli victims of the October 7 massacre, the ensuing Israeli onslaught on Gaza and the unprecedented scale of the Palestinian human loss and destruction were repeatedly relativized and belittled.

Several of the letter's authors and dozens of its signatories (including all three authors of the present piece) were working at Czech universities. As such, this initiative marked one of the most visible manifestations of Czech academia's growing discontent with the public discourse and policies regarding Israel/Palestine. As we discuss below, the Czech debate as well as the international position are not only highly skewed in the pro-Israeli direction, but they are often characterized by Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism, and disregard for the Palestinian plight. This is in contrast with the academic field which has over the last two decades produced nuanced and critical voices capable of both deconstructing the dominant discourse and providing an alternative perspective on Middle East politics. The scholarly expertise, however, has been largely sidelined in media, public discussions, and policy-making.

Drawing on the symbolic watershed of the open letter criticizing the Czech foreign policy, in what follows we ask whether the current crisis and unprecedented disaster in Gaza could mark a possible shift in academics' attitudes towards their public engagement with the topic of Israel/Palestine. While the events in the region and the intensity of the pro-Israeli leaning of the Czech discourse caught local academics by surprise, over the following months there have been shifts towards a greater willingness to confront the ideologically charged environment. At the same time, it should be added that so far, academics who have voiced critique of Israeli policies have not faced professional repercussions and backlash similar to what we have seen in Germany, the US and other countries, a reality which arguably has facilitated bolder public engagement. More generally, this case prompts broader reflections on the relevance of academic expertise in the public domain and the challenges it faces.

The Czech public and political discourse on Israel and Palestine

The developments following October 7 can only be fully appreciated by attending to the longer history of the Czech political elites' position towards Israel and Palestine. Historically, Czech(oslovak) policies were significantly shaped by geopolitical influences, aligning with the dominant orientation within Central and Eastern Europe. Prior to 1989, the Czech stance was unequivocally pro-Palestine, determined by the coerced geopolitical partnership with the Soviet Union. In turn, the post-Velvet Revolution Czechoslovakia adopted a discernible shift towards a pro-Israel leaning, a move that was seen as an integral part of the new pro-Western, Transatlantic orientation. Today, the Czech Republic is considered one of the staunchest supporters of Israel within the European Union[2], a stance consistently showcased in international forums such as the United Nations. The Czech Republic nearly at all times votes in line with Israeli interests, most

recently against the humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.[3] Domestic political developments, such as changing left-wing and right-wing governments, have had a minimal impact on the Czech position towards Israel/Palestine.

The unwavering support for Israel extends beyond political elites and permeates the media discourse with implications for public opinion. Despite recent studies revealing a gap between Czech politicians and public attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict[4], the public maintains predominantly uncontested pro-Israeli views compared to other nations. As opposed to Germany, this seems to be rooted not in the legacies of the Holocaust (as Czechs have never fully acknowledged the historical responsibility for partaking in the mass murder of their Jewish and Roma fellow citizens during WWII) but rather in the myth of the shared fate of small besieged nations facing overwhelming adversaries, as well as historically positive attitudes towards the Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period which have been translated into support for the self-proclaimed "Jewish state" after 1989.[5] The resonance of the widespread pro-Israeli discourse may be further explained by the lack of civil society organizations representing Palestinian interests. Initiatives such as the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement are nearly non-existent and unfamiliar to the wider Czech audience. Topics regularly discussed in Western countries, such as the occupation of the Palestinian Territories, expansion of the illegal settlements in the West Bank, or concerns about the ongoing shift of Israeli politics towards the right, exemplified by the current government's extreme make-up, remain marginal in Czech public debate and largely unnoticed by Czech political elites. Many Czech politicians are not hesitant to call the mutual relations with Israel "special" and even "strategic."[6] In the mainstream political discourse, Israel is seen as the island of stability and democracy in an otherwise hostile environment of Arab nations. Former Czech president Miloš Zeman, who held the presidential office from 2010-2023, significantly contributed to this narrative with rhetoric often tainted by anti-Arab and Islamophobic statements[7].

These prevailing attitudes underpinned Czech responses to the October 7 events and the Israeli assault on Gaza. The Czech foreign minister's prompt visit to Israel after the Hamas attack, followed by visits of other key state representatives, and accompanied by statements of uncritical support for the Israeli actions, are both a continuation and demonstration of this special alignment. From the outset, the political posture adopted by the Czech government was almost fully endorsed and reproduced by the reaction of the public as well as private media. Public voices presented by most mainstream media reacted with a chorus of not just condemnations of Hamas' attack but also, frequently, endorsements of harsh Israeli response. Media reactions spanned from liberal-Zionist perspectives, emphasizing the threat posed by Hamas to the Israeli's security and the state's right to self-defense, to openly racist rhetoric equating all Palestinians with Hamas and evoking Orientalist tropes of murderous Arabs. Concerns over the humanitarian consequences or the overall fate of Palestinians were notably absent, persisting even after months of the Israeli operation in Gaza, which resulted in massive destruction and drew international condemnation elsewhere.

Czech academia and the question of Israel/Palestine

Like most other Central and Eastern-European countries, Czechia possesses a relatively long history of specialized study of the region (formerly under the rubric of Oriental studies), reaching as far back as the 19th century. Sustained for the reasons of trade, translation, training of diplomatic staff, or out of purely academic interest, this expertise, however, rarely effectively determined or intervened in the official state policy. This is a part of a bigger issue of disconnection between academic knowledge and policy-making in the Czech context, as there is not a sustained tradition of academics being involved in shaping foreign policy.

The October 7 attack and the subsequent war in Gaza thus found Czech academics in a situation in which there has been little to no experience with public and political engagement. Experts in the Middle East have only rarely sought to influence Czech foreign policy towards the conflict (or the region at large) or to utilize their academic capital to intervene in the public discourse. Nor was there

demand for their services: neither politicians nor the majority of the media sought a wider variety of expert voices or a nuanced analysis once the new round of violence erupted, relying instead on a rather small number of scholars who for the most part did not deviate from the mainstream discourse. Media space valorized a plethora of non-expert voices, many of whom rarely displayed focused interest (if any at all) in the region before, i.e. journalists, commentators, writers, or public intellectuals of different expertise. In addition, media and public debates featured a small number of known pro-Israel experts and observers who continued legitimizing Israeli actions even in the face of mounting international critique of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza.

The public and media space thus took a particularly articulated ideological shape in which siding with Israel was largely established as a "non-questionable common sense". As even hints of a critique of the Israeli policy (such as calling a cease-fire) were often attacked and denounced, academics with more complex perspectives whose ideological positions did not align with the dominant discourse faced a rather hostile environment. Under these conditions, expertise and knowledge of the region were deemed largely irrelevant in the mainstream discourse.

Nonetheless, the extremely one-sided Czech foreign policy, and the increasingly grave impact of the Israeli war on Gaza's population, started to generate critique of both the Czech steps in the international arena and the Israeli campaign. The growing discontent was not limited to academic voices, as it gradually found its way into the public sphere in the form of critical opinions coming from journalists and other public figures.[8] At the same time, it needs to be noted that any organized pro-Palestinian movement remains limited in terms of membership and activation of the public: for example, the biggest demonstration in support of the Palestinians so far attracted no more than five hundred people. Czech scholars contributed to these debates by providing long-term historical context of the conflict and emphasizing different collective memories of the global North and global South.[9] They have also attended to the dynamics of (de)colonization - a prism that remains largely at the margins of Czech debate and is only slowly finding its way into public discourse[10] - showing how it shifts our understanding of power hierarchies and political dynamics in Israel/Palestine.

More generally, criticism coming from Czech academics and others echoed the global arguments against the Israeli operation. From the early warning that the Hamas attack may invite an Israeli reaction too harsh by any reasonable measures[11], the discontent became more urgent with the mounting material and human cost of the ground Israeli invasion. This prompted questions about the moral and legal justification of this cost in terms of proportionality and unconditional humanitarian obligations[12]. A set of pragmatic concerns has also been articulated, such as harm to the long-term credibility of the Czech foreign policy, the risk of the spread of the war throughout the region with further negative international repercussions, and the likely negative implications of the Israeli destruction of Gaza for the long-term interests of the Israeli state itself.[13] At the same time, the critique offered by Czech academics has also shown restraint in some respects compared to many of their Western European and American counterparts, most notably in refraining from the gravest accusations of Israel committing genocide and apartheid against the Palestinians.

Critical arguments regarding the war in Gaza, pursued by academics as well as a few other commentators, grew at first largely at the margins of the media and public space.[14] In the mainstream media, the critical expert voices remained not only comparatively underrepresented but, perhaps even more significantly, when they were occasionally aired they were not taken up as an impetus for a genuine debate and contestation of the official state positions. Thus, even if critical arguments and dissenting opinions were voiced and broadcasted, most journalists and commentators would not take them seriously into account nor draw on them in their further coverage of the conflict. The critique was not utilized to press the politicians on crucial issues or to question the prevailing partisan opinion giving a blank check to Israel and its policies.

Becoming more vocal

Eventually, this inability to shape or influence the Czech state policies and the one-sided public debate, along with a strong moral appeal, should be seen as a key motivation for issuing the open letter calling for the change of these policies, as well as a reason for many others to sign it. Publishing the letter as a public petition which gathered thousands of signatures meant that the initiative could not be ignored as easily by the media and politicians as the individual voices. This can be exemplified by the reaction of a former diplomat and presidential candidate and currently an MP aligned with the ruling liberal coalition who responded with a proposal (the first of its kind) to organize a delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza.[15] A few state officials have also met with the initiators of the letter. Incidentally or not, shortly in the wake of the publishing of the letter the Czech government abandoned some of its most extreme policies, such as the blocking of the EU consensus on demanding a ceasefire and sanctioning extremist Israeli settlers in the West Bank. Significantly, the letter also succeeded in eliciting media reaction and at least partly disrupting the atmosphere of consensus within the public sphere. The majority of responses have been rather polemical and defensive of the pro-Israeli stance and, unsurprisingly, did not stay short of attempts to smear authors and signatories with the slur of antisemitism.[16]

Regardless of its immediate impacts on the public discourse, the letter, together with the other separate statements and interventions in the media, may be seen as a marked shift in the rather apolitical and restrained posture of the Czech academic community focused on the Middle East. It is the first document of its kind in the history of Czech academic research on the region, and, by articulating a normative position on Israel/Palestine and open criticism of the official Czech policy, it poses a novel development in academia's public engagement, something that would be inconceivable to many in the field before. While the Islamophobic statements that characterized the Czech debate during the so-called "migration crisis" of 2015-16 and the emergence of the Islamic State were criticized by some academics with expertise on the Middle East and Islam, their vocality and public engagement were much less pronounced. Motivated by the perceived gravity of the current events in Gaza and the indignation caused by the ignorance–both within the public debate and the political sphere–of the facts and circumstances viewed by the experts in the field as essential and crucial, a significant part of this community found it inevitable to contest the popular consensus.

The labor of formulating and publishing the letter, and engaging in the public debate after it came out, has already generated new dynamics and positionality for members of the academic community. Arguably, for many of the involved, joining the public debate and voicing their dissenting opinion against the overall consensus in a heated and sometimes openly hostile environment has by itself been an important step towards a new role that they had not previously envisioned in their professional careers. It has led to acquiring new experiences and skills in the public domain, forging new interpersonal relationships and networks of like-minded scholars, and as a result integrating previously disparate debates and areas of expertise. Overall, the events of the last six months can be seen as leading towards enhancing the professional identity which combines academic expertise with public engagement and fostering a new sense of community and identity.

Conclusion

Despite the developments discussed in this article, we do not argue that the Czech public debate and policy orientation have undergone a profound change in the wake of the public letter and the discussions it generated, nor that we should expect such a shift immediately. Nonetheless, what should be noted in this regard is that available data suggest that the Czech public is in fact not as unequivocally supportive of Israeli policies as governmental steps and dominant media framing suggest. According to a public opinion poll conducted by the Peace Research Center Prague and Herzl Center for Israel Studies at Charles University, the Czech public shows more nuanced views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,

although nearly half of the population is often unable to form a strong opinion on this topic.[17] More vocal public engagement of scholars thus might find a less hostile audience than it appears now.

Regardless of the extent to which Czech scholars will influence foreign policy and mainstream media discourse, what might prove crucial in the long run is the honing of skills and attitudes that are necessary preconditions for academia to play a more important role in public debate and deliberation. While it is too early to evaluate if this shift towards public engagement will be permanent, or will have long-term consequences for how academic expertise is wielded and heeded in making crucial foreign policy decisions, it shows that striving for relevance depends not solely on developing scholarly programs per se.

The scale of destruction and human life loss in Gaza, coupled with the inability - or, in many cases, unwillingness - of the international community to stop the Israeli war, makes yet again clear that scholarship on the politics of (not only) the Middle East cannot remain separated from public and policy debates. The brief overview of the Czech debate and academic intervention however reveals that there may be a gap between cultivating academic expertise and mobilizing it in situations in which it may prove influential. While there are ongoing debates concerning how (and if at all) should academia seek to influence policies and public attitudes, this case shows that we need to account for the wider constellations of public, media, and political relationships in coming to terms with the feasibility of such influence in the first place. Disciplinary politics, the matter of funding, and global hierarchies of knowledge production do indeed underpin and channel possibilities of academia's social and political relevance, but the encounter with particular local conditions needs to be taken into account as well.

Endnotes

1 The text of the letter in Czech can be found here: https://www.petice.com/vyzva_ke_zmn_postoje_eske_vlady_ke_krizi_na_blizkem_vychod?fbclid=IwAR0h9qvbwifbHAAsnJWoRl4HiV-ZY5X_I5SlNWtHN-U5s7qtO9C7xuSICQU. There is no English version.

2 Raphael BenLevi, Amnon Cavari, and Lesley Terris, 'Global Public Opinion toward Israel: Mapping and Assessing the Determinants of Public Attitudes in 45 Countries', *Israel Affairs* 25, no. 6 (2 November 2019): 1006–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2019.1670442; Marek Čejka, 'The Narrative of the Czech-Israeli Strategic Relations in the European Context', *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, no. 11, 4. (2017): 24-43.

3 United Nations, 'EU Overwhelmingly Votes at UN for Humanitarian Ceasefire in Gaza', United Nations Western Europe, 13 December 2023, https://unric.org/en/eu-overwhelmingly-votes-at-un-for-humanitarian-ceasefire-in-gaza/.

4 Irena Kalhousová et al., 'Elite-Public Gaps in Attitudes towards Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: New Evidence from a Survey of Czech Parliamentarians and Citizens' (Under review, 2024).

5 Čejka, 'Marek, Izrael a Českou republiku spojuje mýtus malých ohrožených států', A2larm, 31 August 2020, https://a2larm.cz/2020/08/izrael-a-ceskou-republiku-spojuje-mytus-malych-ohrozenych-statu/.

6 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the Czech Republic, 'Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy', 2015, https://mzv.gov.cz/file/1574645/Concept_of_the_Czech_Republic_s_Foreign_Policy.pdf.

7 Freedom House, 'Why We Shouldn't Ignore the Czech President's Latest Gaffe', Freedom House, 21 October 2015, https://freedomhouse.org/article/why-we-shouldnt-ignore-czech-presidents-latest-gaffe.

8 Jakub Patočka, 'Jakub Patočka: Zlomit kruh násilí', Deník Referendum, 16 October 2023, https://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/35714-zlomit-kruh-nasili; Martin Fendrych, 'Hamás svým terorem rozpoutal nenávist. Ale Hamás není islám, Hamás není Palestinec', Aktuálně.cz', Aktuálně.cz - Víte, co se právě děje, 16 October 2023, https://nazory.aktualne.cz/komentare/hamas-svym-terorem-rozpoutal-nenavist-ale-hamas-neni-islam/r~03fe07ce69b011ee8d680cc47ab5f122/.

9 Pavel Barša, 'Od židovské demokracie k židovské etnokracii. Izrael, globální Jih a my', *A2larm* (blog), 18 November 2023, https://a2larm.cz/2023/11/od-zidovske-demokracie-k-zidovske-etnokracii-izrael-globalni-jih-a-my/.

10 See, e.g., Ema Hřešanová 'Comrades and spies. From socialist scholarship to claims of colonial innocence in the Czech Republic', *American Ethnologist*, 2023, Vol. 50, No. 3, pp. 419-430.

11 Jakub Záhora, 'Brutální Útok Hamásu Je Neomluvitelný. Jaké Odvetné Kroky Izraele Ospravedlňuje?', Deník N, 10 October 2023, https://denikn.cz/1253840/brutalni-utok-hamasu-je-neomluvitelny-o-tom-neni-sporu-rozbor-si-ale-zaslouzi-i-izraelske-kroky-proti-palestincum/; Zora Hesová, 'To, jak bude pokračovat válka v Izraeli, se týká náš všech', *A2larm* (blog), 16 October 2023, https://a2larm.cz/2023/10/to-jak-bude-pokracovat-valka-v-izraeli-se-tyka-nas-vsech/.

12 Zora Hesová, '„Děláme to znovu?" Pásmo Gazy a poválečná zodpovědnost Západu', *A2larm* (blog), 6 January 2024, https://a2larm.cz/2024/01/delame-to-znovu-pasmo-gazy-a-povalecna-zodpovednost-zapadu/.

[13] Jakub Záhora, 'Co Izraeli Neprospěje? Bagatelizace Palestinského Utrpení a Bezvýhradná Obhajoba Operací v Gaze', Deník N, 13 February 2024, https://denikn.cz/1351373/bezvyhradna-obhajoba-operaci-v-gaze-a-bagatelizace-utrpeni-palestincu-v-ceskem-diskurzu-neprospeji-ani-samotnemu-izraeli/?ref=list; Jakub Koláček, 'Český postoj k válce v Izraeli a Gaze je morálním i politickým selháním', *A2larm* (blog), 7 February 2024, https://a2larm.cz/2024/02/cesky-postoj-k-valce-v-izraeli-a-gaze-je-moralnim-i-politickym-selhanim/; Jan Bělíček, 'Postoj k válce v Gaze podrývá kredibilitu zahraniční politiky Západu, říká analytik Jan Daniel', *A2larm* (blog), 10 February 2024, https://a2larm.cz/2024/02/postoj-k-valce-v-gaze-podryva-kredibilitu-zahranicni-politiky-zapadu-rika-analytik-jan-daniel/.

[14] Critical reactions appeared mainly or exclusively on non-mainstream media platforms with limitted leadership such as *Deník N* or *A2larm/A2*. The latter, comprising a non-commercial "alternative" platform ordinarily identified with leftist and progressive agenda also devoted perhaps the most effort to provide a balanced coverage of the war with, among other things, a series of six podcasts staging academic experts' views on the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a special issue assessing the war from different angles.

[15] ČTK, 'Vláda by mohla zorganizovat pomoc potřebným v Gaze', *Pavel Fischer* (blog), 9 February 2024, https://www.pavelfischer.cz/17525-vlada-by-mohla-zorganizovat-pomoc-potrebnym-v-gaze/.

[16] Though indirect and shrouded in ambiguous language, these found their way even in the public broadcast media; see Jan Fingerland, 'O tom otevřeném dopise', Rozhlas Plus, 11 February 2024, https://plus.rozhlas.cz/jan-fingerland-o-tom-otevrenem-dopise-9172189 .

[17] Peace Research Center Prague and Herzl Center for Israel Studies, 'Czech Attitudes towards Israel', prcprague.cz, 10 May 2022, https://www.prcprague.cz/news/2022/5/10/czech-attitudes-towards-israel-new-study.

Europe and the abused "Shoah guilt complex" after October 7

Claudia De Martino, CORIS, La Sapienza University

Accusations of European double standards and inconsistency in the war Israel is waging on Gaza have raged since October 7, coming from Arab states, the BRICS, European public opinion, and even from some Western officials themselves. The comparison between the EU reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and Israel's war on Gaza is stunning. Moscow's blatant violation of international law had then ushered a unanimous response by European powers and peoples and triggered sanctions, economic boycotts, and mass economic, cultural, and diplomatic disengagement from Russia. On the other hand, since October 7 many European governments have been perceived as colluding with the Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip which has prompted one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes of the 21st century. In fact, many EU states, both from the staunchly pro-Israel Visegrad group (four former Communist eastern and central European countries: Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia) and the Western bloc (the "filo-Atlantic" Western European countries and founders of the EU, such as France, Germany, the Benelux and Italy plus Spain and Portugal), usually more balanced in its approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, have abstained on UNSC resolutions asking for an immediate ceasefire and cracked down on Palestinian NGO's and institutional funding – including to UNRWA, in the midst of a tremendous humanitarian crisis.

The EU-Israeli relationship is tarnished by a guilt complex based on the Holocaust (Shoah) nurtured by most Western states towards the Jewish state. This partially explains the recent and vocal emphasis in Shoah commemorations displayed by European heads of states and party leaders in attending the "March of the Living" in Auschwitz or laying wreaths of flowers in places where Jews were murdered in World War II, all actions that are doing little in helping raising awareness among the public about racism, intolerance, and Islamophobic violence again on the rise throughout Europe. This Shoah-related "guilt complex" buys into the rhetoric of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, who throughout his 20 years in power has framed the existence of Israel as the single shelter of Jewish life and prioritized anti-Islamist and anti-terror security discourses in its relations with Europe.

The European "guilt complex" acts in two ways: first, fully supporting Israel, shielding it from attacks in the diplomatic arena by subscribing to its victimization's narrative of a lonely "David-style" oppressed single Jewish state confronting a "Goliath-like" galaxy of enemies, all united against it under the banner of "terror"; and second, in defending Israel from any critique and any attempt to address it as a normal country expected to act responsibly in the international arena.

Paradoxically, the "guilt complex" has recently been emphasized by governing right-wing parties in Western Europe more than it used to be in the past, when left-leaning or central Christian Democratic coalitions were ruling. European right-wing government use it instrumentally to advance a so-called Judeo-Christian identity of the EU in deep contrast to the multinational and multicultural vision of the EU, embracing Muslim minorities and new immigrants of any background, supported by left-leaning parties. Yet, the alliance between European right-wing parties, among which lie many formerly anti-Semitic political forces, with Israel is quite controversial even among Israeli right-wing politicians. For instance, in 2016 the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin publicly denounced members of the ruling party (Likud) for flirting with far-right European politicians. At that time, the warning was directed at those government members who had invited Austrian leader Heinz-Christian Strache of the Freedom Party (FPÖ), previously accused of anti-Semitism, to visit Israel as a gesture of normalization. On that occasion, Rivlin thundered against "those who

try to form alliances with xenophobic and anti-Semitic parties and groups that only seemingly support the State of Israel," adding that "it was up to his generation, closer to that of the Holocaust, to draw a clear line: no interest in the world could justify this unfortunate alliance with groups (...) committed to fighting all foreigners, refugees, and migrants who dare to enter their space".[1] Since 2017, though, Netanyahu's Israel has been strengthening its cooperation with the right-wing "Visegrád Group", (Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland) with the goal of expanding its international relations beyond Western Europe, often perceived as hostile in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while also playing on the traditional "guilt complex" of Western Europe and the EU growing understanding of Israel in Western Europe as a bulwark against "Muslim terror".

In an era where the memory of the Shoah has never been so central in the political agendas of half of Europe, the United States, and Israel, Shmuel Rozeman, President of the Jewish association managing the "March of the Living" and an authoritative voice in matters of Holocaust studies, bucked the trend articulating a rather pessimist opinion in an interview with the *Rhein-Neckar Zeitung* (April 24, 2017), predicting that "in the next ten years there won't be any direct witness of the Shoah and (thus) antisemitism and denialism will pull themselves back together". His prophecy touches a raw nerve: the universal message against genocide and its ever possibility of recurrence that the Shoah was supposed to convey is gaining legitimacy in institutions, but it is progressively fading out in European societal fabrics. The memory of the Shoah should have acted as a powerful reminder of the rejection of any form of discrimination against minorities, ethnic, national, or racial hatred propaganda eventually leading to new genocides, and the refusal of unjust orders, even if imposed by lawful authorities, which should in turn represent the fundamental core of any liberal democracy's social contract. However, this message has failed to transcend the specific case of the Jewish suffering during the Shoah, failing to boost international vigilance against discrimination of any oppressed or colonised minority. Even the establishment of a dedicated day for the memory of the Shoah (the 27th of January), introduced by the United Nations in 2005 (UN General Assembly Resolution 60/7) was originally meant to shore up the compliance with the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1951) – signed or ratified by 152 states – which lies at the foundation of the International Criminal Court based in The Hague (1998). The link between the Jewish genocide's yearly commemoration and its universal value as moral warning against any possible mass persecution has not been enshrined either by European states' policies or those of Israel. In addition, the divisions between the two main Jewish organizations engaged in the commemoration of the Shoah – the US-leaning World Jewish Congress and the Russian-leaning European Jewish Congress – has further complicated these narratives and, as I have argued elsewhere, "undermines the common intent that both declare to pursue as well as the moral authority of those very institutions that would like to stand as guardians of the memory of the Shoah when there will be no more witnesses."[2] This development raises the question whether the memory of the Shoah has become so politicized over time that it can no longer unite even the Jewish community around its commemoration.

Indeed, a "Holocaust fatigue" has been noticed in German public opinion as much as in other European countries: according to the Anti-Defamation League, three-quarters of Poles declare that Jews talk excessively about the Holocaust, followed by 44% of Austrians, 40% of Belgians, 38% of Italians, and 37% of Spaniards.[3] This societal "fatigue", in sharp contrast to most European governments' pro-Israel vocal support and Holocaust state canonization, is marking the emergence of a young generation no longer defined by World War II's memory, but also increasingly moving away from the Holocaust guilt complex by acknowledging that "Jews also have also committed crimes"[4] in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 2015, a survey conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung on Israeli-German relations highlighted a strong desire in Germany for a "Schlusstrich" ("to draw a line" or "to put an end to something"), meaning the emergence of the need to move away from a heavy historical legacy such as the Holocaust responsibility. Such a shift was supported by a

remarkable 65% of respondents under the age of 40. Young Germans are tired of bearing the burden of events dating back to 80 years ago. It marks no attempt at denialism, but rather an aspiration to be relieved from a burdensome past loosely connected to the present. The Auschwitz memory stays important for young Germans at national level, but no longer defines identity at a personal one. Young German feelings are in line with those of their Europeans peers, with the European newspaper Politico reporting that a third of Europeans interviewed on this matter complain that Jews are too much invested in commemorating the Holocaust to "advance their own political agenda" (November 27, 2018)[5], mistaking Jews with Israelis, and showing a high degree of confusion between diaspora Jews and Israel, primarily generated by Israeli government authorities who would not miss an opportunity to blur the distinction between them. And while anti-Semitism is not yet a rampant phenomenon in Western Europe, despite being again on the rise since October 7, conspiracy theories about the supranational Jewish lobby are already the rule.

Muslim minority communities stand at an uneasy relationship with such trends. Some worry that the authorities' attachment to the Holocaust as a "European moral norm" might further alienate social and religious minority groups of Arab and Islamic descent who already feel little part of the respective European national communities and see it as a way to silence criticism of Israel. Frantic reactions such as those of Germany's Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck, blaming Muslim groups for the rise of antisemitism in Germany but also indiscriminately identifying pro-Palestinian demonstrations with pro-Islamist supporters, together with the proposal to make migrants' residency status conditional on the public rejection of Antisemitism, could only deepen the cleavage and fan the flames.[6] Muslim groups already blame the authorities for applying a double standard, overemphasizing Europe's historical role in the Shoah while paying little notice to other crimes, such as colonial ones, perpetrated in countries from which many migrants in Europe today originate. A "selective memory" process frown upon by the Arab collective and acutely described by Professor Karim Emile Bitar as a "double traumatism" (Shoah versus colonialism) nurturing two separate, and mutually exclusive, historical legacies and marking the cleavage between the Global South and the former colonial West.[7]

Finally, some observers project diverging trajectories between Israel and Europe in the near future, due to multiple factors: the small number of Jews living in Europe (about 1 million); the growing value-based distance towards Israel (reciprocated by Israel, with 69% of Israeli citizens considering "Europe" an enemy[8] by virtue of its support of the "two state solution"); the increasing irrelevance of the values stemming from WWII, such as the commitment to build a united Europe; and the flare-up of small countries nationalisms within the EU.

In the next European elections due in May 2024, opinion polls show most of European countries projected to shift further right-wing, driven by a strong opposition to migrants, and particularly Muslim migrants. Yet, there seems to be a growing divide among generations on hostility to Muslims: negative attitudes toward Muslims, in fact, are much more common among older people (60+), while 18-34 years old seem to adopt more lenient or tolerant positions, with a gap of over 25% points.[9] Additional surveys, such as the popular Economist/YouGov poll[10], confirm this trend. Consequently, there seems to be a positive correlation between appraisal of Muslim migrants and support of the Palestinian cause among youth aged 18-29, which tend to side slightly more with Palestinians than with Israelis (28%-20%) compared to those aged 65 and over, consistently siding with Israel by a margin of 65% to 6%. A trend in line with similar surveys conducted in the USA, with only 48% of Millennial and Gen Z'ers approving U.S. support to Israel.[11]

Youth (Gen-Z's) engagement with the Palestinian cause reveals a wide generational gap in attitudes towards social justice on a global scale. If youth are generally more likely to embrace change in their respective societies, Generation Z's mark is its tech-savviness and its consequential wide exposure to global social media, producing a horizontal rather than top-down information filtered by the

governments.[12] In contrast to national official media, in facts, social media are more likely to host contributions by on-the-ground, free-lance journalists from the Global South providing alternative readings of events. This feeds Generation Z's main generational hallmark of being highly invested in promoting global campaigns based on racial and gender equality and individual rights.

In the current conflict on Gaza, social media have been far less shaped by authorities' attempts to control speech, accessing more alternative sources released directly from Gaza, displaying the extent of sufferance of average civilian people, and challenging or, at least, denting official narratives of the Israeli Defence Forces acting with restraint in warfare. In addition to being exposed to the brutality of war in full display, they have been stricken by the lack of intervention of the international community and by the stark contrast between sound international laws and humanitarian international laws' provisions and real-time images of mass bombings and starvation in the Gaza Strip, which these same laws seemed completely unable to stop. Dramatic images of Palestinian suffering posted on social media have fostered a sense of solidarity with those perceived as killed by a great military power, that is Israel, able to bomb the Strip for successive 180 days. Therefore, the Palestinian cause has been ranked among the "just causes" by young activists already protesting century-old oppression of great powers or Western white elites, linking it up with other global contention movement, such as "Black Lives Matter" or anti-apartheid ones, based on intersectionality. A latest development marking a global shift in narratives in which Israel is rapidly losing out the support it once enjoyed among Black activists, who used to sympathize with Jews as a people historically oppressed throughout and by the West, and European leftists, who associated it with collective farms.

In the latest round of war in Gaza, however, many Muslim youth in Europe are seizing the opportunity to raise their voice on Palestine to voice their discomfort of being regarded as second-class citizens in many European states, where they feel more tolerated by than equal to natives. "Freedom for Palestine" is a catch-all slogan superseding all internal differences among Muslim groups, providing them with an opportunity to denounce the Islamophobia they experience in their daily life in Europe, this time for a humanitarian just cause shared by many of their peers. Yet, Islamophobia has been on the rise throughout the conflict in Gaza, with Federal Germany, for example, invested by a wave of hostile acts against Muslims, digging further the trench between German native citizens and new minorities. Particularly in the Bundesrepublik, pro-Palestinian demonstrations chanting "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" have been forbidden, thus curbing freedom of expression in favour of a blind check and widespread consensus for Israel just now starting to crack. In France too, the Government has been caught between a rock and a hard place by pro-Palestinian mass protests, fearing the recovery of youth clashes of Arab descent with the police in the banlieues, like the riots sparked by the shooting of a 17-year-old driver of Maghrebi descent in a Paris suburb in June 2023, which ravaged the city's outskirts.[13] Yet, this time, pro-Palestinian support is also very spread among European youth and University students, who from Ghent to Berin, from Pisa to London[14], have been voicing their discontent with their respective authorities siding with Israel and thus making themselves complicit with genocide in Gaza. This trend could show an increasing bond between young EU natives and their fellow citizens of migrant background, signalling a potential convergence on attitudes towards global issues and conflicts in the Gen-Z, overcoming deep cultural and societal cleavages.

Finally, the EU should not be blinded by its "Shoah guilt complex" in relation to current affairs in the MENA region and should be seriously concerned by its plummeting reputation among Arab countries. Having bet on civil societies' cooperation as the largest donor in the Mediterranean region, its activity in MENA countries could not be insulated from widespread repercussions due to its one-sidedness in the Gaza conflict and its non-abidance to international law, in sharp contrast to the Ukrainian war, where sanctions on Russia had been advocated on a moral ground. The EU's reputation in advocating for human rights, the rule of law, and

democracy in the Arab world – all values and objectives pompously outlined in the "EU's 2021 New Agenda for the Mediterranean strategy" – relies on good connections with civil societies and local communities, now massively alienated by EU stances on the Gaza conflict and its alleged complicity with genocide. Buit the blatant double standards over Gaza have drawn much criticism from activists of the region. The same activists supposed to challenge their own governments on human rights with EU assistance no longer perceive it as neutral. In November, for instance, the Tunisian foreign minister is reported to have said "we want an authentically Tunisian democracy, without intervention from the outside or foreign NGOs" just before the European NGO's office in Tunis was vandalised.[15] In other countries, such as Egypt, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights led by Hossam Baghat has cut all ties with the EU Commission. The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) concludes that by now "Europe's soft power in the Arab world may have suffered irreversible harm"[16], much more serious than the one caused by the 2003 invasion of Iraq, when some major EU countries (Germany and France among them) refrained from partaking to the US-driven but UN-justified military campaign. Furthermore, the devastation inflicted on Gaza could fuel terrorist attacks of lone wolves and scattered jihadi groups in Europe, such as the one defused in Brussels on the 6th of March.[17] For Europe rebuilding strong ties with the Arab world is a high priority which would prove not only rewarding in political gains and moral standing, but also a rational and far-sighted decision, aligning the EU with the positions advanced by many BRICS and Global South countries in defence of the decisions of the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court and of a more multipolar order yet to emerge, but this major shift will require a firm resolve from EU institutions and governments and a breakaway from the "Shoah guilt complex" to embrace a more universal understanding of 20th century history and, consequently, of present events too.

Endnotes

1 Jeremy Sharon, "Rivlin warns of Israeli alliance with antisemitic parties in Europe", The Jerusalem Post, May 1, 2019, https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/rivlin-warns-of-israeli-alliance-with-antisemitic-parties-in-europe-588437.

2 Claudia De Martino, "Storia, memoria, politica. Il ricordo della Shoah oltre l'epoca dei testimoni. Una riflessione sul futuro della memoria, i rischi storiografici e politici", *Reset*, 29 giugno 2020, https://www.reset.it/idee/la-memoria-della-shoah-oltre-lepoca-dei-testimoni.

3 ADL survey, November 15, 2019, https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/adl-global-survey-18-countries-finds-hardcore-anti-semitic-attitudes-remain.

4 Ibidem.

5 POLITICO, "Third of Europeans know little or nothing about Holocaust: poll", November 27, 2018, https://www.politico.eu/article/holocaust-poll-third-of-europeans-know-little-or-nothing/.

6 POLITICO, Claudia Chiappa, November 2, 2023, https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-robert-habeck-vice-chancellor-concerned-over-rise-of-antisemitism/.

7 IREMMO, «Hezbollah face à la guerre», January 24, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beFJIiEACHA.

8 Mitvim Israel Foreign Policy Index, 2023, https://mitvim.org.il/en/publication/the-israeli-foreign-policy-index-of-2023/.

9 Pew Research Center, Minority groups survey, October 14, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/minority-groups/.

10 Matthew Smith, "Attitudes to the Israel-Palestine conflict in Western Europe and the USA in 2023", July 3, 2023, https://yougov.co.uk/international/articles/45869-attitudes-israel-palestine-conflict-western-europe.

11 NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist poll, November 15, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/11/15/1212913674/poll-israel-hamas-war-biden-democrats-republicans.

12 (PDF) How is Gaza Inspiring Gen-Z and Changing their Mindsets?. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377085097_How_is_Gaza_Inspiring_Gen-Z_and_Changing_their_Mindsets#fullTextFileContent [accessed Mar 02 2024].

13 Paul Taylor, *The Guardian*, 2 Dec. 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/02/antisemitism-jews-france-emmanuel-macron-israel-hamas-warved police racism

14 VRT news, "Pro-Palestinian activists attack Ghent University in protest against ties with Israel", February 15, 2024, https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/en/2024/02/15/pro-palestinian-activists-attack-ghent-university-in-protest-aga/.

15 European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), "When soft power is spent: Gaza, Ukraine, and Europeans' standing in the Arab world", March 7, 24, https://www.pubaffairsbruxelles.eu/opinion-analysis/when-soft-power-is-spent-gaza-ukraine-and-europeans-standing-in-the-arab-world/ .

16 Ibidem.

17 RTBF, «Projet d'attentat déjoué visant le Botanique à Bruxelles : le suspect majeur conteste toute implication», March 7, 2024, https://www.rtbf.be/article/projet-dattentat-dejoue-visant-le-botanique-a-bruxelles-le-suspect-majeur-conteste-toute-implication-11340511 .

Mis-framing the Houthis:
The European Debate Focuses on Iran, And Eclipses Yemen

Eleonora Ardemagni, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI)

The way the public debate in Europe[1] has framed the Houthi movement since it began attacking Red Sea shipping in late 2023 is a case of mis-framing. The debate has produced an incomplete and thus fallacious framing which tends to disregard the agency of the Houthis while focusing on its assumed political dependency on Iran.[2] Since October 7th and the following opening of the Red Sea crisis by Yemen's Houthis, the European public debate about the Zaydi Shi'a movement (also known as Ansar Allah) has centred on Iran's interests and strategies, stressing the proxy-client relationship assumed to govern relations between the Houthis and Tehran. In my view – and that of many Yemen experts – the Houthis are partners, but not proxies, of Iran. They are an armed movement with a local genealogy and leadership, which first of all pursues to consolidate and expand its authoritarian rule in Yemen merging part of the Zaydi tradition with *Khomeinism*, in rejection of the central government's authority, of the Saudi-backed rise of Salafism in Yemen and the way economic resources and religious affairs have been managed by the government since the 1990 unification. In this framework, the Houthis have gradually developed a partnership with Iran and its allies in the region, especially since Saudi Arabia has begun the military intervention in the country in 2015.[3]

What is more salient for my purposes than the proxy-partners dispute is that such an Iran-centred approach to the Houthi issue has eclipsed Yemen itself from the European debate, removing its civil war and the internal scenario that enabled the rise of the group led by Abdel Malek Al Houthi from the discussion. This phenomenon has been dominant in European media, and it has also affected most of Europe-based think tank productions in the context of the Red Sea crisis. In the majority of cases, journalists and experts have concentrated – especially in the early phase of the crisis – on how the offensive the Houthis conduct against international navigation in the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden fits into Iran's regional strategy during the Gaza war, and the role Tehran plays in the maritime crisis, rather than on the Houthis' own motivations and interests.

The Houthi maritime offensive should instead be seen within the broader context of the Yemen war, started in early 2015 after the Houthis' coup in Sanaa, and current power balances in the country. The fact the European public debate about the Red Sea crisis is Iran-centred and overshadows Yemen disregards the Houthis' agency as a political and military actor, thus offering an incomplete picture which risks negatively affect policymaking, since poor background and inaccurate framing are likely to led to misleading policy recommendations.

Against this backdrop, reframing the European debate about the Houthis *on Yemen* is a priority for knowledge production, which should both improve academic and analytical approaches to the crisis and also enable a more effective policy response to their violent attacks against freedom of navigation. This reframing effort can benefit from a closer look at the Houthi movement's genealogy and group trajectory. Doing so, making sense of *when* the Houthi-Iran relationship has started, and *how* it has evolved, can be a very useful reframing exercise.

The European 'discovery of the Houthis`. Two dynamics, the same mis-framing

Two entrenched dynamics have contributed to mis-frame the Houthis in the European debate, maximizing the focus on Iran while eclipsing Yemen. The first dynamic relates to the widespread lack of knowledge about the Houthis, and Yemen more broadly. Before October 7th, European newspapers and TV channels did not publish

in any depth about, or cover, the Yemen war, especially in my country, Italy. For too long, this conflict has been ´off the information radar`, as it was considered –in a short-sighted way- peripheral to European interests due to Yemen's geographical position but also because of the absence of a 'migrant threat` to Europe (differently from Libya and Syria) and of the absence of Russia's involvement in the country (differently from Syria and Libya, again).

European media and public opinion ´discovered` the Houthis only because of the impact on shipping caused by the Red Sea attacks since late 2023. At that point, the media then tended to oversimplify the issue mis-framing the Houthis as Iranian proxies executing Tehran's orders. This helped to reduce the complexity and provide ´a label` to the unknown through a plausible but misleading heuristic scheme. Portraying the Houthis merely as Iran's puppets was the easiest way to frame the Red Sea crisis exclusively as a direct fallout of the Israel-Hamas war, thus providing a linear, effortless narrative to the widely distracted European audience vis-à-vis international politics.

The second dynamic regards the research angle from which most of the Europe-based analysts and experts have conveyed perspectives about the Houthis to public opinion after October 7th. Most of the articles and analyses published by experts about the Red Sea crisis have focused on Iran's role in Yemen, the typology and quantity of weapons Tehran provides to the Yemeni group, or the implications of maritime disruption on global economy and trade balances. More broadly, Houthis' attacks have been analysed through the regional lens of the "escalation risk", or the "enlargement risk" in the Middle East. Conversely, only a very small quantity of Europe-based think tank's articles about the Red Sea crisis have investigated the history and the strategy of the Houthis as an armed movement, the goals they would pursue through the attacks, and current conflict balances in Yemen.[4]

The Iran-centred research angle followed by Europe-based experts can be partly explained by the limited number and media presence of Europe-based Yemen experts and the experts' widespread incentive to focus on topics of media interest such as Tehran's leverage in Yemen and the Israel-Gaza war. As a result, Iran's role and goals in Yemen and in the Red Sea crisis have monopolized the European debate about the Houthis, with both media and experts widely mis-framing the armed political actor.

Observing the Houthis as armed political actors: A reframing attempt.

A 2020 Report on the Houthis by the American RAND Corporation acutely observed that "although we have learned much about the Houthis since 2015, many crucial questions remain unanswered. And absent this information, observers tend to fall back on old prejudices. But analysts should avoid falling into this trap. The Houthis, like Iran, are a strategic actor with clear interests. At their core the Houthis are focused on domestic issues and historic grievances".[5]

To demonstrate this, it can be helpful to chart the political-military trajectory of the Houthi movement since its foundation trying to reframe the European debate about the Houthis *from Iran to Yemen*. This effort doesn't aim to understate the decisive role Tehran played, and has been playing, in supporting the evolution of the Yemeni movement from a local guerrilla group to a regional actor with significant military capabilities. Rather, such a reframing can contribute instead to highlight the often-neglected agency of the Saada-based movement and its evolving relationship with power, putting Yemen again at the centre of the debate. Analyzing the Houthis first of all as an armed political actor also allows to better identify *when* and *how* the Iranian variable has intervened in shaping the group's path.

1980s-2004: Resistance to power. The Iranian Khomeini as the Houthis' inspiring model

At an early stage, the linkages between the embryonic Houthi movement and Iran were ideological, more than religious (both belong to the Shi'a confession of Islam, but the Houthis are Zaydis while the Iranians are Twelvers,

so they follow different branches), as they shared a similar worldview. The topic of the "resistance" to the Yemeni government, the US and Israel was central in the Houthis' formation. Husayn Al Houthi, the founder of the movement in early 2000s who had previous political experiences with Zaydi Shia political parties (Hizb al-Haqq) and formations (The Believing Youth), built much of his political discourse upon the opposition against "arrogance" and "corruption".

At the very outset of the war on terror launched after 11 September 2001, Al Houthi condemned the security-oriented alliance the Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh established with the US against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). This provided him with an effective argument to target both the internal (the government) and the international (the US) power. At that time, the Houthi slogan "God is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse upon the Jews, Victory to Islam" was shouted for the first time by Al Houthi's supporters in Sanaa against Saleh. In his collection of lectures ("Malazim"), Husayn Al Houthi frequently mentioned the Ayatollah Khomeini as an inspiring leader not because he was an Iranian or a Shi'a, but because he "resisted" to the Western pressure.[6] The founder studied in Iran in the 1980s and had contacts with Shi'a religious seminaries abroad, comprised in the Shi'a holy city of Qom (Iran), but combined the anti-imperialist message of *Khomeinism* with the distinctive Zaydi religious traditions from which the movement emerged.

2004-10: Rebellion against the power. Iran starts limited weapons provisions.

According to the UN, Iran started to provide a limited number of weapons to the Houthis in 2009, as Saudi Arabia had military intervened in the Saada wars after the Houthis performed border raids crossing the kingdom's territory. The six rounds of the Saada wars, fought in 2004-10 between the Houthis and Yemen's army (supported by the Republican Guard and tribal Salafi militias), represented a watershed for the movement. Fighting started in Saada, the Houthis' stronghold in the upper north, gradually expanding in two directions: down to Amran and northern Sanaa and up till the Saudi border. In 2004, Husayn Al Houthi was killed by Yemen's army.

The Saada wars can be considered a rebellion against the central power: it turned into an attrition war that exhausted the Yemeni army and allied forces although the Houthis weren't able to transform fighting groups into a coordinated and synchronized combat force. As of 2009, "the Huthi phenomenon is not yet an insurgency" since lacks a political agenda; also, it isn't an organized entity, even though "it may develop in this direction".[7] With regard to Iran, a confidential UN report seen by AFP in 2013 suggested the existence of "a pattern of arms shipments to Yemen by sea that can be traced back to at least 2009,[8] the year in which Saudi Arabia reacted to the Houthis' cross-border ambushes intervening with air power and artillery on the Yemeni territory.

2011-15: Revolution against the power. Iran systematically provides weapons.

Iran has begun to systematically provide weapons to the Houthis since 2015, in the context of the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen following the Houthis' coup in Sanaa. The Houthis joined popular protests against Saleh's government in 2011, calling their movement Ansar Allah (Partisans of God) to reach a wider Yemeni audience. The Houthis didn't start the revolution; however, they largely profited later from both popular and elite discontent. They derailed the institutional transition process (2012-14), forging an alliance of convenience with former president Saleh against the interim government, and then setting up camps in the capital to denounce government's economic measures (mid-2014). In this way, the Houthis were able to take the power in early 2015: they seized institutional palaces in Sanaa, placed the interim president under house arrests, emanated a constitutional declaration and formed a revolutionary committee. Therefore, the Houthis upgraded their military capabilities first of all thanks to Saleh's power bloc, and the support of the majority of the regular army which still sided with the former president, and, since 2015 onwards, due to the increasing provision of weapons by Iran.

2017-24: Capture of power in Yemen and maritime disruption. Iran steps up weapons provision and training.

The 2015 war, still formally ongoing, has allowed the Houthis to increase their military capabilities, structuring as a political organization and also as an economic actor in held territories. The Houthis have gradually captured the power in the northwest,[9] first placing supervisors alongside local officials and then taking over fully the state machine after they killed Saleh in late 2017. From that moment on, the Houthis have consolidated their *de facto* government. Differently from other Iranian-backed armed actors in the region, they are largely autonomous from Tehran's money, relying upon taxes, customs duties, confiscation of properties/lands, revenues from fuel and telecommunication sectors, smuggling,[10] while receiving a limited financial support by Iran.

During the war, Iran has played a decisive role. The al-Qods force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and also Hezbollah have provided training to the Houthis, with military advisers also teaching how to internally assemble and build drones. In 2016-22, the Houthis targeted Saudi Arabia with missiles and drones and, to a lesser extent, the United Arab Emirates. In 2019, a medium-range ballistic missile was launched for the first time against Saudi Arabia. The Houthis have been partially integrated in the "axis of resistance" led by Tehran, for instance with the establishment of the Jihad Council in Yemen to further coordinate military strategy,[11] even though preserving a significant degree of autonomy in decision-making.

Since late 2023, maritime attacks against international navigation in the Red Sea, occurring also with Iran's intelligence support, have allowed the group to gain in regional status and media visibility, disrupting a collective interest like freedom of navigation. In terms of political language, the Ayatollah Khomeini is missing in the speeches of the current leader Abdel Malek Al Houthi: when he mentions Iran, this is mostly related to the "resistance" against Israel, which therefore remains a key issue.[12]

Many Reasons for Reframing

A deeper look at the Houthi movement's trajectory demystifies many of the oversimplifications the mis-framing of this armed political actor has spread, in times of heightened media attention. Although sharing a worldview, the Houthis weren't created by Tehran, so they can't be considered its puppets, but rather partners. The Houthis play with Iran's 'team`, but they also have profited on the material (ex. weapons, training), and immaterial (ex. political support, media, political discourse) assistance coming from Tehran and the axis to advance their own goals in Yemen. The military and political rise of the Houthis as regional actors wouldn't have been possible without the Iranian military support. Nevertheless, the Houthis are a Yemeni actor with their own agency. Observing the Houthis through these lenses sheds light on the local genealogy of the group and agenda, as well as on the incremental tightening of the relationship with Iran. Reframing the European debate about the Houthis from Iran to Yemen allows first of all to recalibrate the analytical and media representation of the group, in order to better grasp what's going on. Moreover, this effort can also benefit policymaking, favouring the elaboration of more effective tips and recommendations about the Red Sea crisis.

Endnotes

[1] This article focuses on the European countries and not on the US. In my view, the Western debate about the Houthis in the Red Sea crisis has been in fact more nuanced than the European one, especially since US think tanks' analyses tended to provide more background, thus consistency, regarding the Yemen war and the relationship between the Houthis and Iran. This could be related to the stronger knowledge and attention by US think tanks to Yemen and the Houthis with respect to European ones, mainly because of: the US drone warfare campaign against AQAP and IS in Yemen (2002-ongoing), started after the 2000-2001 al-Qaeda's attacks against American targets (USS Cole; 9/11); the intelligence and logistical support provided by the US to the Saudi-led Coalition intervening in Yemen since 2015 to defeat the Houthis.

[2] Framing refers to how individuals construct and organize meanings in everyday life. See the seminal work of Erving Goffman (1974). *Frame analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, New York: Harper & Row. In this essay, misframing builds upon the term introduced by Nancy Fraser (2008) in her philosophical work on justice: Fraser defined misframing a typology of injustice occurring when a dominant frame wrongly denies to a group of people the chance to take part to distribution, recognition and ordinary-political representation. Nancy Fraser, "Abnormal Justice", *Critical Inquiry*, 34:3, 2008, pp. 393-422. Since the meaning I convey to this term in the essay builds upon Fraser's conceptualization but presents differences, I refer to my version as mis-framing.

[3] See some of my previous publications about the Houthis and the Yemen war: "Beyond the Axis: The Houthis Now Are Selling Their Own "Brand", in ISPI Dossier "A Global Gamble: Yemen's Houthis After Gaza", (edited by E. Ardemagni), *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, February 15, 2024; "The Yemeni-Saudi Border: The Huthis and the Evolution of Hybrid Security Governance", in A. Hamidaddin (ed.), *The Huthi Movement in Yemen. Ideology, Ambition and Security in the Arab Gulf*, KFCRIS Series, I.B. Tauris-Bloomsbury, 2022, pp. 259-272; "Yemen's Defense Structure: Hybridity and Patronage After the State", *Journal of Arabian Studies*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, 2020, pp. 72-89; "Beyond Yemen's Militiadoms. Restarting from local agency", *The European Union Institute for Security Studies*, EUISS Conflict Series Brief 8, April 2020; "Yemen's nested conflict(s): Layers, geographies and feuds", *ORIENT-German Journal for Politics, Economics and Culture of the Middle East*, No.2, 2019, pp. 35-41; "The Huthis: Adaptable Players in Yemen's Multiple Geographies", CRiSSMA-Catholic University of Milan, Educatt, N° 25, 2019; "Patchwork Security: The New Face of Yemen's Hybridity", in ISPI-Carnegie Dossier "Hybridizing Security: Armies and Militias in Fractured Arab States", *Italian Institute for International Political Studies and Carnegie Middle East Center* (co-edited with Y. Sayigh), October, 30 2018.

[4] Some of the few examples are: Farea Al-Muslimi, "The Houthis won't back down after US and UK strikes on Yemen", *Chatham House*, January 12, 2024; Helen Lackner, "The Houthis in Yemen Gain the World's Attention", *Orient XXI*, January 10, 2024; Baraa Shiban, "The Houthi Attacks Stem from a Failed Policy of Appeasement and Containment", *RUSI*, December 20, 2023;

[5] Trevor Johnston *et al.*, "Could the Houthis Be the Next Hizballah? Iranian Proxy Development in Yemen and the Future of the Houthi Movement", *RAND Corporation*, 2020, p.7.

[6] M. Almahfali, "Transformation of dominant political themes from the founder to the current leader of the Huthi movement", in A. Hamidaddin (ed.), *The Huthi Movement in Yemen. Ideology, Ambition and Security in the Arab Gulf*, Bloombsury-I.B. Tauris, 2022, pp. 37-55

[7] B. Salmoni, B. Loidolt, and M. Wells, "Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon", *RAND Corporation*, 2010, p.234.

[8] *Al Arabiya*, "Iran arming Yemen's Houthis since 2009: U.N.", May 1, 2015.

[9] Michael Knights, "The Houthi War Machine: From Guerrilla War to State Capture", *CTS Sentinel*, 11:8, September 2018.

[10] UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, *Letter dated 21 February 2023 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2023/130.

[11] The Council is headed by the leader Abdel Malek Al Houthi, with a jihad assistant from the al-Qods and a deputy jihad assistance from Hezbollah. See M. Knights, A. al-Gabarni, C. Coombs, "The Houthi Jihad Council: Command and Control in 'the Other Hezbollah`", *CTS Sentinel*, 15:10, October 2022.

[12] M. Almahfali, *op. cit.*

How the war in Gaza shattered Iraqi civil society's trust in Western institutions

Hamzeh Hadad, European Council on Foreign Relations

Since the 2003 war, the United States has invested millions in the promotion of grassroots democracy in Iraq through the funding of civil society organizations (CSOs). Despite the American troop withdrawal in 2011 and Iraq fatigue in Washington, the connection to Iraq's civil society was maintained through the American embassy, and through development arms like USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and various United Nations agencies. Although the U.S.'s diplomatic presence in Baghdad was minimal and its military presence was contentious, it was able to cultivate soft power through civil society. At a time where the United States may be exiting Iraq, these societal links are arguably more important to American policymakers than ever.

The importance of the civil society which the United States helped to promote in Iraq became even more clear during the 2019 October protest movement, which lasted months and culminated in a new electoral law and the resignation of a prime minister. For many who had lost hope in Iraq's stagnant democratization process, this reinvigorated their beliefs in the possibility of democratic change and led to the establishment of new protest-based political parties and organizations.1 NGOs from across Iraq began to host training sessions, discussions, and conferences with new political activists, usually with the financial and technical support of Western or international organizations.

However, many of the ties that link Iraqi activists and researchers to their Western allies are beginning to unravel under the weight of the war in Gaza. For many Iraqi activists, particularly those young enough not to remember the United States invasion and occupation, the West's commitment to human rights and democracy made Western institutions an appealing partner. For some organizations - like pro-democracy, women's rights, and environmental groups – Western support kept them afloat when there were few sources of local funding, thus creating a partnership of shared beliefs. But this was no longer the case, as the unwavering Western support for Israel's bombardment of Gaza shook not only Iraqi civil society, but activist groups throughout the Middle East. These organizations and activists enjoy a great deal of legitimacy in their own communities, largely due to the personal sacrifices they make in support of freedom and good governance. In Iraq, their association with the United States has come at a high cost and has led to their persecution, a risk they were willing to take when they believed in the sincerity of their ally and patron. This is due both to the legacy of the United States invasion and the continued skepticism with which many Iraqi politicians view the United States. In light of recent escalations between the United States and paramilitary groups in Iraq, and the growing unpopularity of the United States more broadly, this is a risk they may no longer be able and/or willing to take.

This paper explores the implications of this lost faith in working with the United States by Iraq's (and the region's) activists. In the short term, this can halt organizational programming and research collaboration on important topics. In recent years, research on Iraq has proliferated, and foreign researchers traveled to the country where they met and made contacts with local organizations, researchers, and activists. Iraq, which had achieved hard-earned stability after decades of violence, was beginning to look inwards and to ask crucial questions about good governance, transparency, political freedoms, economic development, and climate change. In the long term, this has made Iraqi activists question the viability and universality of those values and ideas that have often been pushed by the West. In Iraq, it is civil society actors who curate the democratic debate on the street and shape the language of the growing number of young liberal protestors.

Protests, civil society, and democracy in Iraq

The October protest movement, the largest in Iraq since 2003, involved a vast array of activists, many of whom were part of CSOs or had participated in their leadership and democracy workshops. In fact, it was civil society veterans who helped transform the energy of the movement into practical political aspirations, like an early election law. Later, they helped leaders from the protest movement position themselves as political candidates and provided training for campaign management and running for office. It is not surprising, in the Iraqi context, to see longtime civil society veterans become political candidates, or vice-versa, to see an unsuccessful political candidate turn to civil society work.

Before 2003, civil society had been either swallowed up or wiped out by the former Ba'ath regime. After regime change, CSOs began to pop up across Iraq, as international donors, primarily the United States, began to fund various CSOs to promote democratization. Although democracy promotion through supporting NGOs is an oft-criticized tool of American foreign policy, it has produced mixed results in Iraq. As of May 2020, there are over four thousand registered CSOs, and nearly 500 are devoted to human rights or democracy.[2] In the past, many CSOs have been abandoned, as they had run out of funding or were created to tackle a specific issue that was no longer necessary. Having said that, there is a significant number of active CSOs in Iraq, many which are still in operation years after foreign funding decreased, and they were active in promoting democratic values over two decades that accumulated in the 2019 October protest movement.

A key and organic democratic value that was manifested by the protests was the deliberate promotion of anti-sectarianism by Iraqi youth. The protests took place largely in Shia-majority areas and were protesting the informal consociational system in Iraq and the Shia-dominated government.[3] Political elites, from across the ethno-religious spectrum, responded to these protests in various ways. There was, of course, the heavy-handed security approach in which hundreds of Iraqi protestors were killed by security forces. Others, like Muqtada Al-Sadr, tried to co-opt the protests in an attempt to gain political momentum. Arguably the response that had the most enduring impact was to paint the protestors and civil society activists as foreign agents. When the U.S. targeted Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis on Baghdad Airport Road, it marked a dark turn for activists, in which they were now painted as disloyal foreign agents. In doing so, the political elite were trying to delegitimize their grievances.

While some protestors were revolutionary in their demands, many in the protest movement were pushing for reforms within the system. To help push for reforms, these same CSOs have assisted in the research of better policies in Iraq. Whether it is democratic reforms, women's rights, or climate change, Iraqi CSOs have been at the forefront in supporting this research and promoting its policies. Moreover, they have done so despite significant threats to their lives and livelihoods, directly associated with their actual or imagined ties with the United States.

Iraqi civil society reacts to the war in Gaza

Four years after the October protest movement, CSOs in Iraq find themselves at odds with the Western countries that had supported them. They watched as hospitals, refugee camps, schools, mosques, and churches were attacked in Gaza, and all the while, many of their Western patrons continued to support and defend Israeli actions. From the perspective of Iraqi CSOs, the Western states that have been funding programs promoting human rights were nothing more than hypocrites, who held selective views of human rights that excluded Palestinians and Arabs. Iraqi CSOs were not the only ones who formed that view. In late October, a group of activists from Egypt, Palestine, Kuwait, Jordan, and Lebanon who had received a German-French human rights and rule of law award, wrote an open letter to the French and German ambassadors in their countries, stating that "we have no recourse but to imagine that you too believe that the people in Gaza are less important humans, perhaps this belief extends to all Arabs".[4]

Members of Iraq's CSOs have also gone public with their condemnation of the Israeli campaign in Gaza and have expressed their shock and disgust with the stance of Western states. The negative response to the South African case at the International Criminal Court of Justice (ICCJ), further enflamed anger at the apparent subjectivity of human rights international institutions. This has manifested in several policies on the ground. First, many of the politically oriented CSOs are now producing content relating to Palestine and the war on Gaza, thus serving a role of informing the public. Others have taken to organizing protests and public gatherings in support of Palestine. Although the Sadrist-led protest in October garnered the most media attention, as it attracted nearly half a million participants, other protests have taken place across Iraq. For example, a prominent activist from Mosul led a protest in late February in his hometown, which had avoided political activity in 2019. Finally, some have refused to collaborate with Western organizations, and critically, to accept funds from them. For many CSOs, it is impossible to function without Western financial support, which makes this position both rarer and more powerful.

Although it is too early to map out and measure these responses, it is evident that the mood is changing in civil society spaces, and this will have short and long-term impacts. In the short-term, it will have a negative impact on the cooperation between Western researchers, particularly among international organizations and think tanks, and local researchers and CSOs. This has played out on social media and behind closed doors. For example, a prominent American think tank, with a good reputation in Iraq, was seeking to hire a local researcher for an important project on climate change, an issue that is of dire importance to Iraqis. One of the environmental activists that was approached for this refused to participate, saying that they had already left the environmental NGO they were working with because it was receiving foreign funding from sides they viewed as aiding the Israeli military campaign in Gaza. They were not interested in working with an American think tank, despite their personal interest in climate change and the importance of the research to Iraq.[5]

The issue has become more troubling for Western research centers that have offices in Iraq. With the improved security situation in Iraq, and Baghdad in particular, the space for Western organizations to have a presence on the ground became possible. With the democratic backsliding in Tunisia and the economic crisis in Lebanon, Iraq has become the rare state in the region whose stability is not based on an autocratic regime, making it viable for research. Unfortunately, one Western institution was forced to close their local office after the conflict in Gaza broke out, because their institution's main office showed solidarity to Israel. This closure meant the loss of a research institute that was conducting high quality research on the ground.

In the long-term, Iraqis who believe in liberal democracy will be disheartened with the double standards of the West. For the West, their chief allies in the region should not be the autocratic regimes that do not share ideological beliefs, but the CSOs that do. Autocratic regimes may serve as a stable ally to the West today, but they are quickly able to begin flirting with other autocratic powers like China and Russia if it serves their interests. That is not the case for ideologically driven CSOs who have put themselves at risk to promote liberal democratic values. The current conflict risks CSOs in Iraq and elsewhere in the region becoming disillusioned with Western states, who are seen to prefer working with autocrats for the sake of political expediency.

Conclusion

The United States has a multiprong approach to foreign policy in the region. Although it has cultivated longstanding alliances with autocratic regimes, like Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia; it has also invested in promoting grassroots democracy through funding civil society actors across the region. The former gets far more attention than the latter, but it is investing in civil society that has continued to give the United States the upper hand over China and Russia. This form of soft power is now at risk.

Although the Middle East is one of the world's least democratic regions, its leaders are not immune to the

pressures of public opinion, as witnessed during the Arab Spring in 2011 and the regional Hirak Movement in 2019. Regional public opinion is shaped by civil society activists, which the United States considers as the only ones that hold democratic principles in the region. In the rare democratizing states, like Iraq and Lebanon, it is civil society actors who serve on the frontlines against authoritarian encroachment.

While the United States has worked with autocratic leaders to maintain stability, the long-term vision of a democratic Middle East is harnessed through promoting civil society. Now, civil society is growing disenchanted with the West for their silence in the face of Gaza's bombardment. As the death toll mounts in Gaza to over 30,000, the United States' credibility with its once staunch civil society allies is waning.

Endnotes

[1] Alshamary, Marsin. 2023. "The New Iraqi Opposition: The anti-establishment movement after the 2021 elections" Clingendael CRU Report. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/The%20New%20Iraqi%20Opposition.pdf.

[2] Alshamary, Marsin and Maqsoud, Sura. 2022. "The Landscape of Civil Society in Iraq: The Relationship of CSOs with Government, Religious, and Tribal Institutions at the Sub-State Level." *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. https://cnxus.org/the-iraqi-knowledge-sharing-platform/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/The-Landscape-of-Civil-Society-in-Iraq.pdf.*

[3] Haddad, Fanar. "Hip hop, poetry and Shia iconography: How Tahrir Square gave birth to a new Iraq." 9 December 2019. Middle East Eye. https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/iraq-new-political-awareness-and-culture-have-been-formed.

[4] Omran, Rajia et al. "Letter to the Ambassadors of France and Germany in Our Country". 30 October 2023. Mada Masr. https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2023/10/30/opinion/u/%d8%b1%d8%b3%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a9-%d8%a5%d9%84%d9%89-%d8%b3%d9%81%d9%8a%d8%b1%d9%8a-%d9%81%d8%b1%d9%86%d8%b3%d8%a7-%d9%88%d8%a3%d9%84%d9%85%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a7-%d9%84%d8%af%d9%89-%d8%a8%d9%84%d8%a7/.

[5] Yassin, Maha. "The Space for Iraqi Climate Activism Is Dangerously Small, and Shrinking". 30 August 2023. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/commentary/the-space-for-iraqi-climate-activism-is-dangerously-small-and-shrinking/.

The Impact of the Gaza War on Jordan's Domestic and International Politics[1]

Curtis R. Ryan, Appalachian State University

Since the beginning of the Gaza war in October 2023, Jordanians have been closely watching the enclave, and the rising tensions in the region, with deep concern and increasing anxiety. By January 2024, the war and related regional conflicts began to hit Jordan more literally, in the form of Israeli artillery strikes on a Jordanian field hospital in Gaza and drone strikes by Iran-backed militias on a U.S. base inside the Hashemite Kingdom. The crisis over funding for the *United Nations Relief and Works Agency* for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had profound implications for Jordan and its people. And all of these challenges helped to revive a protest movement in Jordan that demanded major changes to the kingdom's domestic and foreign policies, even as the state was trying to make itself heard in the international din and to bring about a ceasefire and access to aid for Gaza.

Many Jordanians get their news not from newspapers or television, but through social media. Like so many others around the world, they find themselves too often 'doom scrolling' through posts and videos about the Gaza war and its staggering civilian death count. It is not an exaggeration to say that the war may be taking a psychological toll on a country whose citizens deeply identify with, and care about the suffering of, the Palestinian people. This is true across Jordanian society—not just among Jordanians of Palestinian descent, but also among East Jordanians of tribal backgrounds, Chechens, Circassians, as well as among Muslims and Christians. As recent polling has shown, the cause of Palestine remains close to the hearts of almost all Jordanians and other Arab peoples, and the relentlessly negative news cycle is taking its toll.[2] At both the state and society levels, Jordanians were also deeply concerned about any further displacement of the Palestinian people.[3]

Another UNRWA Crisis

Throughout its history, Jordan's domestic and international politics have been deeply affected by the politics of refugees, from the Nakba, to the Syrian civil war, to Gaza. This makes it uniquely vulnerable to the recent campaign against UNRWA, which operates multiple refugee camps in the Kingdom.[4]

On January 26, the Biden administration abruptly announced it was pausing funding for UNRWA—the main international organization supporting Palestinian refugees—following accusations by the Israeli government that several of its employees were connected in some way to the October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel. Many European funders promptly followed the American lead. Jordanian officials quickly scrambled to press donors to restore funding, an exercise that felt very similar to one that followed the Trump administration's 2018 decision to cut US funding for the agency. In 2021, the Biden administration had resumed funding for UNRWA, but then it too suspended aid.

As Jordanian officials and UNRWA itself were quick to point out, Israel leveled its accusations at 12 employees out of a staff of 13,000. UNRWA has long been controversial in Israel, and successive Israeli governments have at times sought ways to bring it down. But UNRWA, in addition to condemning the Hamas attack and firing the accused, stressed its key role as the main source of aid for Palestinians in Gaza. The Israeli government, in short, was trying to shut down UNRWA just when it was needed most, given the massive death toll, levels of displacement, destruction of hospitals, restrictions on aid, and emerging fears over the spread of famine and disease.

These are all, of course, urgent concerns for Gaza. But UNRWA's work extends well beyond the Strip, as the agency delivers similar services in the occupied West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and very importantly, Jordan. Specifically, UNRWA in Jordan provides key services to more than 2 million registered Palestinian refugees in the kingdom. This includes services in ten refugee camps, in 169 schools serving 119,000 students, and in 25 medical clinics and other health centers. Jordanian officials therefore urged the United States and other countries to reverse their funding freezes, especially in the heat of the ongoing war in Gaza and the broader regional crises. The links between the Gaza war and other regional crises were already clear with the Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping, which impacted Jordan's only port at Aqaba.

Tensions Over Border Security and U.S. Forces in Jordan

The costs became clearer still on January 28, 2024, when Iran-backed Shia militias professing solidarity with Gaza attacked a U.S. base in Jordan itself, for the first time killing American military personnel in the Hashemite Kingdom. The attack killed three U.S. soldiers at Tower 22, an American base in Jordan located close to the Syrian border and not far from the U.S. Tanf base in Syria, which was also attacked. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a grouping of Iran-backed Shia militias, claimed responsibility. Such pro-Iranian militia attacks on U.S. forces in Syria or Iraq are not uncommon. The deadly attack in Jordan, however, was a significant escalation amidst the mounting violence and chaos across the Middle East. The attack also shed unwelcome light on Jordan's increasing regional insecurity and on its position in the crossfire between conflicts from Gaza to its own northern borders.

In addition to being a violation of Jordanian sovereignty, the attack on U.S. troops stationed in Jordan appeared to be retaliation against the United States for its support for the Israeli bombardment of Gaza. The ramifications of the Gaza war, in short, risked destabilizing the kingdom itself, even as it tried not to be dragged into a broader regional war.

The Jordanian government condemned the attack on U.S. forces, noting that their presence was meant to secure the kingdom's borders and to help Jordan fight terrorism. The foreign military presence also underscores the kingdom's broader concerns with securing the border against the Islamic State or Da'esh as well as against Iran-backed militias—long a concern for the Jordanian government. Border security issues in recent years have also included the plight of Syrian refugees and, especially at present, concerns with drug smuggling, most notably of Captagon pills into the kingdom.

But the U.S. military presence is a double-edged sword. It is intended to support Jordan's borders, its territorial integrity, and the security of the state and the Hashemite regime, a close ally of the United States. Yet the unpopularity of the U.S. military presence threatens to undermine the regime's domestic security and legitimacy. There may be an increasing disconnect between state and society on this issue, as the question of the U.S. military presence has become ever more controversial in Jordanian domestic politics, even as U.S.-Jordanian relations and military cooperation grow steadily closer.

In September 2022, the United States and Jordan signed their fourth Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the U.S.-Jordan "Strategic Partnership." The MOU pledged $1.45 billion in U.S. annual economic and military aid to Jordan from 2023 through 2029, which represents the largest-ever American aid commitment to the already aid-dependent kingdom. Cooperation between the two countries has been extensive for decades—ranging from trade and aid to military and intelligence cooperation. In 1996, the United States and Jordan signed a Status of Forces agreement allowing U.S. forces to operate in the country and in the same year the United States designated Jordan a "major non-NATO ally." This was followed in 2001 by a free trade agreement between Jordan and the United States. Underscoring the extensive level of military cooperation, Jordan has since 2010 hosted U.S. and other international military forces for two weeks of annual military exercises known as "Eager Lion."

In 2021, Jordan and the United States added a defense cooperation agreement that became law by royal decree, bypassing parliament and generating considerable public backlash. Opposition members of parliament denounced the agreement as a violation of Jordanian sovereignty and as a national humiliation.[5] While the backlash in no way changed the agreement, or U.S.-Jordanian relations for that matter, the indignant tone was a harbinger of things to come, as domestic opposition to the US military presence has grown since then. With U.S. support for the Israeli bombing of Gaza, that opposition became louder still.

The U.S.-Jordanian relationship has at times been bumpy, most recently during the Trump years, when bilateral economic and military ties remained expansive, but there was a widespread perception at both the state and society levels that Jordan was being marginalized and neglected. That changed slightly as the Biden administration took office and restored a more active diplomatic partnership. But the two countries have diverged significantly over the Gaza conflict, with King Abdullah II and Jordanian officials at all levels consistently decrying Israel's use of force as excessive and calling for a ceasefire.

Jordanian Prime Minister Bishr Khasawneh warned Israel against any attempt to forcibly displace Palestinians from Gaza, saying that such a move would cross a "red line" for Jordan and amount to a "fundamental violation" of the 1994 peace treaty. In November 2023, Jordan recalled its ambassador from Israel, and told the Israeli ambassador not to return to Amman. Jordan also supported South Africa as it took Israel to the International Court of Justice, accusing it of committing genocide in Gaza. Jordan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi accused Israel of committing war crimes, while warning the international community of the threat of a broader regional war.

At the state level, the king, the prime minister, foreign minister, and other officials—none of whom are fans of Hamas—have been consistent in their harsh criticisms of Israeli policy and their demands for a ceasefire and the defense of Palestinian civilian lives. Yet at the grassroots level, Jordanian activists have gone further, as a revived protest movement has demanded more radical levels of change. The Gaza war has reinvigorated many of Jordan's opposition forces and its protest movements, even leading to the rise of an increasingly populist politics at the street level.

A Resurgent Protest Movement

As Jillian Schwedler has noted, "Jordan's government and citizens alike fear that Israel and the United States will pressure the country to accept another large wave of Palestinian refugees." She also points out that "the issue of Palestine has, for decades, driven Jordanians to push the limits of permissible protest."[6] Some worry about another Nakba against Palestinians, while others focus on a longstanding fear in some Jordanian political circles: that Israel and the United States might try to "solve" the Palestinian issue at Jordan's expense.

Historically, countless ideological and identity issues have been used to drive wedges in Jordanian opposition movements, dividing and weakening them. But the Israeli use of force against Palestinians has long been a unifying issue within Jordan, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has seemed uniquely disposed to have inadvertently unified Jordan's grassroots protest movements. This unity may turn out to be especially important in Jordan's new electoral and party systems, with general elections expected to take place by November 2024. Still, Jordan has a long history of political protest.[7] In recent years these include the extensive protests of the 'Arab Spring' era.[8] But they also include revived protests over austerity crises in 2018 and after.[9]

The post-October 7 protest coalition brings together diverse ideological groups from leftists to Islamists to nationalists. This new coalition builds on the existing Jordanian movement against the gas agreement with Israel.[10] That movement followed an earlier anti-normalization campaign that had begun after Jordan signed the 1994 peace treaty with the State of Israel. Since October 2023, activists maintained a campaign

of marches in Amman and elsewhere in increasingly large demonstrations that sometimes numbered in the thousands. The protestors echoed the harsh criticisms of Israeli policy already coming from state officials and from the king himself—and then went much further, calling for far more extensive measures and changes. As Schwedler has noted in her extensive work on Jordanian protests, many demonstrations tend to follow established repertoires.[11] But recent protests in the Jordanian capital have pushed the usual parameters, with ever larger protests almost reaching the Israeli embassy (historically a red line not to be crossed).

A January 2024 communique issued by the protest movement referred to the 1994 peace treaty as "the treaty of shame" and demanded that Jordan cancel it. The communique also called on the Jordanian government to end all relations with Israel, to close each country's embassies, and to annul the 2017 gas deal. It demanded that Israel open Gaza's borders to the delivery of food, fuel, water, and medical supplies, and called on other states in the region to cease participating in trade with Israel.

But the protest coalition was not just making demands regarding Jordanian relations with Israel. It also sought to dramatically change Jordanian relations with the United States. Protestors focused on the U.S. military presence by calling for an end to the U.S.-Jordanian military agreements and the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the kingdom. This latter demand has especially been audible in the various slogans and chants in demonstrations across the country. For these increasingly active and vocal movements, the U.S. military presence does not strengthen Jordanian security but undermines it. As one Jordanian activist noted to this author, "a majority of Jordanians think that the US military presence is a threat to the country, may involve it in war if hostilities expand, and might be directed against Palestinians or other Arab and neighboring nations."[12]

Even for the many Jordanians who do not attend protests or belong to any opposition movement, these seem to be increasingly widespread sentiments. The Gaza war has also hurt Jordan's already struggling economy, causing tourism revenues to plummet just after they had revived following the COVID-19 pandemic. Aside from taking part in demonstrations, many ordinary Jordanians have joined boycotts of U.S. and European companies and products, while worrying that Jordan's geographic location and its international ties may drag it into a broader regional war.

"Jordan is not in a position to start any wider conflict," a Jordanian journalist told this author, adding that "Jordan wants this nightmare to end. After the Palestinians, Jordan has the most to lose with war in the region."[13] This appears to be a majority sentiment in Jordan right now. From state to society, Jordanians are deeply and increasingly worried about the fate of the people of Gaza, of the occupied West Bank, and of Jordan itself as the Gaza war continues.

Endnotes

1 An earlier version of this essay was first published by the Arab Center, Washington DC, as Curtis R. Ryan, "From Gaza to the Syrian Border, Jordan is Increasingly in the Line of Fire," February 8, 2024 https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/from-gaza-to-the-syrian-border-jordan-is-increasingly-in-the-line-of-fire/

2 Arab Center (2024). "Arab Public Opinion About Israel's War on Gaza," Arab Center, Washington DC, February 8, 2024 https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/arab-public-opinion-about-israels-war-on-gaza/

3 Suha Ma'ayeh, "Jordan Struggles to Weather Gaza Storm," *The Arab Weekly*, December 18, 2023 https://thearabweekly.com/jordan-struggles-weather-gaza-storm

4 On a variety of key issues in refugee politics in Jordan, see the essays by Elizabeth Parker-Magyar, Shaddin alMasri, Rawan Arar, Sigrid Lupieri, and Lillian Frost in *The Politics of Migration and Refugee Rentierism in the Middle East*, POMEPS Studies 50, March 2024.

5 Saud al-Sharafat, "Critics React to U.S.-Jordan Defense Agreement," al-Monitor, April 1, 2021 https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/critics-react-us-jordan-defense-agreement

6 Jillian S. Schwedler, "Palestine and the Limits of Permissible Protests in Jordan," *Middle East Report* 309 (Winter 2023) https://merip.org/2024/01/jordan-palestine-and-permissible-protest/

[7] Jillian S. Schwedler, *Protesting Jordan: Geographies of Power and Dissent* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022).
[8] Sara Ababneh, "Troubling the Political: Women and the Jordanian Day-Waged Labor Movement." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48 (2016): 87-112. See also Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Security and Politics Beyond the State* (New York: Columbia University Press).
[9] See Sara Ababneh, "Do you know who governs us? The damned International Monetary Fund": Jordan's June 2018 Rising," *Middle East Report*, June 30, 2018 https://www.merip.org/mero/mero063018, Pete Moore, "The Fiscal Politics of Rebellious Jordan," *Middle East Report*, June 21, 2018 https://www.merip.org/mero/mero062118, Curtis R. Ryan, "Why Jordanians are protesting," *Washington Post*, Monkey Cage Analysis, June 4, 2018 ; https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/06/04/why-jordanians-are-protesting/ Curtis R. Ryan, "Resurgent Protests Confront New and Old Red Lines in Jordan," *Middle East Report* 292/3 (Fall/Winter 2019) https://merip.org/2019/12/resurgent-protests-confront-new-and-old-red-lines-in-jordan/
[10] Curtis R. Ryan, "Reviving Activism in Jordan: The Movement Against Israeli Gas," *Middle East Report* 281 (Winter 2016) https://merip.org/2017/05/reviving-activism-in-jordan/
[11] Jillian S. Schwedler, "More than a Mob: The Dynamics of Political Demonstrations in Jordan," *Middle East Report* 226 (2003): 18-23, Schwedler, "Cop Rock: Protest, Identity, and Dancing Riot Police in Jordan," *Social Movement Studies* 4, no. 2 (2005): 155-75, Schwedler, "The Political Geography of Protest in Neoliberal Jordan," *Middle East Critique* 21, no. 3 (2012): 259-70.
[12] Author correspondence with Jordanian protester and activist. February 2024.
[13] Author correspondence with Jordanian journalists. February 2024.

Gaza and the Gulf States

Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy

The horrific attack on Israel by Hamas militants and other Palestinian fighters on October 7, 2023, and the months-long Israeli war on Gaza that followed, has presented a number of challenges to both policymakers and scholars of the Gulf States. Three challenges in particular stand out: the durability of the Abraham Accords and the fate of the momentum that seemingly had been building for the further normalization of ties between Israel and Arab states; the notion that had taken root in some circles, especially in Washington, D.C., that the Palestinian issue was no longer central to a region riven by different fault-lines in contemporary geopolitics; and whether the stresses in the international rules-based order exposed by responses to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have been blown wide open by the war on Gaza in ways that accelerate a likely rebalancing in Gulf States' foreign policies.

First, the war on Gaza has reshaped the conversation about the prospects for normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia. In the runup to October 7, a succession of curated leaks to U.S. media outlets laid out the contours of a three-way dialogue involving American, Saudi, and Israeli officials in pursuit of a U.S.-brokered deal to normalize relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Reports of negotiations over a defense treaty for Saudi Arabia and closer cooperation on energy prices and civilian nuclear power formed the backdrop to Mohammed bin Salman's highly anticipated interview with *Fox News* on September 20. The Saudi Crown Prince used his first English-language television interview to state that "every day, we get closer" to a breakthrough that he asserted would be "the biggest historical deal since the end of the Cold War."[1]

Mohammed bin Salman balanced his prediction about a deal with Israel with a statement that 'for us, the Palestinian issue is very important,' and indicated that the details of an agreement remained elusive. On October 4, just three days before the Hamas attacks, an op-ed in Arab News by Faisal Abbas, the paper's editor-in-chief, suggested that for the past two years, a team within the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been examining 'every detail imaginable' to 'boost the Palestinian economy through exports to Israel and other neighbors,' but did not elaborate on specific policy proposals.[2] Both the Saudi and the U.S. reports lacked any suggestion that the Palestinians themselves were part of the negotiating process, other than as an element in a broader package that was being put together without their direct participation.

Saudi-Israeli normalization would have built upon the Abraham Accords signed in 2020 between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. President Trump took credit for the accords, which represented the outcome of an unconventional and transactional approach to policymaking, and was one of the few Trump-era policies that the Biden White House was committed to keeping. Support for the Abraham Accords appeared to seal the 'outside-in' approach that delinked recognition of Israel from a deal for Palestine and marked a shift away from the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. A prioritization of economic over political issues was a thread that linked the Trump and Biden approaches and was evident in the September 2023 announcement of IMEC, an India-Middle East Europe Economic Corridor. Launched at the G-20 Summit in New Delhi by the U.S., European governments, and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and India, the plan was quickly overtaken by developments in Israel and Gaza just four weeks later.

IMEC and the dialogue with Saudi Arabia illustrated how, for members of the Biden administration, their approach to regional issues was conditioned by broader considerations of a perceived great power competition with China. After a decade of expanding economic and strategic ties between China and most Gulf states, senior administration officials

seemed to sincerely believe that the U.S. could offer Mohammed bin Salman a set of concessions that would outdo anything the Chinese could put on the table, and thereby pull Saudi Arabia back into the U.S. orbit. IMEC was seen by many observers to be an attempt to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative by developing alternative forms of connectivity. Both exposed a blind-spot in Beltway thinking in Washington, D.C., namely a tendency to see the initiatives through a zero-sum lens rather than as part of regional states' balancing of competing interests and staying out of global rivalries.

Thus far, the Abraham Accords have survived the Israeli onslaught on Gaza. The UAE has insisted that the Accords are a strategic choice, and none of the countries which normalized with Israel has yet broken diplomatic ties, with the murky exception of Sudan's vague and unimplemented declaration of support for the process in 2020. Saudi officials paused talks over a deal with Israel five days after October 7 but have left the door ajar for them to resume, potentially in 2025 once the Israeli war on Gaza has ceased and a new U.S. presidential administration is potentially in place. And yet, any eventual normalization agreement will need to feature Palestinian interests front and center and move beyond the premise of the Abraham Accords that a diplomatic and political relationship with Israel can be a sustainable alternative to addressing the roots of Palestinian dispossession and grievance. Moreover, any hope or expectation among Israeli officials that the Gulf States will take the lead on or finance the reconstruction of postwar Gaza has failed to gain traction in any of the six Gulf capitals. Nor, so far, has speculation that the UAE might push for the return to Gaza of Abu Dhabi-based Mohammed Dahlan as a 'strongman' alternative to President Mahmoud Abbas seemingly found any local support in Palestine.

Second, Gaza has shown that Palestine remains the central issue in the politics of the Middle East, however much officials in certain quarters believed it had been superseded by geopolitical changes in the 2010s that reshaped regional fault-lines and created new dynamics between Israel and Arab states. Particularly after the Arab uprisings in 2010-11 and amid rising frustration in Jerusalem, Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi at U.S. policies toward the Middle East, a narrative took hold that they shared a common threat from Iran, political Islamism, and (more intangibly) perceived U.S. disinterest in the region. Concern with the Obama administration's response to the toppling of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt in 2011 and willingness to work with the elected Muslim Brotherhood government of Mohammed Morsi was followed by alarm at the secret U.S.-Iran negotiations in 2012-13 that expanded into the P5+1 negotiations with Iran in 2014-15. The exclusion of Israeli, Saudi, and Emirati officials from the negotiations for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) generated further connections among their security, defense, and intelligence officials.

The 2022 FIFA men's World Cup in Qatar demonstrated how Palestine remained an issue with a mobilizing and ideational appeal like no other. When Arabs and Muslims from around the world gathered in Doha, displays of public support for Palestine and the Palestinian cause provided a constant and highly visible backdrop to the tournament. The sight of Morocco's players and fans waving Palestinian flags on the pitch and inside the stadiums was especially symbolic, given that the Moroccan government was one of the four signatories to the Abraham Accords. Held nearly a year before the Hamas attacks and the Gaza War, the World Cup was a 'bottom-up' riposte to advocates of the top-down process of political normalization between governments, as well as an indication that Palestine retained potency among younger generations who had come of age long after the twentieth century era of Arab-Israeli wars.[3]

While political demonstrations over Gaza have been carefully handled by Gulf governments lest they become sites of wider protest, the buildup of public anger has been palpable and not something that leaderships could ignore or brush aside. Rallies for Gaza have been permitted to occur in Qatar and in Oman and have taken place more spontaneously in other Gulf States, and media coverage of the onslaught and statements made by governments and officials have hardened. In December 2023, Oman's

foreign minister, Badr Albusaidi, went so far as to tweet that "I deeply regret that the United States should sacrifice the lives of innocent civilians for the cause of Zionism. Long after we are gone the world will look back on today with shame."[4] Given Omani officials' traditional restraint in engaging with regional issues, the tone of Albusaidi's comments made an impression on many observers, as did remarks by Lulwah Al Khater, Qatar's Assistant Foreign Minister, which drew attention to international double-standards.[5]

Finally, the sense of a different standard applied to Russian actions in Ukraine and Israeli actions in Gaza has generated anger across the Arab world and indeed much of the 'Global South.' Even prior to October 7, it had become evident that many in the non-Western world simply did not buy into the campaign to isolate the Russian leadership through sanctions against President Putin and the oligarchical regime. Russian businesspeople and capital relocated from Europe to the Gulf as Dubai, in particular, became a safe haven, while Saudi and Russian officials worked closely together within the OPEC+ framework to sustain oil revenues at a high level, despite repeated entreaties by U.S. and European officials to do otherwise. In 2023, a former Qatari Minister of Energy was appointed Chairman of the Board of Rosneft in another indication that none of the Gulf States – even those, like Qatar, which have moved closer to the U.S. in recent years – were willing to pick sides in a dispute they felt did not directly concern them.[6]

Over the past decade, and partly in response to their concerns about U.S. decision-making across multiple presidencies, Saudi and Emirati leaders moved toward a foreign policy that carried echoes of the non-aligned movement and was a shift away from their stance during the Cold War in the twentieth century. Such an evolution is not in itself a surprise, as all the Gulf States were engaged in the process of state formation and oriented firmly toward a conservative *status quo* that marked them as distinct from most countries in the region and in the postcolonial world, and impeded ties with the Soviet Union and China. By contrast, the twenty-first century world of multiple centers of polarity is as different as the Gulf States' positioning within it, and a rebalancing within the global order has been underway since at least 2008 and reactions in the Gulf to the global financial crisis and its aftermath.

Policy responses to Gaza have widened the divergence between the Gulf States and 'the west' writ large. The decade of geopolitical confrontations, between the Gulf States and Iran, deep intra-Gulf rifts, and across the broader region in Yemen, the Horn of Africa, and Libya, which marked the 2010s produced no clear winners and gave way after the pandemic to a pragmatic and at times uneasy rapprochement. Especially for Mohammed bin Salman, the need to 'de-risk' the region has assumed urgency as Vision 2030 and the deadline for delivering the giga-projects looms into view. The Saudi leadership is mindful of the optics that surrounded the Formula One Grand Prix in Jeddah in 2022 which took place with smoke billowing from a fuel depot near the racetrack struck by Houthi missiles fired from Yemen. For the (overly) ambitious targets to attract tens of millions of new residents and visitors to Saudi Arabia to be met, and mega-events such as Expo 2030 and the 2034 FIFA men's World Cup to succeed, the Kingdom can ill-afford another bout of regional instability (much self-inflicted) as in the previous decade.

Gaza has thus seen multiple trends come together. The centrality of Palestine in regional politics has been restated and the limitations of the Abraham Accords exposed, especially the notion that inverting the sequencing of normalization could or would bring about a different and more sustainable policy outcome. The strains in the rules-based international order which opened up over the Russian war in Ukraine have been widened considerably by the Israeli actions in Gaza, and the threat of a regionalization of the conflict has highlighted the diverging priorities between an interest in escalation or a preference for de-escalation. Decisions such as the closure of the Texas A&M branch campus in Doha have also raised the possibility that regional states, especially Qatar, given its hosting of Hamas political figures and high-profile

mediatory role in Gaza, may be drawn into the polarization and politicization of Israel-Palestine in the United States. These three streams have not yet led to a seismic break in US-Gulf relations, or an end to the normalization path with Israel, but they have introduced significant complications which seem unlikely to be quickly resolved – and which could grow much worse if the war is not quickly brought to an end.

Endnotes

1 Nadeen Ebrahim, 'Saudi Crown Prince Says Normalization Deal with Israel Gets 'Closer' Every Day,' *CNN*, September 21, 2023. https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/21/middleeast/saudi-arabia-mbs-interview-fox-intl/index.html.
2 Faisal Abbas, 'But What About the Palestinian Cause?', *Arab News*, October 4, 2023, https://www.arabnews.com/node/2385421.
3 Feras Abu Helal, 'Qatar World Cup 2022: Palestine 1, Israel 0,' *Middle East Eye*, November 30, 2022, https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/qatar-world-cup-palestine-support-reject-israel.
4 Badr Albusaidi on *X*, December 9, 2023, https://x.com/badralbusaidi/status/1733374636513964348?s=20.
5 Lolwah Alkhater on X, January 5, 2024, https://x.com/Lolwah_Alkhater/status/1743317687206387996.
6 'Dr. Mohammed bin Saleh Al Sada Elected Chairman of Rosneft,' *The Peninsula*, July 3, 2023, https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/03/07/2023/dr-mohammed-bin-saleh-al-sada-elected-chairman-of-rosneft.

The Project on Middle East Political Science

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York. For more information, see http://www.pomeps.org.

COVER PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ABU ELSEBAH