

THE GAZA GENOCIDE AND THE CANADIAN LEFT



The Gaza Genocide and the Canadian Left

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Front cover: The People's Circle for Palestine at U of T. Yukiko Tanaka, 2024.

Back cover: Children on a damaged building in Gaza. Shareef Sarhan, 2011.

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PREFACE

Four years ago, the Socialist Project published a pamphlet called *Palestine and the COVID Crisis*. In it we published two authors from Gaza, Asmaa Tayeh and Sarah Algherbawi. Both seem to remain alive at the time of this writing, but their lives have been altered in ways that — despite their vivid dispatches and the imagery emerging from Gaza — are difficult to fathom.

Asmaa studied English literature at Al-Azhar University and at the time of our last pamphlet was working as the operations manager for We Are Not Numbers, a collective for promoting citizen journalism by young people in Gaza. In December of 2023, the organization’s cofounder Refaat Alareer was killed in what appears to have been a targeted Israeli airstrike; he was one of few Gazan civilians giving frequent updates to the English language media. Less than two weeks ago, a BBC journalist who has been in touch with Asmaa published an account of their conversations, the most recent of which occurred last month. She describes feeling like she now inhabits a horror movie: searching for water; multiple exhausting displacements; she and her family fanning out as they walk from place to place to improve their chances of surviving an aerial attack.

Sarah, a writer and translator, has written two dispatches for the *Electronic Intifada* in the past ten months. When the genocide began, she was halfway through paying off the mortgage on an apartment she had bought five years prior. Now the building has been bombed, her apartment damaged, and she has been in a state of near constant displacement. “I became speechless on several occasions,” she writes. One of these times it was “when I had to evacuate with my family three times in less than forty-eight hours,

twice at 4 a.m., when my little children were sleeping and I woke them up terrified from their temporary beds and ran into the street to save our lives.” Now, she adds, “I feel that I will never feel at home again.”

In the past few hours Sarah has posted to Instagram a tweet by Yosra Aklouk, an *Al Jazeera* reporter. It reads, “I did not sleep last night: the smell of spilled blood had filled my lungs when I entered the prayer room at Al-Tabaeen school at dawn yesterday. The vision of remains of flesh on roofs, ceilings and walls, and flocked by flies, has not left me!”

These dispatches describe the constancy of loss in Gaza, as friends and family members are murdered without warning, and survivors steel themselves for their own *yestashed*, their own witnessing of injustice in their final moment. For distant observers, the fear of that moment’s arrival can only be addressed by a real-time message or post. But disasters happen so suddenly in Gaza that any such reassurance is fleeting.

We have seen far more of this genocide than any other while it was ongoing, and I believe the combination of its visibility and its longevity marks it as one of the greatest moral failures in the history of humanity. Never before have we seen this level of international complicity in manifest war crimes.

But those of us on the left have been trying to change course. And we know that we must succeed soon. The death toll in Gaza is now at least 40,000, though if estimates given by Rasha Khatib and her coauthors at *The Lancet* are correct, that number could easily exceed 200,000. As of June, at least 115,000 Gazans had been displaced to Egypt alone. And at least 92,000 people have been injured — again, probably an undercount. In ten months of

genocide, the population of Gaza has quite possibly fallen from 2.3 million to under two million.

If this pattern persists for another five years, the whole of Gaza could be ethnically cleansed. At that point what will Israel's abettors have to say about what occurred? Will they continue to cast aspersions upon the thousands of reports by Gazans, journalists, and human rights defenders? Will they still claim without evidence that the hospitals had to be bombed because they were rife with "terrorists" or that the schools had to be demolished because they were linked to a nefarious Hamas tunnel network? Or will they arrogantly shrug off the question, abstaining from either apology or defensiveness in the face of Palestinians' righteous aggrievement? In an interview on October 26, Mamadou Sow, a regional head of the International Committee of the Red Cross, stated that the international community must consider that in a case like Gaza, there may be such a thing as acting too late. I think about those words often. Ten months on, it does feel like our governments have opened a wound that will never heal. At the very least, the work of healing that lies ahead will take generations and has hardly begun.

In Canada, as elsewhere, Palestine has grown over the decades from a blip on the horizon of our consciousness to an unignorable crisis. It was seen as puzzling and audacious when in 1972 the Quebecois labour leader Michel Chartrand travelled with a delegation to Lebanon, where they met with Yasser Arafat. Identifying Israel as a "racist country," Chartrand told the *Toronto Star*, "We will be regarded as antisemitic, but that is not the real issue. ... The Palestinians are fighting for the liberation of their homeland. The occupation of their territory by Israel is completely immoral."

A decade later, when Israel invaded southern Lebanon, a number of Arab-led organizations emerged, such as the Montreal-based Medical Aid for Palestine, as well as the Toronto-based Near East Cultural and Educational Foundation led by U of T philosophy professor Jim Graff. Following the First Intifada, a group in Toronto including the queer socialist Amy Gottlieb also founded the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

I became involved in pro-Palestine politics during the Second Intifada, mostly by joining the weekly vigils outside the Israeli consulate. Strangers would sometimes verbally berate us as they passed by on Bloor Street, their inflamed pink faces poking out the windows of their cars. Politically we were a meagre presence and with the exception of a few veterans like Amy and Jim, we did not really think of ourselves as a movement with a history; because we wished for a resolution to the conflict, we preferred not to think of ourselves as a movement with a future either.

More than two decades on, that has changed. In Canada as elsewhere Palestine has become the most central rallying cry for the left, and the movement has become more prominent than perhaps any other in living memory. Its supporters now number in the millions, and our desire for a free Palestine can be seen almost anywhere there is space to express it: pasted to telephone poles, written on bathroom walls, and etched into picnic tables.

The Canadian left has also made some invaluable contributions to the movement in the past two decades. Israeli Apartheid Week was first held at U of T in 2005 and has since spread to at least fifty-five cities worldwide. Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (of which I was a member) was also established in Toronto in 2008 and set an important precedent for similar

groups around the world. Amid the current genocide, two of the most effective and articulate critics of Israel in the English broadcast media are Canadian: Diana Buttu, the lawyer and former adviser to the PLO, and Tanya Haj-Hassan, the pediatric intensive care physician who has worked extensively in Gaza.

Our literature is also catching up to this moment, with the recent publication of *Advocating for Palestine in Canada: Histories, Movements, Action*, edited by Emily Regan Wills et al. and *Canada as a Settler Colony: On the Question of Palestine* edited by Jeremy Wildeman and Muhannad Ayyash, both of which cover the specificities of the Palestinian struggle within the settler-colonial and putatively liberal context of Canada. This pamphlet is intended to make a similar contribution by bringing together some of the more ambitious and informative articles that have emerged from the Canadian left since October 7.

Saeed Rahnama gives a concise yet comprehensive overview of the conflict's history with an eye to the obstacles to peace. Adam Hanieh distills his vision of Middle Eastern geopolitics to highlight the role of both oil and the settler-colonial affinity in the making of unqualified US support for Israel. Sunera Thobani's essay discusses the centrality of women in the culture of Palestinian resistance, and their commensurate targeting in the current genocide. Turning back to Canada, Larry Haiven discusses the Zionist worldview's spurious positioning of the Holocaust as the only true genocide in history — the genocide that must always eclipse any other. Martin Lukacs gives a vivid account of how the antisemitism smear has seeped into Canadian policing, with the dizzying result that anti-racist pro-Palestine activists are being baselessly charged with hate crimes. The pseudonymous author Molly Schumann then gives us a vitally important peek

behind the curtain at anti-Palestinian bias and censorship at the CBC. Judy Rebick, finally, reflects on the ways in which today's pro-Palestine movement echoes previous anti-war movements, the progressive effects of which reverberated through many areas of North American life.

In addition to the authors and publications whose original work is reprinted here, thanks are also due to the present photographers who have licensed their work under creative commons.

—*Niko Block*
August 16, 2024

OBSTACLES TO PALESTINIAN- ISRAELI PEACE

Saeed Rahnama

If Al-Qaeda and ISIS were the indirect products of the policies of US imperialism, Hamas is a direct product of Israel. A glimpse into the painful history of seventy-five years of conflicts and confrontations between Israel and Palestinians helps one better understand the latest Hamas/Israeli fighting that started on October 7, 2023.

The origins of the Palestinian movement

Prior to the establishment of the state of Israel, Palestinians were overpowered from two sides: the British, and militant Zionist groups. Following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, about 700 thousand Palestinians were displaced and sought refuge in the West Bank and Gaza, and in neighboring countries. They formed several organizations in exile, most notably the Arab National Movement (ANM) in 1951, emphasizing Arab unity, secularism, socialism and later Marxism. Influenced by the Baathist and later Nasserist Arab nationalisms, ANM went through several phases and splits, eventually focusing solely on Palestine, establishing the National Front for the Liberation of Palestine (NFLP). Internal strife led to more splits, including the creation of the Popular Front (PFLP) led by George Habash, and the Democratic Front (PDFLP) led by Nayef Hawatimah. These organizations and their subsequent offshoots, as well as Fatah, formed by Yasser Arafat in 1959, and eventually the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1965, were largely secular, nationalist, and some socialist and Marxist, though of course they also had religious elements among them.

Early Palestinian organizations were weakened for reasons other than their conflicts with Israel. Initially, they came under the influence of Baathist nationalism which led to splits and rivalries in the Syrian and Iraqi sectors. Then, with the growing influence of Gamal Abdel Nasser,



Palestinian refugees walking to Lebanon. Jim Pringle, 1948.

especially after his so-called victory in the Suez War of 1956, they were largely influenced and controlled by Nasserism. Many received military training in Egypt, but up until the 1967 June war, while Nasser was preparing his army for war with Israel, he prevented the Palestinian combatants from engaging with the Israeli army before the Egyptian army was fully prepared. Following the defeat of the Arab armies, the Palestinian movement, followed in the footsteps of the Algerian liberation movement, and to some extent their Yemeni counterpart, and tried to act independently.

Following the humiliating defeat of Arab armies in 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank/East Jerusalem, Gaza, Sinai, and the Golan Heights, Israel's main preoccupation was curtailing Palestinian guerrilla attacks and incursions on Israel's new frontiers. The war led to some three hundred thousand new refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries. In 1970, King Hussein of Jordan, frustrated with the increased activities and interventions of Palestinian organizations in Jordanian

affairs, carried out a large-scale massacre and forced many to seek refuge in Syria and Lebanon. The PLO headquarters moved to Lebanon. In 1972, the ultra-militant Black September group that had emerged from the conflicts between Jordan and the PLO took Israeli athletes hostage during the Munich Olympics, leading to the deaths of all the hostages and the hostage takers.

By the early 1970s, parts of the Palestinian movement including Fatah, which through its armed wing Al-Asifa had organized the first guerrilla attacks inside Israel in 1964, had reached the conclusion that the military defeat of Israel was not possible and they had to find alternative ways to achieve their goal, including on the public relations front which saw the opening of offices in European countries. Starting in 1972, Mossad, concerned about this Palestinian initiative, and angered by the massacre of the Israeli athletes and other guerrilla actions, resorted to assassinations of prominent Palestinian figures, among them intellectuals, artists, professors and jurists in Europe, many of whom were ironically supporters of peaceful resolutions; notable amongst them were the poet and journalist Ghassan Kanafani, poet Wail Zweiter, economist Mahmoud Hamshahri, Fatah's representative in Paris, law professor Basil Al-Kubaissi, and poet Kamal Nasser.

The 1973 October war brought many changes to the region including international efforts to forge peace between Arab states and Israel, and finding a way to attend to the Palestinian cause. 1974 saw a suspected split of the Fatah organization, the Fatah Revolutionary Command led by Abu Nidal, a terrorist organization that violently killed or injured hundreds of civilians in different countries. It also assassinated several prominent Palestinian leaders, and since it carried the name Fatah, it caused a great deal of damage to the efforts of Fatah aimed at improving international perceptions of the Palestinian movement. When in 1982 Ariel Sharon was preparing to invade Lebanon to expel Palestinians, the Abu Nidal group attempted to assassinate the Israeli ambassador in London; even though Mossad presumably knew full well that Nidal had nothing to do with Arafat's Fatah, the Israeli army invaded Lebanon and through massive

bombardments forced the PLO to once again change its base, this time out of the immediate region, to Tunisia.

The Arrival of the Islamists

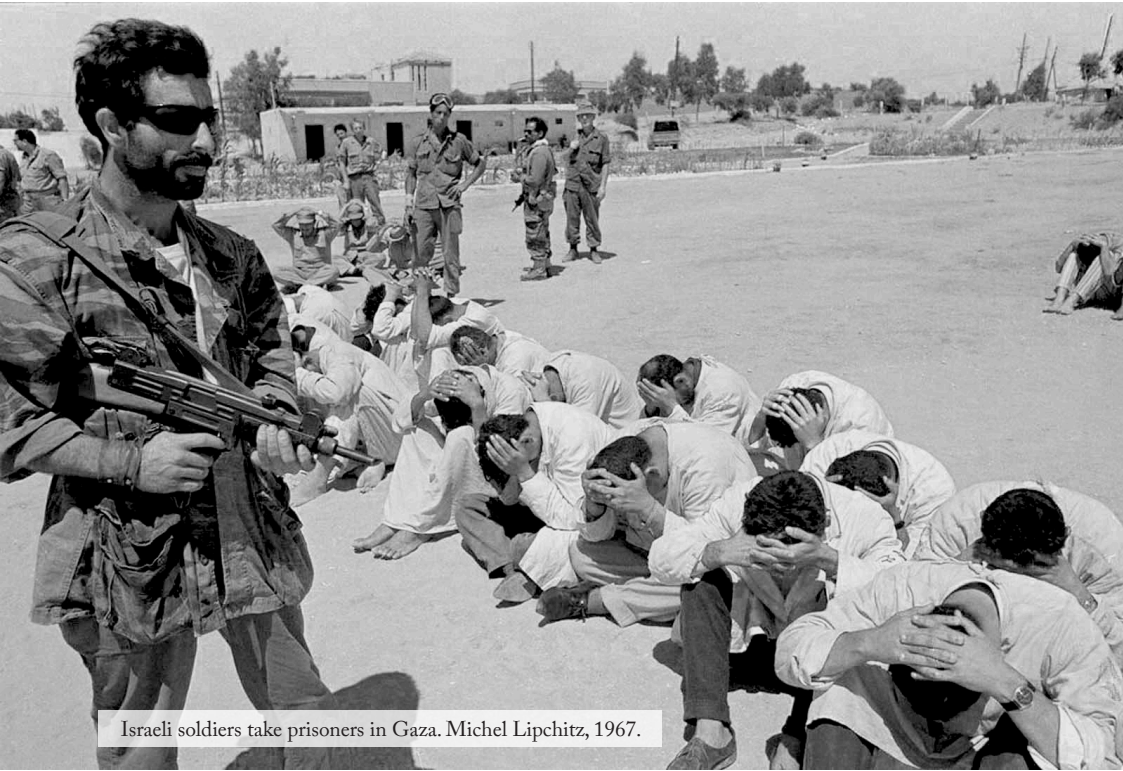
In 1973, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, a fundamentalist Islamic cleric – himself a Palestinian refugee in Gaza who had been expelled along with his family at the age of 12, and had received some education at Egypt's Al-Azhar University – formed a charity called Mujama al-Islamiya. His objective was to spread his obscurantist religious views in the poverty-stricken and overcrowded Gaza Strip. As he gained followers, he also garnered support from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and was able to establish new mosques. The group launched sporadic attacks on secular and progressive Palestinians, burned down cinemas, murdered sex workers and forced hijab on women in their neighbourhoods. With greater influence, they took over the Islamic University of Gaza and fired secular progressive faculty and students.

Israel, which had full control of Gaza since 1967 had continuously been hit hard by secular forces, and decided to fuel internal conflicts among the Palestinians by strengthening the Islamists and helping Sheikh Yassin's "charity," formally recognizing it in 1979.

In 1981 another Islamist group, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a split from Egyptian Jihad (which had assassinated Anwar Sadat) and encouraged by the emergence of the Islamic republic in Iran, called for the establishment of an Islamic state in Palestine on the pre-1948 borders. In 1984, Israel learned that Sheikh Yassin's supporters were hiding weapons in mosques and arrested him, although he was later released through a prisoner exchange. Since then, conflicts between the Palestinian Islamists and Israel have only intensified.

At the inception of the First Intifada in 1987, Sheikh Yassin and Abdelaziz Rantisi, a fundamentalist physician and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, created the Islamic Resistance Organization, Hamas, with the aim of establishing an Islamic state in Palestine. During the first Intifada (1987-1993), in the absence of the PLO which had been expelled from the region, Hamas quickly gained influence and created its

military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigade. As peace talks between Israel and Palestine began in the early 1990s and led to the Oslo Accords, Hamas opposed and confronted the PLO on the subject, and to make matters worse parts of the Palestinian left, including the influential Popular Front, who were also against the peace talks, collaborated with Hamas.



Israeli soldiers take prisoners in Gaza. Michel Lipchitz, 1967.

In 2004, Sheikh Yassin was assassinated by Israel and Rantissi succeeded him, though he would be killed a month later. Hamas survived the loss of its founding leaders and grew in popularity, expanding its social influence, building new mosques (there were 1,080 mosques in Gaza before the current war), and starting to dominate different aspects of

Gazan society, including in universities and colleges, silencing and expelling non-believer faculty and students.

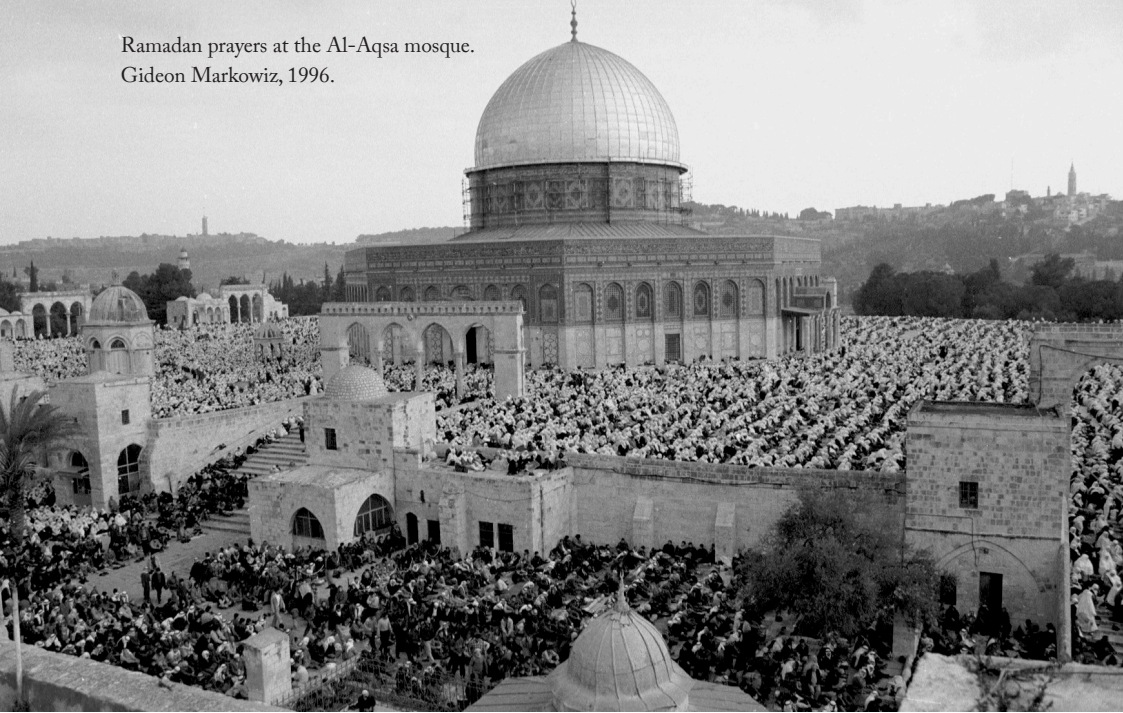
Concerned about the monster that it and its allies had created, Israel unilaterally decided to evacuate Jewish settlements in Gaza in 2005, moving them to the West Bank, and totally encircling the strip by land, air, and sea, turning it into the largest prison in the world.

In the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, Hamas gained more seats than any other party and formed a joint government. Israel refused to recognize the results. The internal divisions eventually led Hamas to engage in a coup, and since 2007 it has ruled the Gaza Strip. At the same time, Israel, claiming that the UN relief agency for refugees, UNRWA, was under the influence of Hamas, pushed the United States, Canada, and some other allies to cut funding. This misguided policy significantly helped Hamas, as Gazans became more radicalized and dependent on Hamas's charitable services.

Hamas, despite its anti-Shia ideology, got closer to Hezbollah in Lebanon, found a base there and gained the support of the Islamic regime in Iran. With the beginning of the Syrian civil war, however, Hamas, unlike Islamic Jihad which had closer relations with Hezbollah and the Iranian regime, refused to support the Assad forces and was expelled from Lebanon. But, with the continuation of the conflicts in Syria, Hamas's relations and support from Iran improved, and reestablished its bases in Lebanon.

With the Palestinian movement divided into two separate entities, the turbulent and chaotic Gaza under Hamas rule and the relatively tame West Bank under the Palestinian Authority (PA), Israel adopted a dual policy, that I have discussed elsewhere. While forcefully reacting to Hamas incursions and rockets and heavily bombing Gaza in successive wars of 2008-9, 2012, 2014 and beyond, Israel used Hamas as an excuse to advance its own overall expansionist policies towards Palestinians. In the West Bank, it supported Palestinian "self-government," which acted as a sort of colonial state run by local rulers; out of about 155,000 PA employees, about 60,000 are in security and policing. In the West Bank

Ramadan prayers at the Al-Aqsa mosque.
Gideon Markowiz, 1996.



also, Israel facilitated the expansion of Palestinian cities like Ramallah, where the new middle classes working in government and in a wide range of foreign-funded NGOs have found relatively prosperous lives and despite dissatisfaction with Israeli occupation, are not willing to risk their newly-gained status. The working class, working in small and medium industries and construction, live in insecure economic conditions, as do the farmers and traditional middle classes. While Israel continues its expansion of illegal Jewish settlements, the most bitter irony is seeing long lines of Palestinian workers at the entrances of these settlements, looking for work on construction sites or on settlers' farms.

Aside from Palestinian religious organizations, there have also been other Islamist groups that have been drawn into the Palestinian/Israeli conflicts. Two of these are based in Lebanon. One is Amal, originally formed in 1974 in response to the plight of the country's Shia minority and coming into conflict with Israel after the latter's first major invasion of Lebanon in 1978. The other is the Lebanese Hezbollah, formed with

the help of the Islamic regime of Iran after Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and which fought a war with Israel in 2006.

In short, along this long path, the Palestinian movement was severely weakened. With the growing strength of Jewish fundamentalists and right-wing political currents and the growing weaknesses of both the left and liberal forces in Israel and among Palestinians, the "Palestinian question" appeared to be fading, to such an extent that the Trump administration initiated the Abraham Accords, hoping to bring all Arab autocracies and Israel together. However, the October 2023 Hamas attack and Israel's response, once again attracted the world's attention to the unresolved Palestinian problems.

The Accumulated and unresolved problems

The main problems following the establishment of the State of Israel can be grouped into several categories, none of which were ever seriously dealt with in the numerous "peace" negotiations.

Displacements and Refugees

During the first war (1947-49), about 700,000 of Palestinians living in Palestine were displaced and sought refuge in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighbouring countries of Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq; more than four hundred Palestinian villages and cities were evacuated at the time. Meanwhile, an increasing number of Jews arrived in Israel from Europe, Asia, and Africa. The UN created UNRWA to take care of Palestinian refugees, and General Assembly Resolution 194 called for their right of return. In the subsequent wars, especially in 1967 and 1973, hundreds of thousands more were added to the refugee populations.

Today more than 5.5 million Palestinians are registered with the UN. About 1.5 million of them live in UNRWA refugee camps, under very difficult conditions; some of the camps house more than 100,000 people in extremely limited spaces. In Jordan, which has the largest number of refugees, many have obtained Jordanian citizenship. In Syria and particularly in Lebanon, however, the refugees live under dreadful conditions and are banned from many professions.

Borders, Walls, blockades and checkpoints

After the defeat of the Arab Armies, the Rhodes Armistice Line of 1949, also known as the Green Line, was agreed upon by Israel and the neighbouring Arab states, establishing the armistice line (not the permanent borders of Israel). The armistice agreements established three demilitarized zones near the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee, but eventually Israel took these over.

Following Israeli conquests in the June 1967 war, Israel started to build Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention and Security Council Resolution 452. Currently, over 200 settlements and outposts house over half a million settlers, all of them illegal under international law. Twelve settlements were also created in East Jerusalem within the heart of the Old City, next to the majority Palestinian population. In Hebron (Al-Khalil), an officially Palestinian city under the Oslo Accords with a population of about 240,000, live several hundred fundamentalist Jewish settlers, protected by 1,200 IDF soldiers. Some of these settlers reside above the town's marketplace and frequently throw stones, bricks and rubbish on the metal gratings that cover the market beneath. Many shops in the market have in fact had to close or go out of business altogether.

In 2002, Israel decided to build a massive concrete wall separating the West Bank and Israel, but actually placing much of the wall within the West Bank, in some areas penetrating more than 15 miles into the occupied territory. It also created large settlement complexes around East Jerusalem, effectively separating it from the West Bank.

The Oslo Accords, as will be discussed shortly, divided the Occupied Territories into three zones: Area A, consisting of seven Palestinian cities; Area B, under Palestinian administration with joint Israeli-Palestinian security; and Area C, under Israeli control and security. The Israel security zone covers the settlement blocs plus the whole border of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. This is just a pretext to control the rich and fertile Jordan valley and access to the river; in the past several decades, thanks to Jordan's cooperation with Israel, not a single guerrilla incursion has been

reported from those borders. It is reasonable to assume that if the Palestinian Authority had control over the valley, it would have been much less dependent on foreign aid and borrowing. The Dead Sea, which is dying as a result of overuse of the Jordan River's water, is very rich with various minerals that are used by Israel's cosmetic companies that enjoy monopolistic control over the Sea's west side. Palestinians are deprived of access to the Sea. I heard from the Governor of Jericho (Eriha), whose city and region are close to the Dead Sea, that he has never been allowed to go to the shore of the Sea.

All major roads and highways are also under Israeli control, and hundreds of miles of highways are solely for the use of Israeli citizens and not accessible to Palestinians. In addition, there are hundreds of military checkpoints on common roads, controlling the flow of cars and pedestrians, which sometimes take hours to pass through.

Maritime borders, fishing and access to natural gas reserves

The Oslo Accords set the maritime border of the Gaza Strip with the Mediterranean 20 nautical miles from shore, except for the two northern and southern shores where Jewish settlements were located at that time, and in which Gazans were prohibited from fishing. Although this borderline limited Gazan fishing access, it was enough for local consumption. With the beginning of the second Intifada, Israel severely restricted Gazan access to the sea. Under international pressure this border was set to 12 nautical miles. In 2006, with the success of Hamas in the Palestinian National Council elections, Israel reduced this border to 6 nautical miles, and at times reduced it further to three miles. The immediate effect of these restrictions was to deprive Gazans from making a meagre living from fishing and eliminated a major food source for the impoverished population of the Strip. Israeli bombing of Gaza's sewage treatment plant, sending sewage into the sea, further disrupted Gaza's fishing.

More importantly, with the discovery of a massive natural gas field in 2000, within the Oslo-set Gazan maritime border, Palestinians could have access to a major source of revenue. A twenty-five-year contract was



An Israel patrol boat. Unknown, 1991.

signed between the Palestinian Authority, British Gas, and a Lebanese-owned company. Israel, particularly when Ariel Sharon formed his government in 2001, had no intention of allowing Palestinians access to this income and blocked the implementation of the contract; Hamas's electoral victory proved the best excuse to force BG to cancel the contract.

Jerusalem

One of the most complicated issues in the conflict between Israel and Palestine is the city of Jerusalem. Because of its historical significance for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, Jerusalem was designated as an international city from the very beginning of the British Mandate. With the establishment of the state of Israel, the Green Line cut the city into two parts. The eastern part along with the rest of the West Bank came under the control of Jordan. With the 1967 war, Israel seized the entire city, unified and later annexed it. UN Security Council resolutions 252 and 476 condemned the decision and declared it null and void.

During the whole period since 1948, Jerusalem's borders were steadily expanded by Jordan and later by Israel. Jerusalem today is almost four times larger than it was in 1947.

The main demand of Palestinians in various negotiations has been to allow for the establishment of East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital. Israel, however, considers Jerusalem as a unified city and its own exclusive capital, and as mentioned earlier, has increased the Jewish population while decreasing the Arab populations of East Jerusalem.

Access to surface and groundwater

A cornerstone of Zionist policy from the very beginning has been access to and control of water sources. The Jordan River stretches 156 miles, flowing from Mount Hermon in Lebanon to the Dead Sea, crossing the Sea of Galilee (Bahr-Tabarieh, Lake Tiberias, Lake Kinneret) in Israel and the Golan Heights. It runs through five countries and territories (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Palestine), which are technically part of a "riparian regime" for collectively managing the affairs of the river. This arrangement, however, never materialized. As mentioned earlier, Israel first took over the three "demilitarized zones" close to the surface water sources. Later on, it drained Lake Hula swamps, diverted water to the south through its National Water Carrier, and maximized its share of the river. Several attempts by the US in the 1950s to find a negotiated settlement for the water issue failed. Of the five riparian members, Syria and Lebanon were almost excluded from sharing the basin and Palestinians were denied all access to the river. Thus, presently only Israel and Jordan are beneficiaries of the river.

Aside from surface waters, Israel also controls the underground waters of the West Bank, which is divided into three (Northern, Eastern, and Western) Aquifers. The second Oslo Accords set Israel's share of water at four times that of the Palestinians. Nonetheless, Israel continued to pump water far above its assigned quota. In fact, forty percent of drinking water within the Green Line supply comes from West Bank groundwater. In the Western Aquifer, of the total 360 million cubic meters (MCM), Israel uses 340 and Palestinians 20. In the Northern

Aquifer, Israel uses 115 MCM out of 140, and in the Eastern Aquifer, Israel uses 60 out of 100 MCM. Palestinians rarely can get permits to drill deep wells, but Jewish settlers are easily allowed to do so.

No doubt, with a relatively larger population, a far more developed industrial society, and one of the most advanced agriculture in the world, Israel consumes plenty of water. It has also a most sophisticated water management system, and in addition to natural water resources, a portion of Israel's water comes from desalination plants, as well as from recycling of sewage for agricultural use. Yet, the unequal distribution of water and limits imposed on Palestinians and other riparian neighbours regarding access to their rightful quotas have been and continue to be a major source of tensions.

A combination of all these major problems has been the basis of the conflicts and confrontations between Israel and Palestinians that at times have reached an explosive point, problems that have either been ignored or were not dealt with seriously in numerous "peace" negotiations.

Israel/Palestine "peace" processes

Since the earliest Jewish immigration to Palestine, and following the Balfour Declaration in 1917, when Britain declared its willingness to establish a homeland for Jews, efforts were made to pacify the Arab inhabitants of the region. The first attempt was a meeting in 1919 between the Zionist leader, Chaim Weizmann and Emir Faisal, a leader of the Arab revolt against the Ottomans. This was in line with the Western countries' policy and the post-war Paris Conference through which Arabs were supposed to encourage and support Jewish immigration to the region, while Zionists would help Palestinians create a viable stable state. Faisal, however, was by no means a representative of Palestinians and like Weizmann, disdained Palestinians. The meeting did not achieve anything. Faisal, who the British had appointed as king of greater Syria, was ousted by the French who had gained the mandate of Syria/Lebanon through the secret Sykes-Picot agreement, and the British moved Faisal to Iraq to become king there, while his brother became king of Transjordan.

During the British Mandate in Palestine until the establishment of the state of Israel, several initiatives were put forward in response to growing tensions. Most notably, in 1937 the Peel Commission proposed the partition of territory and assigned a relatively small part of the Mediterranean coast and northern parts to the Jewish state, and the rest to the Arab state, with the exception of Jerusalem which would remain under British Mandate. The 1938 Woodhead Plan expressed reservations about the possibilities of partition, further limited the territory assigned for the proposed Jewish state and drastically limited the territory for the Arab state, expanding the areas under the Mandate. None of these plans could be materialized, and Zionist para-military organizations Irgun and later LEHI, branded as “terrorists” by the British, expanded their activities. Menachem Begin, head of Irgun and later an Israeli Prime Minister, famously said that “the historical and linguistic origin of the term terror prove that it cannot be applied to a revolutionary war of liberation,” a quote that some Palestinians use.

In 1947, Britain, which no longer had the option to maintain the mandate, handed over the “Palestine Question” to the United Nations. Two proposals known as the Minority Plan and Majority Plan were discussed in the General Assembly. The Minority Plan, favoured by Iran, India and Yugoslavia, proposed a single federal state for two peoples, in which each nation would have full autonomy in its territory, but issues such as foreign relations, national security, and immigration would be dealt with at the federal level through a bicameral parliamentary system. This was a very progressive plan but was not acceptable to the Zionists who wanted to establish an independent Jewish state. The Majority Plan had the support of the United States and the Soviet Union and was adopted in Resolution 181, allocating much wider sections of land for the Jewish State compared to earlier British partition plans. Arab states, newly established with very limited diplomatic experiences, voted against both plans, though Israel accepted the Majority Plan. With the war raging on, Israel declared itself a state in 1948, and by the end of the war, it added more territories to what was allocated to it by the UN Resolution.

With the establishment of the state of Israel, and its expansion through subsequent wars, numerous UN Resolutions have dealt with Israel and the Occupied Territories; more than four hundred by the General Assembly, and over 222 by the Security Council — excluding forty-four resolutions vetoed by Washington. One of the most important Security Council resolutions was 242 in 1967, which along with acknowledging the existence of Israel, demanded its withdrawal from the territories occupied in the 1967 war. Palestinians did not accept the Resolution, as it implied recognition of Israel. Egypt and Jordan accepted it, and later other Arab states made it a condition for the recognition of Israel. Instead of complying with the resolution, Israel came up with the Allon Plan, proposing the partition of the West Bank, allocating two separate areas assigned to Palestinians to be annexed to Jordan, and the rest remaining under Israeli control. The most intriguing part of the plan was that the two divided Palestinian areas were inside Israel and not bordered by the Jordan River, though the plan allowed a passage to Jordan through Jericho.

The 1978 Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel failed to get Israel to make any substantive concessions to Palestinian self-determination. It took until 1987 with the first Palestinian Intifada that world attention was brought back to the unresolved Palestinian problems.

Secret negotiations between representatives of the two sides in Madrid in 1991 brought high hopes for peace, paving the way for the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995. As mentioned earlier, the West Bank and Gaza were divided into three zones, seven Palestinian cities and 450 villages scattered across Israeli-controlled territories were granted limited self-government, and the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established. The Oslo Accords did not deal with the major issues of refugees, borders, or Jerusalem, which were supposed to be finalized in subsequent years. This was obviously a lopsided agreement between a stronger side with massive international support and a much weaker side with no comparable support. Yet, the hope was that it would gradually improve the Palestinian condition and pave the way for a real two-state solution. But this did not



happen. Israel continued establishing illegal Jewish settlements on Palestinian lands and increased blockades and roadblocks. At the time of the Oslo Accords, the population of settlers in the West Bank was 110,000, and today, without counting the settlers in East Jerusalem it is over half a million.

Numerous other agreements followed the Oslo Accords. In 1997, the Hebron Agreement divided the city into two sections: Hebron 1 with 240,000 Palestinians, and Hebron 2 for several hundred Jewish settlers. In 1998, the Wye River Memorandum with Clinton, Arafat and Netanyahu, made some adjustments to the Oslo Accords, and a small percentage of the three areas were relocated. The 1999 Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement made further slight changes.

In 2000, President Bill Clinton hosted Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority chair Yasser Arafat at Camp David. Clinton and Barak proposed changes to the West Bank borders according to which Israel would annex nine or ten percent more of the West Bank and nine or ten percent more of the border with the Jordan River, which

would also be put under “indefinite temporary” Israeli control. In return, Israel would add one to three percent of its own territory in the Negev Desert to the Palestinian territories. Some unspecified parts of Area C would also go under Palestinian control, without any impact on Jewish settlements. Palestinians would be allowed to commute on a highway that would link Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, with Israel having the right to shut it down anytime it deemed necessary. Refugee issues remained unresolved. The proposal would give the Palestinian state administrative control over part of East Jerusalem without “sovereignty” over the Haram al-Sharif/Al-Aqsa Mosque, or the Temple Mount compound. Arafat declared that he could not possibly agree with the proposals and the summit failed. Arafat’s return to the West Bank coincided with the second Intifada, and Israel’s response included demolishing much of Arafat’s residence, leaving a small section for his impending house arrest.

Very important peace talks took place in the Egyptian town of Taba in 2001. While no agreement regarding borders and land divisions was reached, at least on paper it dealt with some major issues pertaining to refugees and Jerusalem. For Jerusalem, instead of dividing it with a border, a reality no longer practical, it suggested that the city be divided into two administrative zones: The western part, Yerushalayim, would be the capital of Israel, and the eastern side, Al-Quds, the capital of the future Palestinian state. More importantly, on the question of refugees, it referred to the 1948 UN Resolution 194 regarding the conditional right of return and compensation, and some concrete suggestions were made: 1- the controlled return of refugees to Israel and Palestinian territories, and to the lands exchanged between the two parties; and 2- refugees formally becoming citizens of where they had settled, including transfer to a third country.

This agreement was certainly a major step forward in resolving the Israeli/Palestinian conflicts. But it coincided with the election of George W. Bush and the neo-cons in the US, the end of the Barak government and Ariel Sharon coming into power in Israel. More significantly, Ehud Barak was not serious about this deal. In 2003, at a conference of the Tel-

Aviv and Al-Quds Universities, where the American, Israeli, and Palestinian negotiators were reviewing the failure of the Camp David II Accord, Barak openly admitted that he was not serious about the deal, and prompted the anger of the chief Israeli negotiator present in the conference. (Arafat could not attend because he was under the house arrest!) In fact, just before handing the government to Sharon, Barak sent a note to the new US president stating that what had been agreed in Taba and in Camp David II was not considered binding on the new Israeli government.

In 2001, Ariel Sharon unilaterally, and outside any negotiations, proposed the Sharon Plan, which comprised some minor changes in the territories assigned earlier to Palestinians while expanding the areas under Israeli control in all of the Jordan River valley and the Dead Sea.

In 2002, George W. Bush, through the 'Quartet' (US, EU, UN, Russia) suggested Roadmap 2002, which was in actual fact a road to nowhere: in the first phase Palestinians were to renounce violence, Israel to withdraw to the pre-September 2000 (2nd Intifada) lines and freeze those settlements built since 2001, in the second phase a Palestinian state would be established and in the third phase an international conference would resolve the finalized borders and the question of Jerusalem.

The Arab states came up with their own Arab Peace Plan, which put forward three conditions for peace and the formal recognition of Israel: withdrawal to the 1967 borders, resolving the refugee issues on the basis of UN Resolutions, and the creation of a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem. Israel rejected the idea.

In 2003 pro-peace Israeli and Palestinian political figures and activists met unofficially and came up with the Geneva Initiative. In terms of borders and territory, they suggested a land swap, assigned much of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to Palestinians, but agreed that the areas close to the Green Line, with significant Jewish population, would be annexed to Israel. In return, part of the Israeli territory close to Gaza would be annexed to the Palestinian side. On the refugee question, however, there was no breakthrough.

Time was passing and key Palestinian issues remained unaddressed. Following years of house arrest, Yasser Arafat was sent to France for medical reasons and mysteriously died in 2004. Internal strife among Palestinian political currents intensified and the movement was eventually divided into two distinct parts.

All sorts of subsequent meetings and summits were held without any serious results. In 2005, representatives of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, the King of Jordan, and President of Egypt met in Sharm al-Sheikh. In the Riyadh Summit of 2007 Arab leaders repeated the earlier Beirut declaration. At the Annapolis Conference in the same year, George W. Bush, Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas attempted to revive the “Roadmap” peace talks, but no agreement was reached. A notable part of this initiative was Olmert’s agreement to assign a section of East Jerusalem to the Palestinian state. With the election of Barack Obama, there were hopes for the negotiated settlement he had promised. But in the 2010 and 2013 Conferences between Obama, Netanyahu and Abbas they could not achieve any progress. In 2014, after confrontations between Israel and Hamas, Netanyahu cancelled all efforts for peace negotiations. During the Trump presidency, any pretense of a peace process between Israel and Palestine was set aside altogether, and the ultra-right Israeli coalition had no interest in any negotiated peace with Palestinians anyhow. The Abraham Accords merely aimed to bring together Arab autocracies and Israel and did not address the Palestinian question. And the Joe Biden Administration did not undertake any major initiatives either.

In short, none of the so-called peace processes resolved any of the Palestinian problems discussed earlier. On this long journey, entrenched frustrations and anger have conjoined periods of calm before storms and outbursts. The first intifada prepared the ground for the Madrid and Oslo negotiations, and the second Intifada brought the Taba Summit. The latest horrific attack by Hamas brutally killing many civilians and taking hostages, followed by the unimaginable brutality of the Israeli response and the collective punishment and killing of thousands of Gazans, has

once again attracted world attention to the ongoing Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Whether this will lead to a new round of peace negotiation following the completion of military operations remains to be seen.

Without a doubt, the effects of the October 7 attacks did not serve the Palestinian cause at all. The major difference between this confrontation and the two Intifadas is that it is led by a reactionary obscurantist religious fundamentalist force that ironically gave the best excuse to another fundamentalist force in power in Israel to mercilessly kill many thousands of Palestinians and justify its expansionist policies.

Are there any solutions to this lasting conflict?

With the total failure of the Oslo initiative, many question the idea of a so-called two-state solution. Putting aside absurd ideas of a Palestinian state in the pre-1948 borders or ‘from river to the sea,’ some (re-)emphasize the one-state solution for the two peoples, not taking into consideration the basic tenet of Zionist ideology that rests on having a homeland for Jews. Whether one agrees with this ideology or not, it is a reality that cannot be ignored. The one-state solution is, without a doubt, an ideal that might be materialized in future. However, there is no chance of its fulfilment any time soon. It is important to note the so-called “demographic dilemma”: Today the population of Israel is 9.7 million, which consists of 2.1 million Arabs and about half a million people of other ethnicities or religions, making the Jewish population of Israel around 7.1 million. The Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza is about 5.4 million, and if added to the non-Jewish Israeli population, Jews would become a minority in the Jewish “homeland.” Although Israel encourages Jewish immigration and so far, about nine major waves of immigration have taken place, and notwithstanding the very high birth rate among ultra-orthodox Jews, Israel’s overall Jewish population growth rate is lower than the Palestinian population, despite the vast numbers killed every year in numerous conflicts.

Some on the left have also put forth the idea of a potential collaboration of the working classes on both sides against the dominant capitalist class. This is a nice idea with no basis in reality. Histadrut, the

powerful Israeli General Federation of Labor, federating over twenty industrial trade unions with about 800,000 members, is still one of the most powerful institutions in the country, despite being weakened by the increased dominance of neoliberalism in Israel since the 1980s. It is a progressive movement for Israeli workers and even has over 100,000 Arab members. But as a founding Zionist institution it has never taken a strong stance in relation to the post-1967 Occupied Territories. On the Palestinian side, the General Federation of the Palestinian Trade Unions, with about 290,000 members, despite defending Palestinian workers, is very close to the Palestinian Authority, has little actual power, and like many other trade unions suffers from a lack of internal democracy. In short, the expectation that under the present conditions, workers on both sides would unite to challenge the dominant power is unrealistic.

The reality is that the two-state solution was never truly on the agenda. Even what in 2010 I called the “One-and-a-half State Solution” has never materialized. And yet, all things considered, the only solution to the seventy-five-year-old conflict is a real two-state solution. The peace negotiations mentioned above, although all have failed, carry the seeds of a practical, realistic and relatively fair solution. If real conditions of peace are provided, they can provide the basis for a lasting agreement.

The main question though is what are these real conditions for peace? Contrary to the present situation where reactionary, ultra-conservative and fundamentalist political currents on both sides are facing off, I believe, it is ultimately the progressive secular currents that will play the major role in finding lasting peace. So long as there are no major changes in Israeli civil society and politics, and the progressive Israeli left and liberal forces are sidelined by the reactionary right-wing zealots, there cannot be any hope for peace, and the world will witness more periodic outbursts. Also, if similar changes do not happen on the Palestinian side, and progressive Palestinian forces are not able to effectively confront the inept and corrupt Palestinian Authority on the one hand, and religious fundamentalism on the other, and create a unified progressive secular front, they will not have a strong voice in the future peace process. It is obvious that these are big

ifs, and numerous powerful regional and international factors, ranging from imperialism, US politics in particular, and religious fundamentalisms (Jewish, Christian, Islamic), as well as regional autocracies, and proponents of antisemitism and Islamophobia, present major barriers to genuine peace between Israel and Palestine.

Thus, it is difficult to be optimistic, but there is no other choice but to remain hopeful and work hard to find practical and progressive ways to move towards peace based on a two-state solution through which a viable secular democratic government for Palestine is established within the pre-1967 borders with its capital in the Eastern part of unified Jerusalem, along with negotiated land swaps based on the Geneva Initiative, resolving the refugee problem based on UN Resolutions and the Taba agreement, and fair division of water sources and land and maritime borders.

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FRAMING PALESTINE

Israel, the Gulf States, and American power in the
Middle East

Adam Hanieh



Protesters at the White House. Ted Eytan, 2023.

Over the last seven months, Israel's genocidal war in Gaza has generated an unprecedented wave of global protest and awareness around Palestine. Many millions of people have taken to the streets, encampments have spread across universities throughout the world, courageous activists have blocked ports and arms factories, and there is a deep-seated recognition that a global campaign of boycott, divestment,

and sanctions against Israel is needed now more than ever. The strength of these popular movements has been reinforced through the enormous attention brought by South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) — a case that has not only powerfully highlighted the reality of Israeli genocide but also the intransigence of the leading Western states in enabling Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip and beyond.

Nonetheless, despite this global upsurge in solidarity with Palestine, there remain several misconceptions in how Palestine is commonly debated and framed. Too often, the politics of Palestine are viewed simply through the lens of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, ignoring the wider regional dynamics of the Middle East, and the global context in which Israeli settler colonialism operates. Relatedly, solidarity with Palestine is frequently reduced to the question of Israel's massive human rights abuses and ongoing violations of international law — the killings, arrests, and dispossession that Palestinians have experienced for nearly eight decades. The problem with this human rights framing is that it depoliticises the Palestinian struggle, failing to explain *why* Western states continue to support Israel so unequivocally. And when this crucial question of Western support is raised, many point to a “pro-Israel lobby” operating in North America and Western Europe as the cause — a false and politically dangerous viewpoint that gets the relationship between Western states and Israel fundamentally wrong.

My goal in this piece is to present an alternative approach to understanding Palestine — one that is framed by the wider region and the Middle East's central place in our fossil fuel-centred world. My key argument is that the unstinting support of the US and leading European states for Israel cannot be comprehended outside of this framework. As a settler colony, Israel has been crucial to the maintenance of Western imperial interests — notably those of the US — in the Middle East. It has performed this role alongside the other major pillar of US control in the region: the oil-rich Gulf Arab monarchies, principally Saudi Arabia. The fast-evolving relationships between the Gulf, Israel, and the US are

essential to understanding the current moment, especially given the relative weakening of American global power.

Post-War Transformations and the Middle East

Two major global shifts defined the changing world order in the years immediately following the Second World War. The first was a revolution in the world's energy systems: the emergence of oil as the world's principal fossil fuel, displacing coal and other energy sources across the leading industrialised economies. This fossil fuel transition occurred first in the US, where the consumption of oil surpassed coal in 1950, followed by Western Europe and Japan in the 1960s. Across the wealthy countries represented in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), oil made up less than 28 percent of total fossil fuel consumption in 1950; by the end of the 1960s, it held a majority share. With its greater energy density, chemical flexibility, and easy transportability, oil powered a booming post-war capitalism — underpinning a range of new technologies, industries, and infrastructure. This was the beginning of what scientists would later describe as the “Great Acceleration” — a massive and continued expansion of fossil fuel consumption that began in the mid-twentieth century, and which has led inexorably to today's climate emergency.

This global transition to oil was closely connected to a second major post-war transformation: the consolidation of the US as the leading economic and political power. The economic rise of the US had begun in the early decades of the twentieth century, but it was the Second World War that marked the definitive emergence of the US as the most dynamic force in global capitalism, opposed only by the Soviet Union and its allied bloc. American power arose on the back of the destruction across Western Europe during the war, coupled with the weakening of European colonial rule over much of the so-called Third World. As Britain and France faltered, the US took the lead in shaping the architecture of post-war politics and economics, including a new global financial system centred on the US dollar. By the mid-1950s, the US held a 60 percent share of world

manufacturing output and just over a quarter of global GDP — and 42 of the top 50 industrial corporations in the world were American.

These two global transitions — the transition to oil and the ascendance of American power — had profound implications for the Middle East. On one hand, the Middle East played a decisive role in the global shift to oil. The region had plentiful oil supplies, amounting to nearly 40 percent of the world's proven reserves by the mid-1950s. Middle East oil was also located close to many European countries, and the costs of producing it were much lower than the costs of oil production anywhere else in the world. Seemingly unlimited quantities of low-cost Middle East oil could thus be supplied to Europe at prices lower than coal, while ensuring that domestic US oil markets remained insulated from the effects of increased European demand. The recentring of Europe's oil supply on the Middle East was a remarkably rapid process: between 1947 and 1960, the share of Europe's oil that originated from the region doubled, rising from 43 percent to 85 percent. This not only enabled the emergence of new industries (such as petrochemicals) but also new forms of transport and war-making. Indeed, without the Middle East, the oil transition in Western Europe may never have happened.

Most of the Middle East's oil reserves are concentrated in the Gulf region, especially Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf Arab states, as well as Iran and Iraq. Through the first half of the twentieth century, these countries had been ruled by autocratic monarchies supported by the British (except for Saudi Arabia, which was nominally independent of British colonialism). Oil production in the region was controlled by a handful of large Western oil firms, who paid rents and royalties to the rulers of these states for the right to extract oil. These oil firms were vertically integrated, meaning they not only controlled the extraction of crude oil, but also the refining, shipping, and sale of oil around the world. The power of these firms was immense, with their control of the infrastructures of oil's circulation allowing them to exclude any potential competitors. The concentration of ownership in the oil industry far exceeded that seen in any other industry; indeed, at the end of the Second

World War, more than 80 percent of all the world's oil reserves outside the US and USSR were controlled by just seven large American and European firms — the so-called “Seven Sisters.”

Israel and the Anti-Colonial Revolt

Despite their huge power, as the Middle East became the centre of world oil markets through the 1950s and 1960s, these oil firms were faced with a major problem. As took place elsewhere around the world, a range of powerful nationalist, communist, and other left-wing movements challenged rulers who were backed by British and French colonialism, threatening to upset the carefully constructed regional order. This was experienced most sharply in Egypt, where the British-supported monarch, King Farouk, was ousted in 1952 in a military coup led by a popular military officer, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser's coming to power forced the withdrawal of British troops from Egypt and led to Sudan obtaining independence in 1956. Egypt's newly gained sovereignty was crowned with the nationalisation of the British and French-controlled Suez Canal in 1956 — an action celebrated by millions of people across the entire Middle East and met with a failed invasion of Egypt by Britain, France, and Israel. As Nasser took these steps, anti-colonial struggles were growing elsewhere in the region, most notably in Algeria, where a guerrilla war for independence was launched against the French occupation in 1954.

Although it is often overlooked today, these threats to longstanding colonial domination were likewise felt across the oil-rich states of the Gulf. In Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf monarchies, support for Nasser ran high, and various left-wing movements protested the venality, corruption, and pro-Western stance of the ruling monarchies. The potential consequences of this were demonstrated in neighbouring Iran, where a popular national leader, Mohammed Mossadegh, had come to power in 1951. One of Mossadegh's first acts was to take over the British-controlled oil company, Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (the forerunner of today's BP) in the first oil nationalisation in the Middle East. This nationalisation resonated strongly in nearby Arab states, where the slogan

“Arab oil for the Arabs” gained widespread popularity amid the general anti-colonial mood.

In response to Iran’s oil nationalisation, US and British intelligence officials orchestrated a coup against Mossadegh in 1953, bringing to power a pro-Western government loyal to the Iranian monarch, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. The coup marked the opening salvo in a sustained counter-revolutionary wave directed against radical and nationalist movements across the region. The overthrow of Mossadegh also demonstrated a major shift in the regional order: while Britain played an important role in the coup, it was the US that took the lead in planning and carrying out the operation. This was the first time the US government had deposed a foreign ruler during peacetime, and the CIA’s involvement in the coup was an important precursor of later US interventions, such as the 1954 coup in Guatemala and the overthrow of Chile’s Salvador Allende in 1973.

It was in this context that Israel emerged as a major bulwark of American interests in the region. In the early years of the twentieth century, Britain had been the principal supporter of Zionist colonisation

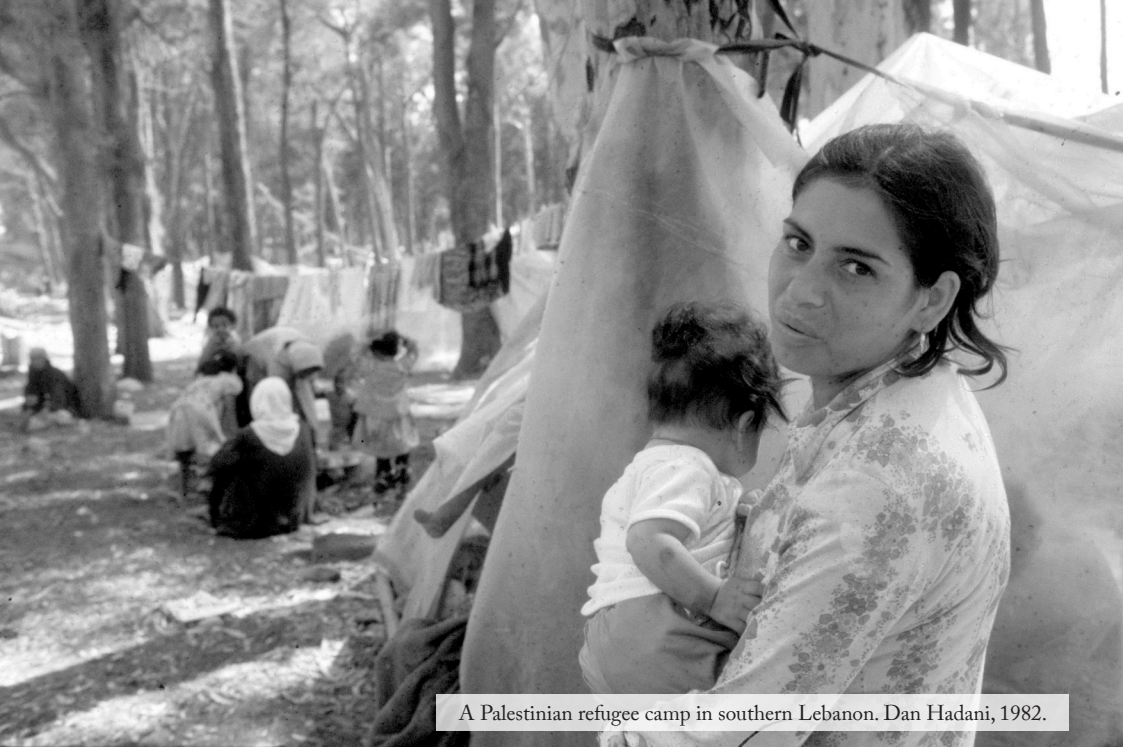


Women confront Israeli soldiers in Gaza. Robert Croma, 1987.

of Palestine and, after Israel's establishment in 1948, it continued to support the Zionist state-building project. But as the US supplanted British and French colonial dominance in the Middle East during the post-war period, American support for Israel emerged as the lynchpin of a new regional security order. The key turning point was the 1967 war between Israel and leading Arab states, which saw the Israeli military destroy the Egyptian and Syrian air forces and occupy the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the (Egyptian) Sinai Peninsula, and the (Syrian) Golan Heights. Israel's victory shattered the movements of Arab unity, national independence, and anti-colonial resistance that had crystallised most sharply in Nasser's Egypt. It also encouraged the US to become the country's primary patron, replacing Britain. From that moment onwards, the US began to supply Israel annually with billions of dollars' worth of military hardware and financial support.

The Significance of Settler Colonialism

The 1967 war demonstrated that Israel was a powerful force that could be used against any threats to American interests in the region. But there is a crucial dimension to this that often goes unremarked: Israel's special place in supporting American power is directly connected to its internal character as a settler colony, founded on the ongoing dispossession of the Palestinian population. Settler colonies must continually work to fortify structures of racial oppression, class exploitation, and dispossession. As a result, they are typically highly militarised and violent societies, which tend to be reliant upon external support, which allows them to maintain their material privileges in a hostile regional environment. In such societies, a substantial proportion of the population benefits from the oppression of indigenous peoples and understands their privileges in racialised and militaristic terms. For this reason, settler colonies are much more dependable partners of Western imperial interests than "normal" client states. This is why British colonialism supported Zionism as a political movement in the early twentieth century — and why the US embraced Israel in the post-1967 moment.



A Palestinian refugee camp in southern Lebanon. Dan Hadani, 1982.

Of course, this does not mean that the US “controls” Israel, or that there are never differences of opinion between the US and Israeli governments over how this relationship should be sustained. But Israel’s ability to maintain a permanent state of war, occupation, and oppression would be deeply imperilled without continuous American backing (both materially and politically). In return, Israel serves as a loyal partner and a bulwark against threats to American interests in the region. Israel has also acted globally in supporting repressive US-backed regimes across the world — from Apartheid South Africa through to military dictatorships in Latin America. Alexander Haig, US secretary of state under Richard Nixon, once put it bluntly: “Israel is the largest American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk, does not carry even one American soldier, and is located in a critical region for American national security.”

The connection between the internal character of the Israeli state and its special place in American power is akin to the role that South African apartheid played for Western interests across the African continent. There

are important differences between South African apartheid and Israeli apartheid — not least the preponderant share of South Africa's black populations in the country's working class (unlike Palestinians in Israel) — but as settler colonies, both countries came to act as core organising centres of Western power in their respective neighbourhoods. If we examine the history of Western support for South African apartheid, we see the same sorts of justifications that we see today in the case of Israel (and the same kinds of attempts to block international sanctions and criminalise protest movements). These parallels extend to the role of specific individuals. One little-known example of this is a trip made by a young member of Britain's Conservative Party to South Africa in 1989, during which he argued against international sanctions on South Africa and made the case for why Britain should continue to support the Apartheid regime. Decades later, that young Tory, David Cameron, now holds the position of UK Foreign Minister — and is one of the key world leaders cheerleading Israel's genocide in Gaza.

The Middle East's centrality to the global oil economy gives Israel a more pronounced place in imperial power than was held by Apartheid South Africa. But both cases demonstrate why it is so important to think about how regional and global factors intersect with the internal class and racial dynamics of settler colonies.

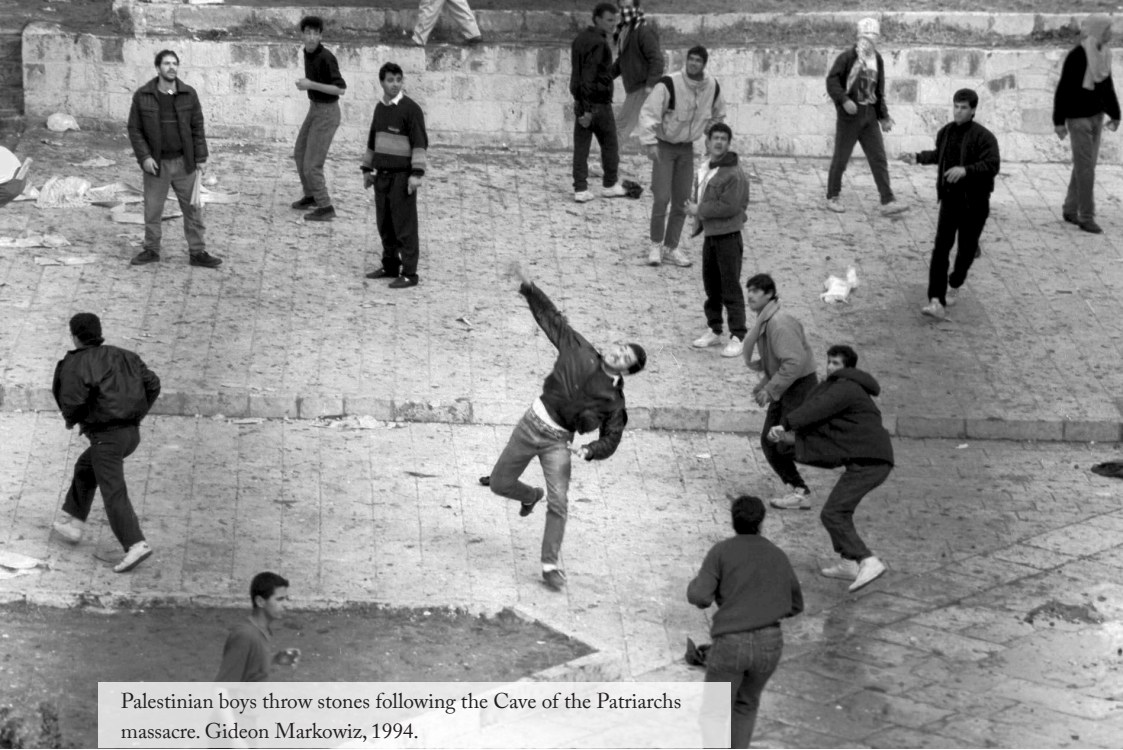
Israel's Economic Integration into the Middle East

The Middle East became even more significant to American power following the nationalisation of crude oil reserves across most of the region (and elsewhere) during the 1970s and 1980s. Nationalisation brought the longstanding direct Western control of Middle East crude supplies to an end (although American and European firms continued to control most of the global refining, transport, and sale of this oil). In this context, US interests in the region revolved around guaranteeing the stable supply of oil to the world market — denominated in US dollars — and ensuring that oil would not be used as a “weapon” to destabilise the American-centred global system. Moreover, with Gulf oil producers now earning trillions through the export of crude, the US was also deeply

concerned about how these so-called petrodollars circulated through the global financial system — a matter that is directly consequential to the dominance of the US dollar.

In pursuing these interests, US strategy became fully focused on the survival of the Gulf monarchies, led by Saudi Arabia, as key regional allies. This was particularly important following the overthrow, in 1979, of Iran's Pahlavi monarchy, which had been another mainstay of American interests in the Gulf since the 1953 coup. US support to the Gulf monarchs was manifested in a variety of ways — including the sale of massive amounts of military hardware that turned the Gulf into the largest market for weapons in the world, economic initiatives that channelled Gulf petrodollar wealth into American financial markets, and a permanent US military presence that continues to form the ultimate guarantee of monarchical rule. A pivotal moment in the US-Gulf relationship came with the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted between 1980 and 1988, and ranks as one of the most destructive conflicts of the twentieth century (up to half a million people perished). During this war, the US supplied weapons, funding, and intelligence to both sides, viewing it as a way to sap the power of these two large neighbouring countries and further ensure the security of the Gulf monarchs.

In this manner, US strategy in the Middle East came to rest upon two core pillars: Israel, on one side, and the Gulf monarchies, on the other. These two pillars remain the crux of American power in the region today; however, there has been a critical shift in how they relate to one another. Beginning in the 1990s, and continuing through to the current moment, the US government has sought to knit these two strategic poles together — along with other important Arab states, such as Jordan and Egypt — within a single zone that is tied to US economic and political power. For this to happen successfully, Israel needed to be integrated into the wider Middle East — by normalising its relations (economic, political, diplomatic) with Arab states. Most importantly, this meant getting rid of the formal Arab boycotts of Israel that had existed for many decades.



Palestinian boys throw stones following the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre. Gideon Markowiz, 1994.

From Israel's perspective, normalisation was not simply about enabling Israeli trade with, and investments in, Arab states. Following a major recession in the mid-1980s, Israel's economy had shifted away from sectors such as construction and agriculture, toward a much greater emphasis on high-tech, finance, and military exports. Many leading international companies, however, were reluctant to do business with Israeli firms (or inside Israel itself) because of the secondary boycotts imposed by Arab governments. Dropping these boycotts was essential in order to attract big Western firms into Israel, and also to enable Israeli firms to access foreign markets in the US and elsewhere. Economic normalisation, in other words, was just as much about ensuring Israeli capitalism's place in the global economy as it was about Israel accessing markets in the Middle East.

To this end, the US (and its European allies) employed a variety of mechanisms from the 1990s onwards aimed at driving forward Israel's economic integration into the wider Middle East. One was the deepening

of economic reforms — an opening up to foreign investment and trade flows that spread rapidly across the region. As part of this, the US proposed a range of economic initiatives that sought to tie Israeli and Arab markets to one another, and then to the US economy. A key scheme involved the so-called Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs) — low-wage manufacturing zones established in Jordan and Egypt in the late 1990s. Goods produced in the QIZs (mostly textiles and garments) were given duty-free access to the US, provided that a certain proportion of the inputs involved in their manufacture came from Israel. The QIZs played an early and decisive role in bringing together Israeli, Jordanian, and Egyptian capital in joint ownership structures — normalising economic relations between two of the Arab states that neighbour Israel. By 2007, the US government was reporting that more than 70 percent of Jordan's exports to the US came from QIZs; for Egypt, 30 percent of exports to the US were produced in QIZs in 2008.

Alongside the QIZ programme, the US also proposed the Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) initiative in 2003. MEFTA aimed to establish a free trade zone spanning the entire region by 2013. The US strategy was to negotiate individually with “friendly” countries using a graduated six-step process that would eventually lead to a full-fledged free trade agreement (FTA) between the US and the country in question. These FTAs were designed so that countries could connect their own bilateral FTAs with the US with other countries' bilateral FTAs, thereby establishing sub-regional-level agreements across the Middle East. These sub-regional agreements could be linked over time, until they covered the entire region. Importantly, these FTAs would also be used to encourage Israel's integration into Arab markets, with each agreement containing a clause committing the signatory to normalisation with Israel and forbidding any boycott of trade relations. While the US failed to meet its 2013 goal for establishing MEFTA, the policy successfully drove an expansion of US economic influence in the region, underpinned by normalisation between Israel and key Arab states. Strikingly, today the US

has fourteen FTAs with countries across the world, of which five are with states in the Middle East (Israel, Bahrain, Morocco, Jordan, and Oman).

The Oslo Accords

However, the success of economic normalisation ultimately hinged upon there being a change in the political situation that would give a Palestinian “greenlight” to Israel’s economic integration into the wider region. Here, the key turning point was the Oslo Accords, an agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) that was signed under the auspices of the US government on the White House lawn in 1993. Oslo built heavily upon colonial practices established over preceding decades. Since the 1970s, Israel had attempted to find a Palestinian force that would administer the West Bank and Gaza Strip on its behalf — a Palestinian proxy for the Israeli occupation that could minimise day-to-day contact between Palestinians and the Israeli military. These early attempts collapsed during the First Intifada, a large-scale popular uprising that began (in the Gaza Strip) in 1987. The Oslo Accords brought the First Intifada to an end.

Under Oslo, the PLO agreed to constitute a new political entity, called the Palestinian Authority (PA), which would be granted limited



Israeli soldiers in Budrus, West Bank. Tal King, 2012.

powers over fragmented areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The PA would be completely dependent upon external funding for its survival — especially loans, aid, and import taxes collected by Israel that would then be remitted to the PA. Because most of these funding sources ultimately derived from Western states and Israel, the PA was quickly politically subordinated. In addition, Israel retained full control over the Palestinian economy and resources, and the movement of people and goods. After the territorial division of Gaza and the West Bank in 2007, the PA established its headquarters in Ramallah in the West Bank. Today, the PA is headed by Mahmoud Abbas.

Despite the way the Oslo Accords and subsequent negotiations are typically presented, they were never about peace and a road to Palestinian freedom. It was under Oslo that Israeli settlement expansion exploded in the West Bank, the Apartheid Wall was built, and the elaborate movement restrictions that govern Palestinian life today developed. Oslo served to cast key segments of the Palestinian population — refugees and Palestinian citizens of Israel — out of the political struggle, reducing the question of Palestine to negotiations around slivers of territory in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Most importantly, Oslo provided a Palestinian blessing to Israel's integration into the wider Middle East, opening the way for Arab governments — led by Jordan and Egypt — to embrace normalisation with Israel under a US umbrella.

It was after Oslo that the movement restrictions, barriers, checkpoints, and military buffers that now encircle Gaza emerged. In this sense, the open-air prison that is today Gaza is itself a creation of the Oslo process: a direct thread connects the Oslo negotiations to the genocide we are now witnessing. It is crucial to remember this in the light of ongoing discussions about possible post-war scenarios. Israeli strategy has always involved the periodic use of extreme violence, twinned with false promises of internationally backed negotiations. These twin tools are part of the same process, serving to reinforce the continued fragmentation and dispossession of the Palestinian people. Any post-war negotiations steered

by the US will certainly see similar attempts to ensure Israel's continuing domination of Palestinian lives and land.

Thinking Forward

The strategic centrality of the oil-rich Middle East in American global power explains why Israel is now the largest cumulative recipient of US foreign aid in the world, even though it ranks as the world's thirteenth wealthiest economy by GDP per capita (higher than the UK, Germany, or Japan). It also explains the bipartisan support for Israel among political elites in the US (and UK). Indeed, in 2021 — under the Trump presidency and before the current war — Israel received more US foreign military financing than all other countries in the world combined. And, crucially, as the last eight months have shown, American support extends far beyond financial and material support, with the US acting as the final backstop in defending Israel politically on the world stage.

As we have seen, this American alliance with Israel is not incidental to the dispossession of the Palestinian people, but is actually grounded in it. It is Israel's settler-colonial character that has given it such an outsized role in bolstering US power across the region. This is why the Palestinian struggle is such a core part of driving political change across the Middle East — a region that is now the most socially polarised, economically unequal, and conflict-affected in the world. And, conversely, it is why the struggle for Palestine is intimately bound up with the successes (and failures) of other progressive social struggles in the region.

The central axis of these inter-regional dynamics remains the connection between Israel and the Gulf states. In the two decades that followed the Oslo Accords, US strategy in the Middle East continued to emphasise Israel's economic and political integration with the Gulf states. A major step forward in this process occurred with the 2020 Abraham Accords, which saw the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain agree to normalise relations with Israel. The Abraham Accords paved the way for a UAE-Israel FTA, signed in 2022, which was Israel's first FTA with an Arab state. Trade between Israel and the UAE surpassed \$2.5-billion in 2022, up from just \$150-million in 2020. Sudan and Morocco have also

reached similar agreements with Israel, driven forward by significant American inducements.

With the Abraham Accords, five Arab countries now have formal diplomatic relationships with Israel. These countries encompass around forty percent of the population across the Arab world, and include some of the region's leading political and economic powers. But one crucial question still remains: when will Saudi Arabia join this club? While it is impossible that the UAE and Bahrain could have agreed to the Abraham Accords without Saudi Arabia's consent, the Saudi Kingdom has so far not formally normalised ties with Israel — despite a plethora of meetings and informal connections between the two states over recent years.

Amidst the current genocide, a normalisation deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel is undoubtedly the principal goal of US planning for the post-war moment. It is very likely that the Saudi government would agree to such an outcome — and it has probably indicated as much to the Biden administration — provided it receives some sort of go-ahead from the PA in Ramallah (perhaps connected to international recognition of a Palestinian pseudo-state in parts of the West Bank). There are obviously significant obstacles to this scenario, including the ongoing refusal of Palestinians in Gaza to submit and the question of how Gaza will be administered following the end of the war. But the current US plan of a multinational Arab force taking control of the Strip, headed by some of the leading normalising states — the UAE, Egypt, and Morocco — would likely be connected to Saudi-Israeli normalisation.

Bringing the Gulf states and Israel together is increasingly crucial to US interests in the region, given the sharp rivalries and geopolitical tensions emerging at the global level, especially with China. While there is no other “great power” that is set to replace American dominance in the Middle East, there has been a relative decline in US political, economic, and military influence across the region over recent years. One indication of this is the growing interdependencies between the Gulf states and China/East Asia, which now go far beyond the export of Middle East crude. In this context — and given the longstanding place of Israel in

American power — any normalisation process steered by the US state would help reassert American primacy in the region, potentially serving as a crucial lever against China's influence there.

Nonetheless, despite the ongoing discussions around post-war scenarios, the last seventy-six years have repeatedly demonstrated that attempts to permanently erase Palestinian steadfastness and resistance will fail. Palestine now sits at the forefront of a global political awakening that exceeds anything seen since the 1960s. Amidst this heightened awareness of the Palestinian condition, our analysis must go beyond immediate opposition to Israel's brutality in the Gaza Strip. The struggle for Palestinian liberation sits at the centre of any effective challenge to imperial interests in the Middle East, and our movements need a better grounding in these wider regional dynamics — especially the pivotal role of the Gulf monarchies. We also need a deeper understanding of how the Middle East fits within the history of fossil capitalism and contemporary struggles for climate justice. The question of Palestine cannot be separated from these realities. In this sense, the extraordinary battle for survival waged by Palestinians today in the Gaza Strip represents the leading edge of the fight for the future of the planet.

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GENDERING GENOCIDE

Gaza, the resistance of Palestinian women, and the
limits of Western feminist solidarity

Sunera Thobani

The Israeli attacks on Gaza have resulted in the mass slaughter of Palestinian women and children; this violence is part of the state's genocidal strategy. Reported daily in the Arab media but either neglected or minimized in mainstream Western media, the violence directed toward Palestinian women and their children is clearly neither an unintended consequence in the "fog of war" nor an unfortunate effect of oversight by the Israeli army. The Israeli political leadership has repeatedly and very publicly articulated its clear genocidal intent, which includes the particular targeting of Palestinian women. In the case of Gaza, the Israeli state has deliberately bombed sites where large numbers of women and children are known to be seeking shelter. No mere acts of omission, these are rather acts of commission.



The stability of every settler society depends upon its ability to destroy the colonized people's power to resist and their capacity to reproduce future generations. Gaining control over the women is crucial to this process, and Israeli officials have made no secret of their intent to accomplish exactly this. Israel's former Minister of Interior, Ayelet Shaked, explicitly called for the extermination of Palestinian women when she termed their children "little snakes": "They should go, as should the physical homes in which they raised the snakes. Otherwise more little snakes will be raised there," she stated. She was subsequently appointed justice minister in 2015. Deputy Defence Minister Eli Ben-Dahan called Palestinians "beasts" in 2013, going on to claim "they are not human." This was ten years ago. These were senior politicians with the highest political ranks speaking.

To dismiss such declarations of intent as the ravings of ultra-right racists is to miss how the dehumanization of Palestinians — upon which the destruction of their peoplehood relies — is racialized as well as gendered and folded into the very structure and religio-racial logics of the Zionist nation-state. One can find similar examples of such dehumanization right from the Nakba onward, including Golda Meir's comments that "[t]here is no Palestinian people," only Palestinian refugees, and that the Palestinian "terrorist" subscribes to a "ghoulish nationalism." Meir designated the Palestine Liberation Organization "exultant murderers of the innocent" as she continued to claim "we dispossessed no Arabs." This was a woman prime minister who is celebrated as a (proto)feminist, the first woman prime minister in the Western world, and whose career is often presented as attesting to Israel's superior commitment to gender egalitarianism.

The history of the Israeli woman politician who actively disappears the presence of Palestinian women in political as well as existential terms in order to claim legitimacy for the Israeli state — and her own place within it — has yet to be accounted for. Tzipi Hotovely, the Israeli ambassador to the UK, most recently echoed Meir's view that "there is no Palestinian people" as she denied there is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza,



Gazan women demanding the release of detainees. Joe Catron, 2013.

one that has disproportionately killed Palestinian women and children. For good measure, she dubbed UNRWA schools “terror schools” and called for Gazans to be “re-educated” as she rejected outright the idea of any peace with the Palestinians on the basis of a two-state solution. Hotovely is reported to have supported the destruction of the Palestinian village Khan al-Ahmar as well as of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The ongoing representation of Israel’s women politicians, who call for the erasure of the Palestinian people and who disappear Palestinian women and children from the political field, as symbols of gender egalitarianism demonstrates how deeply saturated with gender politics is the project of settler colonialism: exaltation of Israeli women in the nation state’s gender politics goes hand in hand with its racial-political “disappearing” of Palestinian women even as it brutalizes them for being the obstacle to the realization of the Zionist project.

In keeping with this foundational logic, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant ordered “a total siege of Gaza” following the Hamas attacks of

October 7, proclaiming to the world “we are fighting human animals and will act accordingly.” Just so there would be no doubt as to what this “fight” would actually mean, he clarified “[t]here will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed.” Not to be outshone, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described Palestinians as the “children of darkness” to justify this horrific slaughter with the stated objective of “destroying Hamas,” an objective that even the Biden administration, Israel’s most powerful political backer, recognizes cannot be realistically achieved, notwithstanding Biden’s ardent expressions of total support.

The objective that is being achieved on the ground in Gaza is the slaughter of Palestinian women and children, the destruction of their homes, schools, mosques, bakeries, shops, churches, and hospitals — in short, the infrastructure that sustains their everyday lives and livelihoods. The numbers in Gaza demonstrate this. Well over 20,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 7. The numbers are rising hourly and will undoubtedly be much higher when the actual toll is taken after the assault ends. Of those killed, 70 percent are women and children. The UN estimates that 50,000 pregnant women are due to give birth in these catastrophic conditions. An estimated 180 women give birth every day, reports Al Jazeera, with no access to clean water, no painkillers, no electricity, no medical supplies or access to healthcare services. Mothers are giving babies formula using contaminated water; mothers go hungry to feed their children.

Gaza is on the verge of famine, warns UNICEF, and all children under the age of five are “at high risk of malnutrition and preventable death.” Israel, however, has ordered yet another evacuation, this time from Bureij and Nuseirat along what Palestinians call the “death corridor.” Gazans, including wounded and injured women and children, have been ordered to travel via what Israel pronounces to be “safe routes” along which its soldiers then proceed to arrest, shoot, and kill many on the move.

These facts on the ground are not unknown to the Israeli state, its military, its nationals, nor to the Euro-American states who provide the

arms facilitating the carnage. In addition to those killed, thousands more women and children are being injured, maimed, and disabled by the relentless bombings. Azhaar Amayreh, a young mother and an interpreter and translator, recounts a day in her and her child's lives as she struggles to find water, bread, and care for her family under the terror of the Israeli state. Amayreh states, "It seems all the more likely, almost assured, that we will not make it alive from here, given the barrage of weapons and bombings directed at us from every imaginable direction." The message she wants the world to understand and remember is short, clear, and devastating; it is also an indictment: "What kept me going till the very last are three things: my faith in Allah, my love for my young daughter, and the Palestinian blood in my veins."

Gazan women are losing their children, family members, support systems and yet, as the world witnesses daily, they keep going on in these desperate conditions, salvaging whatever they can of their children and families, their lives and belongings, holding their communities together even under the threat of immediate death. And their spirit of resistance remains undaunted, as demonstrated daily in the interviews, social media posts, and news reports coming out of Gaza.

A woman recently released from an Israeli prison spoke to the media saying, "God bless the resistance. Without them, we would have never been released. Our freedom is because of them. Our honour is because of them. We hold our heads up high because of them. Without them, no prisoner will have been released." She continued:

While we were getting released, a captain called "Diab," who is a loser, came to me. I told him today that you imprisoned me for no reason, but we were victorious at the end. He said: "Celebrations for your release are illegal." I told him all Palestinians will celebrate my release. The Palestinian people are amidst a revolution. He told me that he would arrest me again, but no one can break my will.



The younger generation of Palestinian women are learning from their elders, from women who lived through the Nakba as well as through Israel's previous attacks on Gaza. From founding the Palestinian Women's Congress in 1910 to opposing the British Mandate, to storming the prison where Palestinian men were held in 1936, to leading the First Intifada (beginning in 1987) after large numbers of Palestinian men were arrested, killed or deported, and to organizing mass boycotts as well as struggles for the right of return, Palestinian women have been both the backbone and at the forefront of the resistance. Together they have survived expulsion; they have been detained, imprisoned and subject to constant surveillance. They have had their homes demolished, sometimes multiple times over; they have survived the punishing blockade of the Gaza Strip designed by Israel to keep the population at a bare subsistence level. The shrinking spaces where these women and children seek shelter, including the UN centers — which, like all the other civilian spaces are determined to be out of bounds for attacking armies by international law — are being deliberately and systematically destroyed. Gaza is being

turned into “a graveyard for thousands of children” warns the United Nations. Israel continues to drop the bombs. Yet the women of Gaza resist. When Israel burns down the bakeries and the fishing boats, Gaza’s resourceful women make, trade in, and use, traditional clay ovens.

I make these points not because I want to discount or dismiss the violence done to Palestinian men. They too are being killed, injured, maimed, terrorized, and traumatized indiscriminately in this violence. Just recently, dozens of men sheltering in UN schools were rounded up, stripped to their underwear, publicly humiliated, and taken by Israeli soldiers. The point I want to emphasize here is that it is the women who, in the resistance against Israeli attempts to erase Palestinian existence, hold the family and community together, who are the mothers of future generations, and who, as was the case in every other anti-colonial revolution, keep the spirit of resistance alive and pass it on to their children.

Young men and teenage boys in Gaza who join the resistance and become fighters speak of how they are inspired by their mothers and sisters in the struggle. As they emerge from the rubble, they grieve the loss of these mothers and sisters, whom they describe as heroes and martyrs. Women are central to shaping this culture of resistance; they are critically influential in their communities and in their movements. In Frantz Fanon’s *A Dying Colonialism*, he describes how the decision of Algerian women to join the resistance revealed the gendered violence of the French Occupation and transformed the Algerian family by opening up possibilities for the reshaping of gender roles and relations: “The Algerian woman is at the heart of the combat. Arrested, tortured, raped, shut down, she testifies to the violence of the occupier and his inhumanity. As a nurse, a liaison agent, a fighter, she bears witness to the depth and density of the struggle.” The decision of the women to join the resistance became the collective decision of the family as they supported her. This organic transformation of the Algerian family united the population in their common objective, ending the French occupation.

Palestinian women are playing a fundamental role in the resistance of their people. This is abundantly evident in Gaza, and in the mobilizations of the pro-Palestinian people's movements across the Middle East, across the US, Canada and Europe, indeed around the world. Gaza is today the frontline against the US-led imperialist order with its Israeli outpost in the Middle East, and Palestinian women are at the forefront of this resistance.

The stakes are high indeed for Israel and the US. After the defeats of the US-led alliance in Afghanistan and Iraq comes this exposure of the political, intelligence, and military failures of the Israeli state, its ability to keep destabilizing the region and thus advance US foreign policy interests now suddenly in question. The US was already an empire in decline; its foreign policy in the region is now in tatters as the popular support for the Palestinian cause across the Middle East and North Africa has upended the drive for normalization of Israel's relations with the Arab states. Compounding the crisis, the UN has been shown to be utterly incapable of bringing about a ceasefire in Gaza, despite its best efforts and the strong consensus around the world that this carnage must end. Not only was the US empire weakened by the global war on terror, the international institutional arrangements in place since the end of the Second World War have been exposed as utterly powerless to hold to account the US-Israel-European alliance.

In these conditions, it is striking to witness how different has been the Western feminist response to the violence in Gaza — mostly silence — than to the earlier US-led war on terror in Afghanistan. Western feminists have always been more interested in the violence done to colonized women by colonized men, to Palestinian women by Palestinian men, than they have been in the violence done to Palestinian women (and men) by the Israeli state and the settler communities it has emboldened. This is nothing new; colonized and enslaved women everywhere are familiar with these politics of “feminist solidarity” that direct animosity toward the men from these communities.

Racism, underwritten by this politics of feminist recognition, has shaped Western feminist solidarities for decades; this racism has been confronted by Indigenous, Black and other women of colour. But the contours of the racism directed at Palestinian women today is especially revealing when comparing the siege of Gaza to the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan that began in 2001.

During the twenty-year Afghan war, the construction of the Afghan woman as helpless and in need of rescue by Western feminists racialized the Muslim woman as passive object, oppressed by her men, family, religion, and culture. This demonization of the Muslim man and Islam became the basis for the making of the Afghan/Muslim woman into a “worthy” victim. As many of us argued then, Western feminists made common cause with their states by working to “save” Afghan women, gendering Islamophobia to advance the interests of their states. The grounds for such “feminist solidarity” during the war on terror was the feminist demonization of Islam as inherently misogynist and of Muslim men as essentially woman-hating, as well as the exaltation of Western secularism as orientated toward egalitarianism and hence essentially superior. The imposition, or even better, willing embrace, of Western-secular-feminist gender norms and values by the Afghan/Muslim woman thus became the condition of her salvation.

That such collusion with the imperialist state offered Western feminists opportunities for their own advancement was not an insignificant factor during the global war’s two decades, a prominent example of which was the use of what Western feminists called “the plight of the Afghan woman” to develop their own brand of “feminist foreign policy” for this state.

What, then, does that feminist foreign policy offer in this moment of crisis? In the case of Palestinian women, we see a different kind of racism and Islamophobia at work. Anti-Palestinian Israeli propaganda has long been invested in Islamophobic tropes and caricatures of Palestinian/Muslim men as well as women as not even human, hence non-existent in political terms. Moreover, the Islamophobic discourses of the US-led war

on terror that were explicitly institutionalized across Western institutions, particularly the law, the university, and the media, are now being reiterated to attack any opposition to the genocide unfolding in Gaza. The merging of Israeli propaganda with the war on terror's Islamophobia permeates the governing practices, policies, and cultures of these institutions. So thoroughly have Palestinian women been dehumanized in the Israeli-



Women near Ramallah protest the bombing of Gaza. Tal King, 2012.

Western imaginary that their mass killing, even when reported live on a daily basis and directly attested to by their families in the diaspora, has provoked only censorship and retaliation from these institutions. This pattern is paralleled within Western feminist politics, organizations, and movements.

Gaza is a case of settler colonialism, and like every other colonial endeavour, it is a matter of race. Gaza is also an issue of Islamophobia. On

each one of these counts — colonial genocide, racial dehumanization, and Islamophobic demonization — Western feminist movements have turned their back on Palestinian women’s resistance, on their struggle for justice and for an end to the occupation. It is the steadfastness of Palestinian women themselves, whether in Gaza, the rest of Palestine, or in the diaspora, that is energizing the resistance today. And they are a critical force in the collective resistance against not only Israel, but also against the Western institutions that are making common (but ultimately ineffective) cause in their efforts to silence and punish — against their own stated mandates — those opposing the genocide that seeks to erase Palestinian existence.

“Israel has effectively destroyed every single requirement for life in the Gaza Strip while the entire world is watching,” pointed out Riyadh Mansour, the Palestinian Envoy to the UN, in an assembly on the Rome Statute, on which is founded the International Criminal Court. But international law was not developed to protect colonized populations. Today, as the world bears witness to the Euro-American powers thwarting every attempt to stop the Israeli state’s defiance of international law, one sees more clearly than ever the integral linkages between race, gender, colonialism, imperialism, and international law. International law today is what the most powerful, the most militarized states decide that it is.

A new generation of women around the world is learning from and speaking out against this cruel and catastrophic Israeli violence. For these women, the assault on Gaza will be among their formative political experiences, a vital lesson in how racial-gender violence organizes the international order, how it shapes the workings of international politics and law. They are also learning a vital lesson from Palestinian women in the meaning of resistance, from Islamic as well as secular political perspectives. And in response, these young women are standing in solidarity, saying “Ceasefire Now.” They are saying “End the Occupation Now.” They are saying “No Justice, No Peace.” They are redefining the meaning of women’s solidarity from the ground up. And their own



A demonstrator in Toronto. Pooyan Tabatabaci, 2008.

activism is being shaped by centering the struggle of Palestinian/Muslim women.

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WHAT KIND OF HOLOCAUST EDUCATION?

Preventing racism and antisemitism

Larry Haiven

As we mark the nineteenth Annual Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, the call to make Holocaust teaching “obligatory” in Canadian public schools has risen to fever pitch. British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario have responded with firm promises to do so. The Montreal School Board has requested that Quebec copy the idea. And B’nai Brith Canada is demanding that other provinces follow suit.

Why the current panic about Holocaust education?

Echoing other politicians, Premier David Eby said BC’s move was in response to the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent (reported) rise in antisemitism. He also declared, “Combatting this kind of hate begins with learning from the darkest parts of our history, so the same horrors are never repeated,” and promised to consult with Jewish groups like the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre to implement the curriculum changes. (One of Eby’s cabinet ministers, Selina Robinson, was a key protagonist in the BC move and recently resigned for outrageous anti-Palestinian racist remarks.)

Certainly, the Nazi genocide against millions of Jews, Roma, and other ethnic/religious groups as well as LGBTQ, disabled people, socialists, and communists is a world historical phenomenon of immense importance, especially when considered alongside other genocides, particularly those in recent years and those that continue. And there is little debate that we should avoid letting knowledge of the Holocaust fade as the last survivors die off. But several other nagging questions arise: Why the emphasis on compulsion at this very moment? And, more to the

point: How useful is the Holocaust in teaching anti-racism and preventing other genocides?

Report Claims Ignorance of the Holocaust, but Teaching is Widespread

In fact, moves to mandate Holocaust education predate October 7, 2023. They followed a much-publicized 2022 report by the lobby group *Liberation 75*. That report claims that respondents in grades six through twelve in Canadian and US high schools are largely uninformed about the mass murder of Jews by the German Nazi regime. Nearly 33 percent of the students were reported to feel the Holocaust was fabricated or exaggerated. Many respondents said they learned about the Holocaust from social media, movies, TV, comics, and videogames. It's not that Holocaust education is absent in our schools. Rather, warns the report, it's not "compulsory," and, the report insists, it should be.

Actually, the Holocaust has been widely covered in Canadian school curricula for a long time. For example, it has been taught in the Toronto and District School Board for over forty years. Since 1987, Ontario's curriculum has specified "The background and scope of the Holocaust" as part of the senior "Twentieth Century World History" course. In 1992, that expanded to explore the Holocaust more deeply, with topics like "World War II Part I — The Nazi Revolution," "Why Hitler? Why Germany?" "The moral problems of the Nazi regime as embodied in the Holocaust," "An analysis of the rationalization of evil. Is anyone innocent?" and "Demonstrate an understanding of the key factors that have led to conflict and war...and genocides, including the Holocaust."

Vancouver's first high school Holocaust education symposium for students was in 1976, Calgary's in 1984. A McGill Master's thesis reported that by 2016 there were twenty Holocaust education centres involved in helping school boards in Canada.

British Columbia's official Grade 12 Social Studies curriculum has included a unit on "Genocide Studies" which deals with indigenous peoples and cultures: the Armenian genocide; anti-Semitic pogroms; the Holodomor famine in Soviet-era Ukraine; the Japanese occupation of

Korea and China; the Holocaust; the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; Rwanda; Sudan; Guatemala; Yugoslavia. But it is technically true to say that some students could miss this course. Much has been made of the half-truth that a student could get through high school without receiving instruction on the Holocaust.

On November 2, 2023, the CBC quoted a Manitoba government spokesperson saying, “Holocaust education is taught in Manitoba as part of the social studies curriculum in grades six, seven, nine and eleven.”

The CBC goes on, “For example, in grade six, Holocaust education is in the curriculum covering Canadian history from 1867 to the present day. In grade eleven, the history of Canada includes the study of the Second World War and the Holocaust.”

Despite this, Winnipeg’s Belle Jarniewski, executive director of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada and member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, told the CBC she would give her province a “failing grade.” Why a failing grade, despite Holocaust curriculum in four Manitoba elementary and secondary grades?

The reason, responded Jarniewski, is that “right now we are seeing an explosion of antisemitism, as there has been every time that there is a war or a conflict in the Middle East. We feel the pushback here. Jewish parents are worried about the safety of their children. Adults are worried about their own safety, and some are afraid even to self-identify as Jews.”

Does Holocaust Education Teach Anti-Racism?

But is Holocaust education only about the Jews? Proponents insist that anti-racism is a side benefit. Whether Jews themselves are a “race” is a subject better left to a different occasion. Suffice it to say that fighting antisemitism and fighting racism are at least theoretically linked. *Liberation 75* founder Marilyn Sinclair, who also demands “mandatory” education measures, maintains that “the lessons of the Holocaust are not just about what happened to Jews.”

The major Jewish Canadian institutional organizations and several others devoted to this topic alone all offer programs of training and advice on public school curriculum on the Holocaust. All of them assert that, in

addition to countering antisemitism, this training will have the added benefit of reducing other forms of bigotry.

Indeed, Marvin Rotrand, national director of B'nai Brith's League for Human Rights, telling Quebec legislators in September 2023 to follow Ontario's example of mandating Holocaust education, contended that "new research indicates that when Holocaust education is provided, hate crimes and incidents against Jews decrease significantly," and that "making Holocaust education mandatory reduces hate incidents targeting other racial and religious minorities." Rotrand cited preliminary findings of a study by RealityCheck Research. According to Rotrand, that source found US states with mandated Holocaust education had a drop of 55 percent in antisemitic crimes and that anti- Black, LGBTQ2+, Latino, and Muslim crimes also fell.

The legitimacy of RealityCheck is, however, dubious. Its CEO is US lawyer Daniel Pomerantz, who has very close ties to Israel. He launched *Playboy* magazine in Israel, and until recently headed the so-called "HonestReporting" (HR) organization (which has a Canadian subsidiary). HonestReporting was founded in 2006 by Joe Hyams, a registered bureau speaker for the Israeli Embassy in Washington and Simon Plosker, a former spokesperson for the Israeli military and member of several pro-Israel organizations. HR has been called by the American Journalism Review "a pro-Israeli pressure group." HR's purpose is to find, critique, and attempt to contradict media items that cast Israel in an unfavourable light. It pursues that mission with a vengeance. Pomerantz's link with RealityCheck may help explain the current insistence on mandatory Holocaust education.

Two recent articles in *The Maple* ("Meet The Billionaire-Funded Pro-Israel Group Influencing Media" and "Here Are HonestReporting Canada's Billionaire And Millionaire Funders") excoriate HonestReporting Canada and its US parent. They quote HR Canada



director Mike Fegelman claiming HR's aim is "to create a digital army for Israel" and "to act as Israel's sword and shield."

Even if we accept the assertions of the *Liberation 75* study on gaps in student knowledge of the Holocaust, we can see that the Holocaust is already widely taught in Canadian schools. So why do the proponents insist that it be made compulsory? And what does the word "compulsory" mean, anyway, when it is already part of the curriculum? We will return to that presently.

Full disclosure here: I am the Jewish son of a survivor of the Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp and have a very personal interest in the topic. Every day that I lived with my father, I saw the blue tattoo on his arm. I also saw it on the arms of his Holocaust survivor friends and relatives. Their stories became my stories. Their nightmares became my nightmares. They have marked me indelibly as they have many other Jews.

For over a half century, I have wondered what sorts of lessons humanity can learn from these terrible events.

On the other hand, my personal exposure to the Holocaust helped form me as a social justice activist and a contrarian when it comes to all sorts of orthodoxy. A founding member of Independent Jewish Voices Canada, and a consistent critic of Israeli policies and practices, I also co-developed and have been teaching workshops on antisemitism to a multitude of learners for several years. And I am skeptical of the insistence that more knowledge of the Holocaust alone will deliver on the anti-racist promise, not least because some of the actions that Israel takes against the Palestinians cry out for comparison to some of what the Nazis did to the Jews.

Among my more recent reading in Holocaust literature, I read the full *Third Reich Trilogy* by the British historian Richard Evans. At 2,500 pages, this was definitely not a task for the faint-hearted. Other studies focus on single aspects of that regime, like Adolf Hitler, or the genocide of the Jews, or World War II. The recently published *Bystander Society: Conformity and Complicity in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust* by Mary Fulbrook is a significant deep dive into a crucial question.

Only by looking at the entire picture of the Nazi regime can one begin to grasp how it came about and how it proceeded and to what extent it can or cannot teach us to be both non-racist and antiracist. Moreover, we need to examine how the Holocaust ties in with twentieth century imperialism and colonialism.

But knowledge of the full picture of the Holocaust presents several fundamental dilemmas.

Fundamental Dilemmas in Teaching the Holocaust

The Holocaust is so immense a phenomenon, so horrible to contemplate, that it beggars the imagination. Studies of the efficacy of Holocaust pedagogy reveal that evaluation of its success is illusory.

Indeed, the dean of Holocaust scholars, Yehuda Bauer argues, “the Holocaust is too often turned into vague lessons of the danger of hatred

or prejudice at the expense of really trying to understand the reasons and motivations for the genocide.”

A study by several researchers at University College London posits two alternative views of Holocaust education. On the one hand is the argument that general knowledge is more important than detailed understanding.

A cursory overview of the Holocaust is sufficient for students to appreciate that this was a deeply troubling episode in modern history and one which sharply illustrates where prejudice and discrimination might lead if left unchallenged.

On the other hand, the authors suggest an opposite view:

This perspective claims that unless the historical Holocaust is more fully understood, there is a danger that students might acquire simplistic moral and universal lessons which, though well intentioned, typically will be ill-informed and fuel the prevalence of troubling myths and misconceptions.

An upcoming entry on antisemitism education in the *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Social Justice Education* advises the following:

One influential way of thinking about the Holocaust and about Holocaust education is the “particularist” approach whereby the Holocaust is viewed as a unique and unprecedented event which must be studied in its singular historical context and with an emphasis on its devastating consequences for Jews and Jewish life. This approach may fail to derive lessons about universal human rights that can be applied across multiple locations and contexts. The “universalist” view, on the other hand, posits that the lessons of the Holocaust extend far beyond those specifically relevant to antisemitism. While the universalist view of antisemitism and Holocaust education promises to

instill an ethic of tolerance, respect for fundamental human rights and a rejection of racism, prejudice and totalitarianism, there is, remarkably, little empirical evidence that current educational programs actually achieve these ends.

A 2021 Swedish review of the literature on Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust (TLH) reveals several deficiencies, among which are the following: a) A lack of reliable studies that evaluate educational initiatives to prevent antisemitism; b) Few studies that have evaluated TLH for consistency of educational outcomes over time; c) A disconnect between educational research and other research orientations concerned with the Holocaust and antisemitism; and d) A gap between descriptive studies and studies evaluating educational outcomes.

American neoconservative scholar Ruth Wisse herself questioned the efficacy of TLH in a 2020 article that castigates the simplification inherent in it:

...the potential for corruption begins with the impulse to make the Holocaust a universal symbol of evil, Nazism synonymous with “hatred,” and Holocaust education a redemptive American pursuit...

...Holocaust education as currently defined introduces Jews at their lowest point in history — as victims, humiliated, suffering, starved, pursued, despised, and turned to ashes. Nazi energy and ingenuity destroyed a third of the Jewish people, with the cooperation of others, transforming them into the burnt sacrifice of the liberal imagination. Who gave liberals the right to keep using the image of the Jews in this distorted way?

One rationale for teaching about the Holocaust is undoubtedly the “scared straight” or “shock therapy” principle. US anti-crime advocates used to take “juvenile delinquents” to visit jails for a similar reason. In a 1978 American Academy Award-winning documentary film by the same name, murderers and armed robbers in the prison scream at, berate, and

insult the youth. The film insists that the exercise was successful in deterring criminal behaviour. But several subsequent academic studies concluded that such practices actually *increase* the rate of the subjects offending, although the precise reason for that is not known. Polish law-enforcement authorities are known to have used visits to Auschwitz in the hopes of warning persistent criminals of the consequences of their misdeeds, with similar negative results.

Moreover, even if the prospect of prison were a deterrent to juvenile delinquents, how do we know that the fact of the Nazi Holocaust, or the prospect of something similar in the future, would deter, say, a confirmed white supremacist from hating Jews or people of colour? I am unconvinced, as are others, on the efficacy of aversion therapy, as practiced on the anti-hero Alex (including being forced to watch footage of the Holocaust) in the classic film *A Clockwork Orange*. Indeed, the point of Stanley Kubrick's film is that it does not work.

Never Again What?

I have attended lectures by concentration camp survivors to university and high school students. One of those lecturers was Philip Riteman, a resident of my hometown of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Riteman improbably survived Auschwitz by being big for his age and the lie another inmate told guards, that Riteman had a mechanical skill. Riteman died in 2018 at the age of ninety-six. The inevitable lesson Riteman and other raconteurs drew and draw is “Never again.”

But never again what? What is it that humanity must never do again? Never again knowingly commit mass murder of anyone? Never again allow dictators? Never again stand by silently while others are abused and slaughtered? Or does it really mean “Never again for the Jews?”

If the “never again” were any of the above and if a country's level of abhorrence of mass murder were positively correlated to the level of knowledge of the Holocaust, then surely Israel would be one of the countries with the greatest antipathy to these horrors.

A review of Israeli Holocaust education indicates TLH has long been a compulsory part of the curriculum and pervades the education system:

...the Holocaust is the only historical event which is taught throughout the curriculum from kindergarten to high school. In teachers' colleges courses about the Holocaust are obligatory and almost every student — not only history students — studies such a course. In the universities Holocaust courses have become very popular and very crowded, not to mention the many in-service training courses for teachers of all grades organized ... by the Ministry of Education and other institutions.

Not only is the Holocaust taught in classrooms; Israeli high school students are regularly taken on state-sponsored trips to Auschwitz and the sites of other death camps. Such excursions are not without controversy, as rather than encouraging somber reflection on universal values, they frequently turn into binges of Israeli ultra-nationalism. Jackie Feldman's *Above The Death Pits, Beneath The Flag: Youth Voyages To Poland And The*



Holocaust Museum in Washington DC. Karen Ebidia, 2015.

Performance Of Israeli National Identity is an ethnographic study of these trips.

The impact in Israel is reported in *Ha'aretz* in 2016:

Shulamit Aloni, then the education minister, expressed her repugnance for young Israelis who “march with unfurled flags, as if they’ve come to conquer Poland.”

The death-camp pilgrimages, warned the former leader of the Israeli left, were creating a generation of xenophobes obsessed with the notion of Jewish might, but largely blind to the Holocaust’s universal lessons...

Tel Aviv’s Gymnasia Herzliya, the oldest Hebrew high school in the country, became the first large public school to buck the trend, the nation took note. Citing the dangerous rise of nationalism in Israel, principal Zeev Degani announced that as of next year, Gymnasia Herzliya would no longer be sending delegations to Poland.

The junkets to the death camps are particularly well satirized in Israeli author Yishai Sarid’s 2020 novel *The Memory Monster* written from the point of view of a historian from the Israeli Holocaust Museum Yad Vashem, who leads such tours. He channels a conversation by some of his teenage male students fuelled by white supremacy that perversely turns from awe of the Nazis to hatred of Palestinians, left-wing compatriots, and even the millions of Jewish fatalities:

...it’s hard for us to hate people like the Germans.

Look at photos from the war. Let’s call a spade a spade: they [the Nazi soldiers] looked totally cool in those uniforms, on their bikes, at ease, like male models on billboards. We’ll never forgive the Arabs for the way they look, with their stubble and their brown pants that go wide at the bottom, their houses without whitewash and the open sewers on the streets, the kids with pink-eye. But that fair, clean European look makes you want to emulate [the Germans] ...

...On a tour of Auschwitz-Birkenau, this one fat student with mean eyes, cheeks purple with cold, began to scratch the words “Death to left-wingers” onto a wooden wall in the women’s camp. An alert teacher intervened and didn’t let him finish. His friends consoled him, promising to complete the work when they got back to Israel. They were cloaked with the national flag, wearing yarmulkes, walking among the sheds, filled with hatred — not for the murderers, but for the victims.

In late 2023 and early 2024, we see Israel, presumably with soldiers just a little older than those fictional teenagers, conducting one of the most horrific bouts of sustained bloodshed since the Second World War. As of this writing, Israel had dropped 18,000 tons of bombs on Gaza, 1.5 times greater than the Hiroshima bomb. Even conservative estimates put the average number of Gazan civilians killed at 160 per day (while the coalition against the Islamic State in Raqqa killed twenty civilians a day over four-months.) The nine-month battle in Mosul between Iraqi forces and IS killed less than forty civilians a day.

In their defence, Israel and its supporters insist that Israel was provoked by the Hamas 7 October attack where 695 Israeli civilians died, and Israel has the “right to defend itself.” Of course, all perpetrators of extreme violence claim provocation. And even if we accept that Israel has the right to defend itself, when does defence end and genocide begin?

Arguably, a consensus is emerging that the disproportionate killing in Gaza constitutes the crime of genocide, as set out in the 1948 UN convention enacted precisely because of the horrors of World War II. South Africa set out in its eighty-four-page statement to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) a case that includes not only commission, but also intent. This is illustrated by a database of more than five hundred statements from Israeli officials, like an army official at a morale-raising event exhorting, “Be triumphant and finish them off and don’t leave anyone behind. Erase the memory of them,” or Prime Minister Netanyahu

invoking the biblical commandment that the Israelites utterly exterminate the nation of Amalek. Even former Israeli Supreme Court Chief Justice Aharon Barak, an ad hoc member of the panel of judges, joined the others in condemning this incitement.

South Africa's case has been validated by the interim report of the ICJ.

So concerning were these statements of incitement by Israeli leaders that in January 2024 fifty Holocaust researchers at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum demanded that the museum's director condemn such provocation.

We, the undersigned, know from Jewish and human history, especially from studying the Holocaust and its memory, that incitement to extermination and to commission of grave crimes, using language that creates dehumanization and an incrimination of all members of a rival group within a conflict, are in many cases a first step in committing crimes that can reach the stage of genocide.

A trump card wielded by Israel and its supporters is that all comparisons of Israel's wars and occupations to the Holocaust are bogus because they do not match in every detail. Unlike the Nazis, for example, they maintain, Israel is not herding innocent civilians into gas chambers. And this despite the intensity of the Gaza killing, the sheer numbers in killings, starvation, demolition pale in comparison with those of the Holocaust. In fact, argues the counterclaim, the Holocaust is unique in history, indeed outside of history, and all comparisons to it are spurious.

And then, the kicker: the accusation that anyone who would use the Holocaust to make comparisons, especially against Israel, is ipso facto antisemitic.

Can Life Lessons Be Drawn?

But this introduces another dilemma and contradiction. On the one hand, the ostensible reason for insisting that the Holocaust be taught is that students can draw life lessons from it, i.e., that it is a "teachable moment."

A “teachable moment” can be defined as “a specific occurrence, situation, or experience that can be used to teach people about something more general.” Implicit in the notion of “teachable” is that the specific circumstance being used is comparable to the conditions of the students’ lives. Presumably, the more comparable, the more learning can occur.

However, a confounding question arising in such discussions is “how comparable is the Holocaust?” The influential group who advocates that the “Holocaust is outside of history” is caught squarely on the horns of this dilemma.

A particularly revealing example presented itself in June 2019 when a group of US politicians, including Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, denounced cantonments for Southern migrants at the US border as “concentration camps.” Almost immediately, an overwhelming chorus of critics weighed in, insisting the term was inappropriate and insulting to the memory of the Holocaust. No matter that even the Nazis themselves did not invent the term “concentration camp.” (It was rather the Americans in the war against Spain and the British in the Boer War who thus described their mass internment, under horrific conditions, of civilians.)

Soon, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum itself published a statement, announcing that it “unequivocally rejects efforts to create analogies between the Holocaust and other events, whether historical or contemporary,” and that “the Museum further reiterates that a statement ascribed to a Museum staff historian regarding recent attempts to analogize the situation on the United States southern border to concentration camps in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s does not reflect the position of the Museum.”

However, the Museum’s statement was quickly rebuked by a statement signed by 375 top Holocaust and other scholars, including Omer Bartov, Doris Bergen, Andrea Orzoff, Timothy Snyder, and Anika Walke, who argued precisely the opposite, that the museum was
...taking a radical position that is far removed from
mainstream scholarship on the Holocaust and genocide, ...

...and it makes learning from the past almost impossible. [The real value of Holocaust education] is to alert the public to dangerous developments that facilitate human rights violations and pain and suffering, as identifying similar events is a fundamental part of this effort.

Just such a recent controversy has famously embroiled Russian-American writer Masha Gessen. Gessen was awarded the Hannah Arendt Prize by the Heinrich Böll Foundation (allied to the German Green Party) for their iconoclastic journalism (Gessen prefers non-gender-specific pronouns). But the Foundation forswore its support because of a Gessen-penned *New Yorker* article that compared the current destruction of Gaza by Israeli forces to the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto by the Nazis. Critics found the following passage particularly offensive:

...comparing the predicament of besieged Gazans to that of ghettoized Jews... also would have given us the language to describe what is happening in Gaza now. The ghetto is being liquidated.

The irony of the Foundation's baulking on a prize named for so prominent a nonconformist and critic of Israel as Arendt was so thick that Gessen herself cut it with a knife in an interview with Amy Goodman on Democracy Now. Said Gessen:

My argument is that in order to learn from history, we have to compare. Like, that actually has to be a constant exercise. We are not better people or smarter people or more educated people than the people who lived ninety years ago. The only thing that makes us different from those people is that in their imagination the Holocaust didn't yet exist and in ours it does. We know that it's possible. And the way to prevent it is to be vigilant, in the way that Hannah Arendt, in fact, and other Jewish thinkers who survived the Holocaust were vigilant and were — there was an entire conversation, especially in the first two decades after World War II, in which they



really talked about how to recognize the signs of sliding into the darkness [emphasis added].

Indeed, an observer joked in *The Guardian* that “Hannah Arendt would not qualify for the Hannah Arendt prize in Germany today.”

Holocaust Education and Racialized Peoples

It is one thing to ask how effective teaching and learning about the Holocaust is for white students of European background. We still assume that this white demographic is normative. But countries like Canada, the US, and in Europe have had a significant population of non-white, non-Europeans for many years. At least one quarter of Canadians are in this category, with a similar proportion in the US. Accordingly, the question of Holocaust education should take on a very different tone.

Esther Romeyn of the University of Florida explores the impact of Holocaust memorialization using the multi-racial Netherlands as her canvas and sums the dilemma up this way:

Deployed as guarantee of European postwar liberal “tolerance,” European Holocaust memorialization tends to figure the Shoah redemptively, as an object lesson in “intolerance” demanding anti-racist vigilance and the protection of Jews and other minority groups from discrimination. Increasingly, however, I will argue, this conjuring of the ghosts of Jews and the Holocaust serves as a nationalist and racist conceit, designed to drive a wedge between a redeemed, post-racial Europe supposedly pledged to racial, gender, and sexual equality, and Europe’s disenfranchised immigrant, minority and Muslim populations. This instrumentalization of Holocaust memory not only implies what Alvin Rosenfeld has criticized as the transformation of the horrors of the Shoah into a universalist moral “uplift” story of an ongoing fight of the human “spirit” against intolerance.

In other words, the Dutch authorities employ the memory of the Holocaust and antisemitism to help promote good “European” citizenship for its newer Brown and Muslim arrivals. How smug and arrogant to take non-white people, some of them refugees, who may have had descendants and relatives massacred in colonial and neo-colonial wars, and tell them that the worst example of racism and brutality, the one to especially commemorate, is a genocide of Europeans by Europeans, conveniently omitting that the Nazis took their ethnic cleansing lessons from those of other European powers dominating the Third World, and their own colonial history in what is now Namibia.

Romeyn calls this “the reframing of tolerance as a “civilizational discourse” or part of a white European “civilizing mission.” This has recently taken on ominous tones as far-right politician Geert Wilders captured a majority of seats in the Dutch November 2023 legislative election. Wilders is on record as claiming that Palestinians should all move to Jordan. Even as non-white Dutch citizens are cautioned to

commemorate the Holocaust, their government supports Israel's slaughter in Gaza.

One of the criticisms of social studies and literature curricula in North American and European countries is that it is too Eurocentric. As schools attempt to rectify this lapse, proponents of Holocaust education worry that it will receive less emphasis.

This insistence on universal due homage to the Holocaust and antisemitism exacerbates tensions between the Black and Jewish communities, especially given the genocide of the Transatlantic slave trade and three hundred plus years of bondage in the Americas. I have pointed out elsewhere how the “[r]acialized are prime targets of pro-Israel attacks — and it’s deliberate.”

What do Faisal Bhaba, Desmond Cole, Javier Dávila, Nadia Shoufani, Rehab Nazzal, Rana Zaman, Linda Sarsour, Idris Elbakri and Fadi Ennab and countless others have in common?

They are racialized people who have been special targets of pro-Israel lobby organizations in Canada because they spoke out on Palestinian rights. And these examples suggest how the defend-Israel-at-all-costs industry has a racism and Islamophobia problem.

To underscore fraught relations between the Black and Jewish communities, we may cast our minds back to the controversy and international “scandal” that emerged in 1994 when a group of Black and Latino students were ejected from an Oakland, California movie theatre for laughing during a scene in *Schindler’s List*. They had not been given any preparation for the harrowing film. Accusations of Black insensitivity to Jewish suffering were liberally and unfairly disseminated.

Recently, South Asian-origin journalist Shree Paradkar lost part of her position at the *Toronto Star* for her criticism of Israel. Afro-American journalist Marc Lamont Hill lost a job at CNN for a similar offence. More recently, and most spectacularly, Claudine Gay, the first Black president of Harvard University, was forced to resign that position when

what precipitated her fall from grace was her avoidance of an unfairly loaded question from a US congressional committee. Such takedowns will not easily be forgotten by non-white people, and likely, more widely.

Moreover, two movements, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), have both come under fire from Jewish establishment organizations. Both CRT and EDI insist that race is a crucial fault line in white European settler societies, historically, and going forward. The Jewish organizations insist that their community is not only left out of these initiatives, but as summarized by Russel A. Shalev:

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality understand society as comprised of overlapping and interconnected levels of racial oppression. Critical Race Theory simplistically erases the uniqueness of the Jewish experience and identifies Jews as “white,” CRT’s oppressor class.

At best, Jewish pro-Israel groups merely feel aggrieved at their inclusion as white and privileged and at their virtual exclusion from the club of racism’s victims. At worst, they join the radical right’s opponents of CRT and EDI in attempting to discredit these initiatives.

Jews are especially ambivalent toward these latest trends in anti-racism. On the one hand, Jews tend disproportionately to favour civil rights and liberal causes, mainly because of their long history of oppression. On the other hand, Jews have been disproportionately successful in North America, and are wary of any theory that ascribes life chances to skin color and are distrustful of official attempts to redress historic racial imbalance by affirmative action based on historic disadvantage and proportion in the population. As psychologist Pamela Paresky, in an essay that otherwise condemns CRT and EDI initiatives, puts it,

This obviously presents a particular problem for Jews, who represent roughly two percent of the US population. A much higher proportion of Jews than non-Jews attend college. Jews represent an outsize share of winners of major awards, like Nobel prizes. As of

2020, seven of the twenty wealthiest Americans were Jewish. In virtually every major American industry and institution, Jews hold leadership roles disproportionate to their overall demographic numbers.

Many Jews, in short, enjoy no small degree of privilege in North America and Western Europe. They are, understandably, reluctant to surrender that privilege. But they want to be acknowledged as victims as well. The co-existence of privilege and prejudice is quite normal. But it presents a tension that is very disruptive for the Jewish community and poisonous to its relation with the rest of society.

The Weaponization of the Holocaust

For the past half-century, especially since the 1967 Six-Day War, despite the chorus insisting antisemitism is running amok, Jews in North America and Western Europe have experienced the exact opposite: an almost unprecedented degree of acceptance, nay, admiration from their fellow citizens.

Israeli scholar Ran HaCohen went so far as to conclude, in 2003:

It is high time to say it out loud: in the entire course of Jewish history, since the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century B.C., there has never been an era blessed with less antisemitism than ours. There has never been a better time for Jews to live in than our own...

Canada is no exception, and in fact, may be one of the most philo-semitic places in the world. The American Anti-Defamation League's international survey has listed Canada for years as one of the least antisemitic countries in the world.

Bernie Farber, former CEO of the Canadian Jewish Congress and former head of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, suggests (2015):

We have come to a point in the twenty-first century where at least in the halls of government and I think very much in the mainstream of Canadian life, we are viewed as part and parcel of Canadian polity.

York University Jewish Studies scholar David Koffman insists:

Canada may now very well be the safest, most socially welcoming, economically secure, and possibly most religiously tolerant home for the Jews than any other diaspora country, past or present.

Most Canadians are smart enough to know the difference between Jews and Israel, and continue the love affair with Jews even as Israel carries on as a genocidal rogue state. At least for now.

Yes, antisemitism has been on the rise for several years, but it is rising not independently, but commensurate with a rise in North American and global white nationalism that targets many in addition to Jews. And Israel's Gaza war has sparked antagonisms which too many Jews want to interpret as antisemitism.

In fact, so popular have Jews been in Canada in the past fifty years that I would put forward a very different interpretation of recent events. Most Canadian Jews have become used to basking in the consistent veneration and respect they have received as Jews. But for many Canadian Jews, blinkered by their allegiance to Israel, rising criticism of that



Orthodox Jews at a rally in London. Alisdare Hickson, 2022.

country's behaviour is seen as a slap in the face to themselves, as Jews. And those Jews and their collective institutions express their sense of betrayal by lashing out with accusations of...antisemitism.

One suspects that the current insistence that Holocaust education be compulsory is part of a phenomenon whereby accusations of antisemitism are weaponized to silence points of view disliked by the institutional Jewish organizations.

Why accusations of antisemitism are especially powerful is well described by Stephen Beller:

[Accusations of antisemitism are] rhetorically very powerful because as soon as you label someone antisemitic you can dismiss them and their arguments as irrational, as insane, and hence they do not have to be taken seriously, or alternatively have to be taken extremely seriously as a threat not only to Jews but to the whole of society and humanity. It can serve as a political "magic wand," like calling someone a "racist," "sexist," "fascist," etc., or a "socialist" in other quarters. Yet, antisemitism is more powerful than almost any of these because of its association with the Holocaust. ... If you call someone an antisemite you are in effect associating them with the Holocaust — *that is the nuclear option of political rhetoric* [emphasis added].

But the use of the accusation of antisemitism in debate is one thing. How much more powerful if its use can be built into a formal definition of antisemitism, a definition that is widely accepted and included in the standards of ethical behaviour of legislatures, municipal councils, school and university boards, and police forces, a trap that automatically snaps shut on critics of Israel without debate!

The weaponization of accusations of antisemitism is epitomized by the so-called International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance — Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA-WDA). As is now well known, while its preamble is vague and anodyne, the devil lies in the details, i.e., a list of

eleven examples, seven of which refer to criticism of the State of Israel. Jewish institutional organizations like CIJA, B'nai Brith Canada, and Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre are touting the IHRA-WDA as the gold standard definition.

There are several alternative definitions, like the 2021 Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, convened by the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and endorsed by around three hundred scholars in antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Jewish Studies around the world. But the IHRA-WDA has had a head start of almost twenty years. A petition of over six hundred Canadian and over two hundred Jewish-Canadian scholars, motions by over forty academic unions, and a unanimous resolution by the Canadian Association of University teachers have called the IHRA-WDA a violation of academic freedom. Nonetheless, the IHRA-WDA has proven popular, not so much due to its acuity or accuracy but rather as it offers a kind of moral prophylactic for governments and organizations to prove they are not antisemitic.

Proponents of the IHRA-WDA insist that it is non-legal and non-punitive, but in fact, aspirational: meant simply to educate. But its use in practice shows that it is anything but benign. The use of the definition to punish ostensible offenders around the world has been well documented. This author has written about a 2018 public meeting at the University of Winnipeg marking the Trump administration's move of the US Embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem. Nothing about the meeting was antisemitic and even the criticism of Israel there was mild. Yet, after a complaint by B'nai Brith Canada, the university, employing the IHRA-WDA, deemed the meeting antisemitic. The organizers were punished by refusal of future venues at the university.

Due to its overuse, and Israel's recent horrors in Gaza, the accusation of antisemitism may be wearing thinner. But it still packs a punch, boosted by the IHRA-WDA.

What “Compulsory” Really Means

And that leads us back to the question of why the recent emphasis on the word “compulsory” regarding Holocaust education.

Let us be clear. If a subject is on the educational curriculum, and the content is specified, it is compulsory. It means that teachers must teach the material and cannot choose to ignore or skip it.

For example, as mentioned above, in Ontario, when the grade eleven and twelve curriculum prescribes the topics “The Nazi Revolution,” “Why Hitler? Why Germany?” “The moral problems of the Nazi regime as embodied in the Holocaust,” “An analysis of the rationalization of evil. Is anyone innocent?” and “Demonstrate an understanding of the key factors that have led to conflict and war...and genocides, including the Holocaust,” it means that teachers must cover these topics.

Or, as mentioned above, in British Columbia, the grade twelve social studies curriculum explicitly includes the Holocaust and anti-Jewish pogroms. But not every single student in BC will take that course. The newly-initiated curriculum will include the Holocaust and other genocides in Social Studies 10.

If teachers are required to teach the Holocaust, then why the demand for it to be “mandatory”?

There are two possible reasons for this new demand. The first would be that teachers are refusing to teach the prescribed Holocaust curriculum, which is unlikely. The second would be that despite the curriculum, messages and lessons from the Holocaust aren’t getting through to students.

As for the first reason, there is no evidence of a mass rebellion by teachers against the Holocaust curriculum. Indeed, it is hard to believe that social studies and history teachers are anything less than enthusiastic about teaching the Holocaust. It is also hard to believe that students don’t find it interesting.

As for reason number two, we know from the above-mentioned studies that accurately measuring the impact of Holocaust education is difficult. We also know that there is a problem agreeing what precise outcomes Holocaust education is meant to produce, much less measure those outcomes.

Even if we believe the statistics cited in the *Liberation 75* report about poor high school student knowledge of the Holocaust, there are several possible causes for that *other than* the quality of Holocaust education in our schools.

For example, as we move away in time from the Holocaust, it is natural that its presence in the mind of young students is waning. Also, fewer survivors and others with a living memory of those events are alive. There are still plenty of popular references to the Nazi regime and to Hitler in popular culture, movies, and television series. But it is hard for anyone, much less young people, to believe that modern so-called “bad guys” like Vladimir Putin, or Bashar al-Assad, or Mouammar Khaddafi, or even Hamas (whose one-day rampage killed 766 civilians, both Israeli and foreign) are comparable to what they are taught in school, watch in movies, TV and web, and read about the Hitler regime.

There is, however, one possible lesson from the Holocaust that some Jewish institutional organizations feel is not being learned well enough, and which helps explain the current panic about Holocaust education. The lesson is especially relevant as Israel slowly over several decades, and then recently very quickly, has taken on the status of an apartheid and then a pariah state, and it now stands accused of the crime of genocide before an international tribunal.

The lesson that Jewish institutional organizations want learned, expressed in clear and brutal language, can be summarized thus: “A third of the Jewish people alive in the world at the time were slaughtered in the Holocaust, an atrocity worse than any other committed against a people in the history of the world. Israel is now the state of the Jewish people, a state whose very existence came about because of, and is supposed to be an antidote to, that slaughter. In light of the Holocaust, whatever Israel does to defend itself, especially against the resistance of the Palestinians, is permissible, even if it appears to violate or actually violates norms proscribed by international law after World War II, and even if it violates accepted standards of human rights. Those who oppose Israel’s right to violate these norms or refuse to cut Israel some slack are antisemites.”

This message does not have to be explicitly stated in order to be understood. Indeed, the idea of giving Israel a free pass does not need to be said out loud. The immensity of the horror of the Holocaust almost automatically makes most caring human beings wish to help prevent anything like it recurring. This naturally contributes to upping our tolerance to arguments outside of our Holocaust training that Israel is merely defending itself or to have doubts that Israel could really be committing anything close to a genocide. This is especially useful as the death toll in Gaza mounts daily.

Moreover, if the accusation of antisemitism is not enough to deter critics of Israel, or supporters of Palestinian emancipation, or even petition-signers, then the fallback strategy is a campaign of calling out, cancelling, shutting down, firing, suspending, doxing, in short a campaign of civil terror. To name only a few examples among many in Canada since October 7:

- Based on a complaint by a colleague who disagreed with him, University of Ottawa suspended a fourth-year medical resident after the latter posted pro-Palestinian comments on his personal social media.
- CTV fired a Palestinian employee in Halifax who had organized rallies critical of the bombing of Gaza in her non-work time.
- Global TV in Toronto fired a Palestinian journalist for posts she made in her private social media.
- George Brown College in Toronto suspended a culinary instructor, for posting “Palestine Will Be Free” on a private social media account.
- On a closed Facebook group called Canadian Jewish Physicians, several posts suggested reporting healthcare colleagues who had signed a petition about health care in Gaza in the wake of the Israeli incursion to their superiors.
- A Toronto franchise of the restaurant chain Moxies, responding to public complaints, fired several employees for applauding as a march in support of Gaza passed by.

It’s not really about antisemitism at all; it’s about Israel. That is the lesson that Jewish institutional organizations fear might not be getting through.

So when we hear that Holocaust education must be “compulsory” we can be assured that proponents know that is already generally compulsory. What they find wanting is the teaching. What they mean by “compulsory” is not that it be taught in schools. It already is taught in Canadian schools. The problem is that teachers have too much leeway in how they teach the Holocaust. The problem is that the Holocaust education often comes bundled with other genocides which, in the eyes of the institutional Jewish organizations, diminishes the Holocaust.

By “compulsory” the Jewish institutional organizations mean that they want to have greater control over how it is taught. And this control can be achieved in two ways: either specifying precisely, or as closely as possible, the content that teachers must follow. Or, better yet, teaching it themselves.

We know that Jewish institutional organizations, especially the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center (FSWC), already do both. They prescribe content of curriculum and, in some cases, they go into schools and teach about the Holocaust and antisemitism. In its January 26, 2024, newsletter, FSWC claimed to have “taught more than 153 student workshops in 22 school boards to nearly 5,000 students in November, 2023 alone.”

How do we know that what is outlined above is what they really want learned in schools?

We can point out what can happen when they do directly teach the Holocaust. In late December 2023, the CBC reported thus:

Two employees at the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center (FSWC) for Holocaust Studies — a Toronto-based non-profit human rights organization dedicated to Holocaust and antisemitism education — told CBC News that the centre’s educators who teach workshops and courses in schools have been instructed to report students who make comments critical of Israel to the organization.

CBC has agreed to keep the employees' names confidential because of a potential risk to their employment. Comments or questions referencing genocide or occupation of Palestinian people and "anything seen as critical of Israel at all" are to be reported to the organization, said one of the employees.

"The idea is to contact the school, inform the school they have an antisemitism problem and pressure the school to shut down the Palestinian support [by] accusing them of antisemitism, encouraging more pro-Zionist workshops or lessons," they said.

Both employees said these directives were communicated by centre leadership verbally during meetings with the organization's director of education and sometimes the CEO but were not written down.

"They push for us to understand the stance of the organization, which is being pro-Israel," said the second employee. "If you're not pro-Israel, then you're antisemitic".

In other words, according to the whistleblower, when FSWC is given access to high school students, one of its tasks, beyond mere teaching of the Holocaust, is surveilling and fingering students who dare to criticize Israel, even as the death toll in Gaza rises.

A group of over twenty organizations, including Independent Jewish Voices, the Palestinian Canadian Congress, the United Jewish People's Order, Showing Up for Racial Justice, and Toronto Jewish Parents, have written to school boards and relevant ministers across Ontario informing them of these incidents and demanding a formal investigation into not only this particular instance of vigilantism but also the whole question of FSWC's access to students. The letter asks the recipients:

There can be no doubt that the targeting of students for their political views is a violation of their civil rights and must not be tolerated. Indeed, the Toronto District School Board stipulates in Freedom of Information and

Protection of Privacy Policy PO94 that it is forbidden to disclose personal information about a student including “the personal opinions or views of the individual except if they relate to another individual.” The policy goes on to state that “You must have the authority to collect the information, usually from a statute such as the Education Act, Section 265, which provides the authority for the collection of information for the pupil record or OSR.”

In summary, then, the goal of the demand for “compulsory” Holocaust education has little or nothing to do with promoting anti-racism or even combatting antisemitism. It is about defending Israel, proscribing critics, curtailing freedom of expression and convincing schools that they need to hand over even more of their curriculum to pro-Israel organizations.

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THE CANADIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT RESPONDING TO ISRAEL'S ATTACKS ON GAZA

Herman Rosenfeld



Protestors in Toronto. Sikander Iqbal, 2023.

Since Israel began its brutal siege of the Gaza Strip on October 7, Canada's labour unions have largely come out in vocal support of the Palestinians. Ranging from calls for an immediate ceasefire, to opposition

to Canadian arms sales to Israel, and statements opposing violence “on both sides,” unions have increasingly lined up to call out Israel’s genocidal attacks on Gaza and the West Bank.

Even more, there are inspiring examples of activism among union staff as well as sympathetic rank-and-file members organizing and educating co-workers and colleagues. They are working to transform union cultures to engage in forms of international working class solidarity and anti-imperialist politics. There has also been an ongoing, if uneven, movement of activists working across unions to challenge the Israeli occupation while also supporting trade unionists and other civil society organizations within Palestine, for the past decade. The current response is partly built on this foundation.

Labour’s response is unfolding in the face of numerous contradictions and challenges: the political inertia that keeps unions from taking an independent working class position on international issues in ways that challenge the perspective of the ruling classes, the mainstream political parties, and the media; dependence on the NDP, Liberals, and the state and an inability or unwillingness to challenge or break with their corporatist or pro-capital stances; and the absence of an anti-imperialist or socialist political party.

Unions and international solidarity

Support for the Palestinian struggle is based on several principles: first, the common class interest in supporting workers fighting imperialism, colonialism, and oppression; second, recognition of Canada’s origins as a settler colonial state and the similarity with modern Israel; third, support for working people seeking to live their lives free from oppression, exploitation, and foreign domination; and fourth, the need to challenge employers, the ruling class and states that are engaged in domination around the world.

Underlying these principles is the adage, “an injury to one is an injury to all.” This compels unions to act in solidarity with other working class people and institutions in their fight against varying manifestations of the same enemy. Of course, this is sometimes easier said than done.

What is required, concretely, is:

- Opposing the genocidal attacks on Gaza, and unambiguously calling for an immediate Israeli ceasefire.
- Opposing Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territories and recognizing the reality of apartheid as the underlying injustice that drives the ongoing violence.
- Opposing the Canadian government's delivery of military aid to Israel (which totalled over \$26 million in 2022) and its tacit support for Israel's current attacks on both Gaza and the West Bank.
- Developing educational programs in the unions to build support and understanding of this critical moment as well as awareness of the indispensable role of unions in international struggles.
- Boycotting Canadian companies involved in materially supporting Israel's brutal and illegal siege, especially if they have contracts with unions.

Some unions playing a leading role

A number of unions and organizations led by trade union activists have made important steps in this direction.

At its national convention last month, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) passed an emergency resolution, which was endorsed by seven local unions, that called on Ottawa to demand an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, ban arms sales to Israel, and work to end Israel's virtual "diplomatic immunity" at fora like the United Nations. It also called for an end to Israel's blockade of Gaza and the restoration of aid and the basic necessities of life.

The resolution was passed by over two-thirds of the delegates and can be paired with a resolution from the CUPE staff union which also called for the investigation of investments by Canadian pension funds in Israeli companies. CUPE also retains an earlier resolution supporting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

Elsewhere, the National Capital Region branch of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) have organized webinars with Labour for Palestine and Independent Jewish Voices. One invitation notes, "Global events have made it clear that it is more important now than ever for an international workers movement to support the ongoing struggle for the

liberation of people in Palestine and for an equal society for all people in Israel and Palestine.”

According to PSAC’s October 14 statement:

The Canadian government must call for an immediate ceasefire to prevent any further loss of life. It must also oppose Israel’s illegal restriction of water, electricity, food and medicine to the more than two million people of Gaza and demand a humanitarian corridor be established immediately... Canada must lend its support in finding a peaceful resolution to the decades-long conflict, which includes calling for the end of the occupation of Palestinian territories.

The Hamilton and District Labour Council (HDLC) endorsed one of the strongest resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire and an end to the occupation:

The HDLC calls for an immediate ceasefire in the Middle East and we re-affirm our position for an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories.

Further, we call on the Canadian government to stop arming the Israeli government and instead supply humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people to help offset the crisis that continues in Gaza.

We condemn federal, provincial and municipal politicians who are using the crisis in the Middle East to smear and slander those who speak out in defense of Palestinian human rights as being “pro-terrorist” in a way that undermines freedom of expression and democratic rights.

We stand in solidarity with those union leaders, labour bodies, and union activists, who take a public position in defense of Palestinian human rights (in particular, Comrade Fred Hahn and the Executive of CUPE 3906) and denounce the attacks they are facing.

We encourage other labour councils, unions, and labour bodies (both provincially and nationally) to adopt similar positions.

Canada's largest private sector union, Unifor, also released a statement on October 17 that calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and an end to the occupation over the longer-term. Unifor has gone to great lengths to develop informational materials on the Israel-Palestine issue, and efforts have been made to strengthen the union's educational infrastructure on this topic generally. Unifor also has a BDS resolution on its books from 2017.

Much of the strongest union work on the issue comes from networks of members and activists (and union staffers) who have been involved in challenging the dominant pro-Israel narratives about the conflict and have worked to do education about Palestine. In British Columbia, a group of teacher activists calling themselves "Teachers for Palestine" issued an organizing statement to build their network around not just educating coworkers, but bringing the issue into the classroom curriculum.

Their statement begins with the following:

Teachers for Palestine is a grassroots group of teachers, retired teachers and advocates for education across Canada. We come together with a common purpose of bringing Palestine into our curricular practice. As a settler-colonial nation it is important that we understand and teach the impact of such a difficult history on those colonized. The situation in Palestine today is a direct result of the settler-colonial practices of Israel and its allies — Canada being one of them. If we are to live into real reconciliation it is imperative that educators grapple with this truth. It is our hope that our colleagues will join us in this call for justice at this particular moment.

In other unions that have issued weaker statements, similar networks are emerging. In Ontario, pro-Palestinian activists who are members of

the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) and the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) have been working to engage other educators to start conversations to respectfully build support for the Palestinian cause.

Cross-union activists have also challenged Israeli apartheid and the occupation and are building support among unionists to transform the wider position of the labour movement during this crisis. Labour 4 Palestine has a long history of doing this work, and its presence has ebbed and flowed over the years as generations of activists come and go. A new cadre of union activists are breathing fresh life into that organization, and it has already begun to root itself in unions and build public education and action. One of its recent activities in Ottawa involved sit-ins at the offices of seventeen MPs, some of whom are NDP representatives. One of the activists told me, “the NDP were ‘appalled’ that we would challenge them.” It shows how disconnected that party is from the movement on the ground.

Another organization, Labour Against the Arms Trade (LAAT), which has a long history of opposing arms sales by Canada to Saudi Arabia, is now turning its sights on Israel. In the first week of November, the group organized an occupation and rally at INKAS, an Israeli-owned armoured vehicle manufacturing plant in Toronto. LAAT, too, is planning other actions on top of organizing and educational work.

Problems and limitations

I have highlighted some of most inspiring union positions and activities. There are more and they are thankfully growing. Yet, overall, Canadian labour has played a limited role in the movement to stop Israeli aggression and the occupation. The top level union institutions, such as the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and others have been reticent to take a strong stand. This reflects the reticence of Canadian unions to get involved in international issues in recent years.

Like many union movements around the world, Canadian unions are structured in ways that tie them to individual employers or sectors and create a dependence on the latter for jobs. It tends to direct the perspective



Protestors in Toronto. Sikander Iqbal, 2023.

of unions and members towards those of employers, especially when there are no political movements or parties embedded in unions to challenge this dependence.

As well, the union movement and the working class has suffered major defeats in the neoliberal era. Employers and the state have successfully demobilized what was once a more activist and militant union movement, in the waning days of the Keynesian post-war era. This is changing, as unions are at least mobilizing to make up for concessions and defeats. But this doesn't address the political defeat of unions and the broader working class. As militant as some unions have been, and seem to be becoming today, they remain tied the competitiveness of their employers (materially and ideologically) and to a vision of a better, fairer capitalism, rather than socialism. What's more, they support political

parties that reflect that perspective, namely the NDP and in some cases, the Liberals.

A key component of the historic defeat of the labour movement has been the elimination of socialist parties and movements, which in earlier times had some resonance inside and around the union and working class milieu. But that has virtually disappeared today.

Looking at the role of unions on international issues, this has had a lasting and problematic effect. The CLC historically was a protagonist in the Cold War persecutions of socialists and communists and tied its international work to the interests of Ottawa and Washington. That has changed, but there remains a certain reticence by a number of affiliate unions and key leaders to challenge the foreign policy of the Canadian state, and certainly allyship with NATO, much of it based on the economic integration that came with the neoliberal globalization project.

After what had been a high point of union education and mobilization against globalization (when unions sent buses of members to the massive anti-globalization demonstrations in Québec City in 1999), unions have tended to ignore the need to do education on international issues, much less become leaders in challenging the Canadian state and the capitalist class (including the US empire in which it is enmeshed).

More recently, this has become all the more apparent with the growing “new Cold War” sentiment towards China and Russia and the silence of the union movement. The response of trade unions to the Ukraine-Russia war further reflected this. There were no movements within the unions that directly challenged support for NATO, only uncritical support for arming Kyiv and non-stop demonization of Russia. Although this was and remains a complicated issue and the left itself is divided on it, there was no controversy within the labour movement. That only served to reinforce the tendency to echo the ruling class and also to cede the foreign policy terrain to the state.

Another factor holding the union movement back has been its ties to and political dependence on the NDP. After all, the NDP has long been an electoralist party championing moderate reforms. It has eschewed

working class identification on the domestic front (rather than celebrating labour as an instrument of major social change) and given up its earlier commitments to challenging free trade, capital mobility and Canada's growing militarism on the global stage.

In short, the NDP is not concerned with transforming society, or building towards such transformation. Although it now supports a ceasefire in Gaza, the party has waffled on the underlying issues of the present conflict and has placed potential electoral outcomes above principles. The disciplining of Ontario NDP MPP Sarah Jama and the cozying up of federal leader Jagmeet Singh to the Liberals and domestic pro-Israel lobby groups reflects this.

Of course, the near-constant refrains from the mainstream media, the political establishment, and the pro-Israel organizations that erroneously identify criticisms of Zionism with antisemitism also help to reinforce the reluctance of some unions, and even honest rank-and-file members, to identify and challenge Israel's flagrant crimes against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

There has been a growing opposition to Israeli aggression in Gaza and the occupation as a whole, driven by the mass destruction and death being inflicted by the Israeli state. More and more unions have engaged in challenging it. Yet there are roadblocks to having unions play a leading role in educating, mobilizing, and organizing their membership to take to the streets in large numbers and join the growing movement of people on the ground.

We look forward to the buses of young union members, bolstering the numbers of protesters to take their place in the movement, matching the numbers at the anti-globalization rallies, or even better, the 100,000 union and community protesters and strikers at the height of the Days of Action in 1995.

The roadblocks are rooted in many different factors, and require a growing movement of activists — and particularly socialists — to work in their unions, communities, and workplaces.



Posters in Washington DC. Ted Eytan, 2023.

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INSIDE THE “SHOCKING” POLICE OPERATION TARGETING PRO- PALESTINE ACTIVISTS IN TORONTO

A heavily-resourced Hate Crimes Unit has engaged in surveillance, night raids, and “trumped up charges” against the Palestinian solidarity movement

Martin Lukacs

The banging at the front door started at 5:30 a.m. It was so heavy that, on the second floor of the Mississauga, Ont. home of the Islaih family, a bed began to shake. The Palestinian-Canadian family of five opened the door in late January to find several Toronto police officers with a warrant to arrest their eldest son.

“We were in shock,” Suha Islaih told *The Breach* in an interview. “Did my son hurt someone? Did he kill someone? Those were thoughts that crossed my mind.”

Ahmad Islaih, a 26 year old elementary school teacher, was accused of participating in a demonstration that briefly halted traffic on Toronto’s Gardiner Expressway in November. The protest against Israel’s assault on Gaza had lasted for only five minutes.

After waking up Ahmed, handcuffing him and charging him with “mischief,” eight police officers sat the family, still in their pajamas, at their dining room table. While they searched their home, the front door stayed open, despite freezing winter weather and the family’s pleas to police to close it.

According to the warrant — marked “AUTHORIZED TO BE EXECUTED AT NIGHT” — the items police were looking for included black pants, white Nike running shoes, and a keffiyeh.

“Our house is full of keffiyehs, we’re Palestinian,” Suha recalled telling the police. The family, who immigrated to Canada in 2005 from Ramallah, maintains strong connections to their homeland. “I have a poster of a Palestine map. I asked them if they wanted that too?”

After the police left with Ahmad’s computers, electronics, and clothes, the family discovered his room “turned upside down.” Drawers had been emptied on the floor, his mattress was thrown off the bed, a vase was broken, and several boxes had been rifled through.

“It took us back to our life in the West Bank,” Suha said, “when Israeli soldiers raided our home.”

Their family is not alone. Since October 7, both Palestinians and non-Palestinians involved in common, non-violent protest have been targeted in a sweeping, heavily-resourced police operation that experts say has engaged in extreme overreach.

Led by an expanded Hate Crimes Unit and operating under the name “Project Resolute,” the police’s tactics have included pre-dawn raids, snatching people on the street, trying to turn arrested individuals into informants, showing up unannounced at university lectures, and capitalizing on years of surveilling activist movements.

Policing scholars and lawyers say the Toronto police have undermined Charter-protected rights of protest and expression by misapplying “hate crime” charges, with some saying the aim is “strategic incapacitation” of a growing Palestinian solidarity movement.

Yet in several instances, months after the arrests and showy police press conferences, the cases are falling apart and charges are being withdrawn.

But in the time it has taken for the Crown to acknowledge that charges lacked a prospect of conviction, media headlines have caused significant damage to the livelihoods and reputations of those targeted.

Kevin Walby, an associate professor of criminal justice at the University of Winnipeg and an expert on police tactics, called it the “height of political policing.”



The People's Circle for Palestine at U of T. Can Pac Swire, 2024.

Swire Chris 2024

“The police aren’t acting to target everyone consistently,” Walby said. “It’s driven by pervasive anti-Palestinian sentiment among government officials. And it undermines the very idea of hate speech law when police apply the charges so selectively to serve political interests.”

Shane Martínez, a Toronto defense lawyer representing multiple people charged in the protests, said the operation “raises questions about the anti-Palestinian bias” of the Toronto Police Service.

“The public should be outraged that millions of taxpayer dollars are being used not to combat hate crimes, but to surveil and repress one of the largest mass organizing movements seen in decades,” Martínez said.

Hate Crimes Unit zones in on Palestine protests

On October 7, not long after news broke of Hamas’s cross-border attacks on Israeli civilians and military bases, Toronto’s Chief of Police Myron Demkiw posted a message on X: “I am closely monitoring the events in Israel with deep concern. The @torontopolice is not aware of any threats to Jewish communities in Toronto; however, we have increased our

presence and visibility to ensure the safety of our Jewish communities and all residents.”

No such message of concern would ever be forthcoming for Toronto’s Palestinian community, even as Israel launched its bombardment and invasion of Gaza, which to date has killed more than 37,000 Palestinians.

It was an early sign of a one-sided policing approach.

Several days later, Mayor Olivia Chow put forward a motion that would give police a central role in “Keeping Toronto Safe from Hate.”

A small meeting followed between the Toronto Police’s Hate Crimes Unit — part of its Intelligence Services — and Chow’s top staff and the deputy mayor. Also in attendance was councillor James Pasternak, an aggressive defender of Israel who had previously tried to ban the group *Queers Against Israeli Apartheid* from the city’s Pride Parade.

A week later, Chief Demkiw and the unit’s senior officials participated in a major town hall organized by the United Jewish Appeal. Police promised a similar event with the Muslim community, but did not respond to *The Breach*’s questions about whether it ever happened.

Meanwhile, several other pieces fell into place that would reinforce one-sided policing.

The Toronto Police made a decision to empower the Hate Crimes Unit, giving it leadership of Project Resolute.

The unit grew from six officers to thirty-two, according to a verbal report Chief Demkiw gave the Police Services Board in November. Officers from other specialized units were drawn into the operation.

In late October 2023, the mandate of the unit was also quietly expanded to include the “investigation of any occurrence generated as a result of protests and/or demonstrations related to the Middle East conflict.”

This stood out as a red flag to defense lawyer Martínez.

“The fact that the police expanded its mandate to investigate ‘Middle East’ protest activity that is not considered hateful or even criminal makes it evident that this movement was targeted because it is connected to

Palestine,” he said. “They likely saw this as a major surveillance opportunity.”

The Toronto Police refused several requests for an interview and did not respond to questions from *The Breach*.

But one officer who *The Breach* is not naming because they were not authorized to speak to the media said police had set up a “fully-integrated intelligence sharing model,” getting fed information by RCMP’s Integrated National Security Enforcement Team and CSIS, Canada’s spy agency.

Dozens of other officers were soon deployed to fulfill the city motion’s request to create “community safety zones,” monitoring and protecting Jewish and Muslim places of worship.

“Will not allow the people of our city to be intimidated,” Demkiw pledged in front of city councillors at a Police Services Board meeting in November, while explaining the meaning of “Project Resolute.”

“Lest anyone try to misconstrue the meaning of the term, let me be clear: we are resolute in our mission to ensure public safety and security, while also ensuring that the constitutionally-protected right to free speech and assembly is maintained.”

But in the months to come, those rights would come under the crosshairs of the Hate Crimes Unit.

“Strategic incapacitation” of a growing movement

A socialist flag, a university lecture, a peaceful protest on a highway overpass, a non-violent office sit-in, and posters and washable paint splashed on a bookstore — all have drawn Project Resolute’s attention and resources. In many cases, this attention has led to charges of “hate-motivated” crime or severe restrictions on subsequent protest.

In mid-April, Samantha was walking along College Street after attending a protest at Union Station, when a stranger suddenly grabbed her wrist. She shook him off and kept walking, taking her phone out of her pocket.

He followed behind and grabbed her once again, slapping the phone out of her hand.



Protestors on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Tony Webster, 2014.

“You can’t do that, that’s assault,” Samantha shouted, recalling the encounter in an interview with *The Breach*.

That’s when the stranger and several others surrounded her, announced themselves to be plainclothes police officers, and declared that she was under arrest.

The arrest, she was informed, was for a peaceful sit-in she had attended at the Toronto office of Awz Ventures three months earlier, in January.

Samantha is not the protester’s real name, and *The Breach* has agreed to keep her anonymous for fear of professional retribution.

Awz, an investment fund led by former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, is behind a facial recognition tech being used by the Israeli military to conduct mass surveillance of Palestinians in Gaza.

High profile activists Desmond Cole and Anna Lippman were also arrested for participating in the same sit-in, and released on conditions

that prevent them from using devices to amplify their voice when attending demonstrations.

To professor Walby, picking off lead organizers is a classic tactic in the playbook police use against social movements.

“It’s what we call ‘strategic incapacitation’ of groups that threaten the political order,” Walby said. “The tactics also include bogus or trumped up charges, early morning raids, and surveillance and strategic intelligence to know as much as possible about activist communications.

“I think we are seeing all these techniques, amplified by anti-Palestinian racism, brought to bear on this transformative movement.”

Earlier in January, Toronto Police took the extraordinary step of banning protests on the Avenue Road bridge over Highway 401.

Some Jewish organizations claimed the location had been chosen because of the large Jewish population in the area, but for the protesters, it was a convenient and highly visible spot.

Hesham Aly, a 36 year old operations manager who lives a five minute drive from the overpass, was roughly arrested by police and charged with “obstruction.”



Protestors in Melbourne. Matt Hrkac, 2021.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association blasted the police ban as setting a “dangerous precedent.”

In February, Project Resolute even made itself felt in a university lecture hall.

Palestinian scholar Muhannad Ayyash was preparing to deliver a presentation at York University when two uniformed police officers entered the room. When challenged, officers said that they had been called by the university to address a “possible protest.”

But according to *The Breach's* investigation, this wasn't true. In fact, York administrators revealed to a select group of professors that the police were acting on an alert from a “special intelligence unit.”

The crown jewel of Project Resolute's operations, however, was its sustained focus on a protest against Indigo CEO Heather Reisman.

In early November, Indigo's flagship Bloor store in Toronto was plastered with posters and red paint to protest Reisman's involvement in a foundation that provides millions of dollars every year to people who volunteered to join the Israeli military.

For two weeks, nearly ten officers from the Hate Crimes Unit worked full time on the case, scouring social media and canvassing neighbourhoods where the protesters lived, for camera footage.

Night raids followed, involving more than fifty officers and a canine unit. They used tactics usually reserved for violent criminal offenses: arresting people in bed, handcuffing family members of those accused, and leaving doors knocked off their hinges.

Toronto police announced that the postering was being treated as a “hate-motivated offence,” and said it was carried out because Reisman is Jewish — even though one of the accused, a professor at York university, is Jewish herself. When protests first started against Reisman's funding of Israeli military volunteers in 2006, the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation were centrally involved.

At least four of the people who used paint and posters to protest Reisman last year were suspended from their jobs, others lost contracts, and others still were subjected to harassment on social media.

As of early April, the costs of Project Resolute reached \$12 million — though additional legal costs associated with the operations would likely increase that tally by millions more.

Indigo CEO’s “instant access” to Police Chief

Claims of political pressure have swirled around the Toronto police’s operations, with experts stressing that police are not the only ones driving its politicized nature.

“The police are leveraging significant public resources and personnel,” said Walby. “That’s only possible because everyone from Olivia Chow, to Doug Ford, and Justin Trudeau have been pretty supportive. There is a broader formation of elites whose views are animating what police are doing.”

In January, the day before Toronto’s Police Chief declared a ban on the Avenue Road protests, he met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

When Trudeau was pressed by the media about what he had said to Chief Demkiw, he only said “the federal government doesn’t have any line of command over the decisions taken by the Ontario and Toronto police.”

It’s not just political figures who are suspected of giving prompts to Toronto police.

The same day that Indigo was plastered with posters protesting her support for Israel’s military, CEO Heather Reisman made a phone call to Toronto’s Chief of Police, according to a police source.

To Walby, the example is telling.

“It shows some elites have instant access to the upper echelons of the police,” Walby said. “The police aren’t being directed and they’re not taking marching orders. But clearly they are taking cues, they’re taking advice that reflects a certain set of political interests. This is access and power that any other Canadians do not have.”

Reisman spoke to police again in late November. The next day, Toronto police added a new charge to the accused: “criminal harassment,” which is behaviour that causes a victim to “fear for their safety or the safety of anyone known to them.”

It carries the potential sentence of ten years in jail.

“We were watching you”

The day after the eleven accused in the Indigo case were arrested, one of the individuals was interrogated in detention by a Hate Crimes Unit officer.

The officer revealed that police had been monitoring No One Is Illegal, the migrant justice organization that some of the arrested were members of.

“We were watching you,” the officer told the individual.

While police have relied on long-standing surveillance of movements, newcomers to activism have also been caught in Project Resolute’s web of attempted surveillance.

Cyrus Reynolds, a 34 year old construction worker attending protests for the first time in his life, was arrested on Avenue Road the day after protests were banned.

After being released from the police station, Reynolds said he was approached by a detective who asked to speak to him in a side room.

The detective, who told Reynolds he was with the intelligence unit, urged him to join a confidential informant program, and to share upcoming dates and locations of any Palestinian solidarity actions.

He told Reynolds that he couldn’t make any promises, but in return, he would try to help him out with his charges.

“Make sure you don’t tell your wife about this — I’m married too, but I don’t tell my wife everything,” Reynolds recalled the detective saying.

Reynolds told him there was “no way” he would be an informant.

Months on, police’s charges are falling apart

In the middle of the proceeding, the Justice of the Peace delivered a stern rebuke to the Crown prosecutor.

It was late April, and the Crown had agreed to drop charges against Maged Sameh Hilal Al Khalaf, a forty-one year-old sports instructor.

Back in January, he had been charged with “publicly inciting hatred” for flying the flag of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Marxist-Leninist party with a military wing and several legislators in the Palestinian parliament.

But three months later the Crown was withdrawing the charge because there was “no reasonable prospect of conviction.”

Yet the Assistant Crown Attorney had made a statement at the hearing that the police “had legitimate concerns [the flag] could incite hatred toward Jews” and that Torontonians should be “put on notice” that flying it may “very well be met with further arrests.”

Justice of the Peace Robert Shawyer looked taken aback. “I must say that’s an extremely concerning statement to put on the record while withdrawing a charge,” he said.

Police were clearly scrambling to save face.

At the time of Al Khalaf’s arrest in January, Chief Demkiw had confidently declared the flag “illegal” and called the charge “unprecedented.” He told CBC that “police have never laid a charge of this nature.”

To Martínez, who was Al Khalaf’s lawyer, this smacked of “political opportunism,” with “bias clearly at play.”

“It’s not like the police have been laying charges against people flying the Confederate flag, which is often associated with hate groups and white supremacy,” he said. “But suddenly they were motivated to charge someone for flying the flag of a Palestinian organization without first doing any research.”

Left and right, the police’s arrests were falling apart. Charges against all the individuals arrested in the Avenue Road protests were withdrawn almost immediately.

A defense lawyer told *The Breach* that someone within the Crown’s office said the collapse of one case had “Demkiw pulling his hair out.”

The Indigo case was going no better. After making a media splash during the arrests, the Crown’s case was disorganized, languishing under several delays.

As of early June, they had not yet provided key documents to the defendants’ lawyers to explain the basis for the police’s search warrants and night raids.



The People's Circle for Palestine at U of T. Yukiko Tanaka, 2024.

Four of the eleven accused had their charges dropped — yet again because of “no reasonable prospect of conviction.”

At the court hearing, a lawyer for one of the defendants, Mike Leitold, said there was “not a scintilla of evidence to support the allegations of hate motivation.”

At a press conference the following week, Leitold added that he believed all the rest of the charges in the Indigo case should be dropped.

“Police came into homes across the GTA and invaded their sanctity in ways that were highly traumatizing. All for what? For paint and posters,” Leitold said.

“The use of paint and posters to freely express our dissent is a time-honoured tradition — one we see as part of the cut and thrust of urban life and the vibrancy of the city’s fabric. And it is all the more important

to protect when criticism of Israel's war in Gaza is being suppressed. To criminalize this sends a very chilling message."

As for the Islaih family, they told *The Breach* they are still shaken by their encounter with the police.

For weeks after their home was raided, they found it difficult to sleep.

In May, the Crown finally dropped its charge against Ahmad Islaih, saying pursuing it would not be in the "public interest."

But that doesn't change the damage done to the family. Ahmad's arrest, covered across the media, was broadcast on the large television at the local YMCA where he used to teach kids to swim. Colleagues at the school where he works heard about the arrest, too.

"How did my son deserve something like this? They treated him like a criminal," his mother Suha said. "We immigrated to Canada so that our kids would not suffer here like we did in Palestine."

The Toronto Police still haven't returned several of Ahmad's things, including his phone, jacket, keffiyeh, as well his prized possession, a drone.

He used it to shoot videos in the community and to build a fledgling freelance business when not teaching. He's waiting to get it back so he can again start documenting the Palestinian solidarity movement.

Despite the efforts of Project Resolute, the protest movement is not letting up.

"There's a genocide happening," Ahmad said. "I want to film the vast numbers coming out to show support for Gaza. I want to get the word out."

Martin Lukacs is an investigative journalist and the managing editor of *The Breach*. He is a former environmental writer for *The Guardian*, and has written for *The New York Review of Books*, *Toronto Star*, *Walrus*, CBC, and other Canadian publications. He is also the author of *The Trudeau Formula: Seduction and Betrayal in an Age of Discontent*. This article was originally published by *The Breach* on June 17, 2024, with files from Kunal Chaudhary. breachmedia.ca/inside-the-shocking-police-operations-targeting-pro-palestine-activists-in-toronto/

CBC HAS WHITEWASHED ISRAEL'S CRIMES IN GAZA. I SAW IT FIRSTHAND.

Working for five years as a producer at the public broadcaster, I witnessed the double standards and discrimination in its coverage of Palestine — and experienced directly how CBC disciplines those who speak out.

Molly Schumann

The executive producer peered at me with concern. It was November 16, 2023, and I had been called into a virtual meeting at CBC. I was approaching my sixth year with the public broadcaster, where I worked as a producer in television and radio.

He said he could tell I was “passionate” about what was happening in Gaza. His job, he told me, was to ensure my passion wasn’t making me biased. He said I hadn’t “crossed the line” yet, but that I had to be careful. The conversation ended with him suggesting that I might want to go on mental health leave.

I declined. My mind was fine. I could see clearly what was happening.

Earlier that day, I had spoken out in a meeting with my team at CBC News Network, the broadcaster’s twenty-four hour television news channel. It was six weeks into Israel’s siege and bombardment of the Gaza Strip, which had, at the time, killed over 11,000 Palestinians, the majority of them women and children. Legal experts were already suggesting that what was taking place could be a “potential genocide,” with an Israeli Holocaust scholar calling it “a textbook case.”

I expressed concern to my team about the frequency of Palestinian guests getting cancelled, the scrutiny brought to bear on their statements, and the pattern of double standards in our coverage. After this, I pitched a reasonable and balanced interview: two genocide scholars with opposing views discussing whether Israel's actions and rhetoric fit the legal definition of the crime.

Senior colleagues sounded panicked. My executive producer replied that we had to be “careful not to put hosts in a difficult position.” They wanted time to consult with higher-ups before making a decision. A few hours later, I was sitting across from the same executive, being warned about “crossing the line.”

The following afternoon, I showed up for what was supposed to be a typical meeting to go over the interviews we had lined up for the coming days — but some unusual guests were present. In addition to my coworkers, the faces of my executive producer and his higher-ups appeared on Google Meet.

The managers were there to talk about my pitch. They said they weren't vetoing it — they weren't meant to even make editorial decisions — but suggested our show wasn't the best venue. I pointed out that the network was deemed a suitable place for interviews with guests who characterized Russia's war on Ukraine and China's oppression of the Uighurs as instances of genocide. The managers looked uncomfortable. I was reassigned to work on a panel with two guests calling on the West to support regime change in Moscow and Tehran. (Ever since these unusual meetings had started, I was recording them for my protection.)

But that wasn't the end of the blowback. The next week, late on a Friday afternoon, I received an email from the same two managers who had poured cold water on my pitch. They needed to speak to me urgently. Over the phone, I was asked to keep the conversation secret.

They told me I had hurt the feelings of some of my coworkers. But it was more than just hurt feelings: someone was accusing me of antisemitism.

I had, it appeared, “crossed the line.”

Trying to work your way up to a permanent position at Canada's public broadcaster requires knowing the sort of stories, angles and guests that are acceptable — and which are out of bounds. As a precarious “casual” employee — a class of worker that makes up over a quarter of CBC's workforce — it hadn't taken me long to realize that the subject of Israel-Palestine was to be avoided wherever possible. When it was covered, it was tacitly expected to be framed in such a way as to obscure history and sanitize contemporary reality.

After October 7, it was no longer possible for the corporation to continue avoiding it. But because CBC had never properly contextualized the world's longest active military occupation in the lead-up to that atrocity, it was ill-equipped to report on what happened next.

The CBC would spend the following months whitewashing the horrors that Israel would visit on Palestinians in Gaza. In the days after Israel began its bombing campaign, this was already evident: while virtually no scrutiny was applied to Israeli officials and experts, an unprecedented level of suspicion was being brought to bear on the family members of those trapped in Gaza.

My job required me to vet the work of associate producers and to oversee interviews, so I was well-positioned to see the double standards up close.

At first, out of concern that it would jeopardize my chances of landing a staff job that I had recently applied for, I only voiced mild pushback. But as the death toll mounted, my career started to seem less important. If journalists in Gaza were sacrificing their lives to tell the truth, I should at least be prepared to take some risks.

Besides, I naively told myself, it would be easier for me to dissent than most of my colleagues. I am of mixed Jewish heritage, having been raised by a father who fled the Holocaust as a young child and dealt with the life-long trauma and guilt of surviving while his family members were murdered by the Nazis. It would be more challenging, I believed, for cynical actors to wield false accusations of antisemitism against me.

I turned out to be wrong.

The Palestine exception at CBC

In the run-up to October 7, a senior colleague said that if we were lucky, “the news gods would shine on us” and put an end to a stretch of “slow news” days. Waking up on that fateful Saturday to multiple alerts on my phone, I knew that both the world and my professional life were about to dramatically change.

Even before October 2023, trying to persuade senior CBC colleagues to report accurately on Palestinians was a struggle. Here are some of the TV interview ideas that a colleague and I pitched but had turned down: Human Rights Watch’s 2021 report designating Israel an apartheid state; the Sheikh Jarrah evictions in the same year; Israel assassinating Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in 2022; and the Israeli bombing of the Jenin refugee camp in July 2023.

The last of these ideas was initially greenlit but was later cancelled because a senior producer was concerned that the host would have too much on her plate. Around this time, I also pitched someone from the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem to talk about the potential impact of widely-protested judicial reforms on Palestinians — but this was nixed for fear of complaints. These would become familiar excuses.

After October 7, I dreaded going into work: every shift, the impact of the biases went into overdrive. Even at this early stage, Israeli officials were making genocidal statements that were ignored in our coverage. On October 9, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said, “I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel; everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly.” Even after this comment, my executive producer was still quibbling over uses in our scripts of the word “besieged” or references to the “plight of Palestinians.”

On October 20, I suggested having Hammam Farah, a Palestinian-Canadian psychotherapist, back on the network. In an earlier interview he had told us that his family were sheltering in Saint Porphyrius Greek Orthodox church in Gaza City. The following week, I learned from social media that his stepcousin had been killed in an Israeli airstrike on the

twelfth-century building. My executive producer responded to my pitch via instant message: “Yeah, if he’s willing. We also may have to potentially say we can’t verify these things though — unless we can.”



The CBC building. Canmenwalker, 2023.

I was stunned. Never in my nearly six years at CBC had I ever been expected to verify the death of someone close to a guest, or to put a disclaimer in an interview that we couldn’t fact-check such claims. That’s not a standard that producers had been expected to uphold — except, apparently, for Palestinians.

Besides, even at that early stage, civil society had completely broken down in Gaza. I couldn’t just call up the health authority or courthouse to

ask that they email over a death certificate. I already had Farah’s relative’s full name and had found a Facebook profile matching a commemorative photo he had posted on Instagram. This was already more verification than I had done for Israeli interviewees who had loved ones killed on October 7. A few days later, a different program on the network aired an interview with the guest using passive language in the headline: “Toronto man says relative was killed in airstrike that hit Gaza.”

I was being forced to walk a tightrope, trying to retain some journalistic integrity while keeping my career intact.

In early November, I was asked to oversee production of an interview with a former US official now working for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a pro-Israel think tank.

During the interview, he was allowed to repeat a number of verifiably false claims live on air — including that Hamas fighters had decapitated babies on October 7 and that Gazan civilians could avoid being bombed if only they listened to the Israeli military and headed south. This was after civilian convoys fleeing southward via “safe routes” had been bombed by the Israeli military before the eyes of the world.

As soon as I heard this second falsehood, I messaged my team suggesting that the host push back — but received no response. Afterwards, the host said she had let the comment slide because time was limited, even though she could have taken the time from a less consequential story later on in the program.

The majority of Palestinian guests I spoke to during the first six weeks of Israel’s assault on Gaza all said the same thing: they wanted to do live interviews to avoid the risk of their words being edited or their interview not being aired. These were well-founded concerns.

Never before in my career had so many interviews been cancelled due to fear of what guests might say. Nor had there ever been direction from senior colleagues to push a certain group of people to do pre-taped interviews. (CBC told *The Breach* it “categorically rejects” the claim that interviews were “routinely cancelled.”)

On another occasion in November, a Palestinian-Canadian woman in London, Ontario named Reem Sultan, who had family trapped in the Strip, was scheduled for one such pre-taped interview. Because of her frustration over previous interviews that she had given and coverage of her family's situation being "diluted," she asked if she could go live instead.

When I asked the senior producer, he looked uneasy and said the interview should be cancelled, citing that the guest had already been on the network that week. I agreed that it would be preferable to interview a new Palestinian voice and said I had contact information for a number of alternative guests. However, after cancelling the interview with Sultan, the senior producer informed me that he didn't want another guest after all.

Editing out "genocide"

Most shows on the network seemed to avoid airing any mention of "genocide" in the context of Gaza.

On November 10, my senior producer pushed to cancel an interview I had set up with a Palestinian-Canadian entrepreneur, Khaled Al Sabawi. According to his "pre-interview" — a conversation that typically happens before the broadcastable interview — fifty of his relatives had been killed by Israeli soldiers.

The part of the transcript that concerned the senior producer was Al Sabawi's claim that Netanyahu's government had "publicly disclosed its intent to commit genocide." He also took issue with the guest's references to a "documented history of racism" and "apartheid" under Israeli occupation, as well as his suggestion that the Canadian government was complicit in the murder of Gazan civilians.

The senior producer raised his concerns via email to the executive producer, who then cc'ed one of the higher-up managers. The executive producer replied that it "sound[ed] like [his statement was] beyond opinion and factually incorrect." The executive manager's higher up chimed in, saying she thought the interview would be "too risky as a pre-tape or live [interview]."

Despite the guest’s position aligning with many UN experts and Western human rights organizations, the interview was cancelled. (CBC told *The Breach* “the guest turned down our offer of a pre-taped interview,” but Al Sabawi had said to the producers from the start that he would only do a live interview.)

In another instance, a Palestinian-Canadian guest named Samah Al Sabbagh, whose elderly father was then trapped in Gaza, had part of her pre-taped interview edited out before it went to air. She had used the word “genocide” and talked about the deliberate starvation of Palestinians in Gaza. The senior producer told me the edit was because of time constraints. But that producer and the host were overheard agreeing that the guest’s unedited words were too controversial. (CBC told *The Breach* it “has not ‘cancelled’ interviews with Palestinians because they reference genocide and apartheid.”)

By November 2023, it was getting harder to ignore the brazen rhetoric coming from senior Israeli officials and the rate of civilian death, which had few precedents in the twenty-first century. But you wouldn’t have heard about these things on our shows, despite a number of producers’ best efforts. By early 2024, the International Court of Justice’s hearings — and later its ruling that Israel refrain from actions that could “plausibly constitute” genocide — forcibly changed the discussion, and the word “genocide” finally made some appearances on CBC.



Gaza City after an Israeli airstrike.
Shareef Sarhan, 2014.

But back in late October, I booked an interview with Adel Iskandar, Associate Professor of Global Communication at Simon Fraser University, to talk about language and propaganda from Israeli and Hamas officials. The host filling in that day was afraid of complaints, was concerned about the guest wanting to be interviewed live, and judged him to be biased. Yet again an interview was cancelled.

A secret blacklist?

One Saturday in mid-October, I arrived at work shortly after the airing of an interview with the prominent Palestinian-Canadian lawyer and former spokesperson for the Palestine Liberation Organization, Diana Buttu.

There had been a commotion, I was told. A producer from *The National* — the CBC’s flagship nightly news and current affairs program — had apparently stormed into the newsroom during the interview saying that Buttu was on a list of banned Palestinian guests and that we weren’t supposed to book her.

I heard from multiple colleagues that the alleged list of banned Palestinian guests wasn’t official. Rather, a number of pro-Israel producers were rumoured to have drawn up their own list of guests to avoid.

Later, I was told by the producer of the interview that, after the broadcast, Buttu’s details had mysteriously vanished from a shared CBC database. By then, I had also discovered that the name and contact details for the Palestinian Ambassador Mona Abuamara, who had previously been interviewed, had likewise been removed. It didn’t seem coincidental that both guests were articulate defenders of Palestinian rights.

While producers distressed by the CBC’s coverage of Gaza were speaking in whispers, pro-Israeli colleagues felt comfortable making dehumanizing comments about Palestinians in the newsroom.

In one case, I heard an associate producer speak disparagingly about a guest’s decision to wear a keffiyeh for an interview before commenting that “[the host] knows how to handle these people.” This guest had dozens of family members killed by the Israeli military in Gaza.

It seemed the only Palestinian guest CBC was interested in interviewing was the sad, docile Palestinian who talked about their

suffering without offering any analysis or solutions to end it. What they did not want was an angry Palestinian full of righteous indignation towards governments complicit in their family's displacement and murder.

At this stage, I was starting to feel nauseous at work. And then one Saturday night, that sickness turned into anger.

I had been asked to finish production on a pre-taped interview with a “constructive dialogue” researcher on incidents of campus hostilities over the war and how to bring people together — the sort of interview CBC loves, as it's a way to be seen covering the story without actually talking about what's happening in Gaza.

I carried out the task in good faith, writing an introduction leading with an example of antisemitism and then another of anti-Palestinian hate, taking care to be “balanced” in my approach. But my senior producer proceeded to remove the example of anti-Palestinian hate, replacing it with a wishy-washy “both sides” example, while leaving the specific serious incident of antisemitism intact. He also edited my wording to suggest that pro-Palestinian protesters on Canadian campuses were on the “side” of Hamas.

I overheard the host thank the senior producer for the edits, on the basis that incidents of antisemitism were supposedly worse. While the introduction of these biases into my script was relatively minor compared to some other double standards I witnessed, it was a tipping point.

I challenged the senior on why he had made my script journalistically worse. He made up a bad excuse. I told him I couldn't do this anymore and walked out of the newsroom, crying.

Truth-telling about CBC

That evening at home, the nausea and the anger dissolved, and for the first time in six weeks I felt a sense of peace. I knew it was untenable to stay at CBC.

At a team meeting the following week, in mid-November, I said the things I had wanted to say since the start of Israel's assault on Gaza.

I prefaced the conversation by saying how much I loved my team and considered some coworkers friends. I said the problems weren't unique to our team but across the CBC.

But the frequency of Palestinian guests getting cancelled, the pressure to pre-tape this one particular group, in addition to the unprecedented level of scrutiny being placed on them, demonstrated a pattern of double standards. I said there seemed to be an unspoken rule around words like “genocide.”

I pointed out that Arab and Muslim coworkers, especially those who were precariously employed, were scared of raising concerns, and that I and others had heard dehumanizing comments about Palestinians in the newsroom. (The CBC told *The Breach* that there “have been no specific reports of anti-Palestinian and Islamophobic comments in the newsroom for managers to respond to or follow up.”)

I said that two decades since the US-led invasion of Iraq, it was widely-acknowledged that the media had failed to do their jobs to interrogate the lies used to justify a war and occupation that killed one million Iraqis — and that as journalists we had a special responsibility to tell the truth, even if it was uncomfortable.

A couple of coworkers raised similar concerns. Others rolled their eyes. (CBC told *The Breach* that it doesn't recall there was anyone else who raised concerns in the meeting, but audio recordings show otherwise.)

The question of why there was nervousness around this issue came up. I said one reason why we were adverse to allowing Palestinian guests to use the “G-word” was because of the complaint campaigns of right-wing lobby groups like HonestReporting Canada.

Indeed, in just six weeks, there were already nineteen separate instances of HonestReporting going after CBC journalists, including a host on our team. HonestReporting had also claimed responsibility for the firing at two other outlets of two Palestinian journalists, one of whom was on maternity leave at the time.

All this had a chilling effect. Hosts and senior colleagues would frequently cite the threat of complaints as a reason not to cover Israel-

Palestine. During my time there, a senior writer was even called into management meetings to discuss her supposed biases after a HonestReporting campaign targeted her. Her contract was cut short.

This policing of media workers' output reinforced existing institutional tendencies that ensured CBC rarely deviated from the narrow spectrum of "legitimate" opinions represented by Canada's existing political class.

Certain CBC shows seemed to be more biased than others. *The National* was particularly bad: the network's primetime show featured forty-two per cent more Israeli voices than Palestinian in its first month of coverage after the October 7 Hamas attack, according to a survey by *The Breach*.

Although some podcasts and radio programs seemed to cover the war on Gaza in a more nuanced way, the problem of anti-Palestinian bias in language was pervasive across all platforms.

According to an investigation in *The Breach*, CBC even admitted to this disparity, arguing that only the killing of Israelis merited the term "murderous" or "brutal" since the killing of Palestinians happens "remotely." Images of children being flattened to death in between floors of an apartment building and reports of premature babies left to starve in incubators suggested otherwise.

I spoke to many like-minded colleagues to see if there was any action we could all take to push back on the tenor of our coverage, but understandably others were reluctant to act — even collectively — out of fear doing so would endanger their jobs. Some of those colleagues would have loved to have walked out, but financial responsibilities stopped them.

There had been previous attempts at CBC to improve the public broadcaster's coverage of Israel-Palestine. In 2021, hundreds of Canadian journalists signed an open letter calling out biases in the mainstream media's treatment of the subject.

A number of CBC workers who signed the letter were hauled into meetings and told they either weren't allowed to cover the subject or would have any future work on the issue vetted. A work friend later

regretted signing the letter because she got the sense that she had been branded as biased, leading to her pitches on Palestine being more readily dismissed.

Smearred as antisemitic

In mid-November, after laying out my concerns to my colleagues, the regular weekly pitch meeting took place. It was then that I pitched the two genocide scholars, before having to attend that virtual meeting with my executive producer — where he suggested I go on mental health leave — and yet another meeting with two managers who raised concerns over my pitch the next day. But the most unpleasant meeting with management was about to come.

A week later, I was accused of antisemitism on the basis of something I didn't even say. According to a manager, someone had accused me of claiming that “the elephant in the room [was] the rich Jewish lobby.” (CBC told *The Breach* that “employees expressed concerns” that what she said was “discriminatory.”)

The accusation was deeply painful because of my Jewish heritage and how my dad's life — and, as a consequence, my own — was profoundly damaged by antisemitism. But I also knew I could prove that it was baseless: I had recorded what I said, anxious that someone might twist my words to use them against me.

What I had actually said, verbatim, was this:

“I just want to address the elephant in the room. The reason why we're scared to allow Palestinian guests on to use the word ‘genocide’ is because there's a very, very well funded [sic], there's lots of Israel lobbies, and every time we do this sort of interview, they will complain, and it's a headache. That's why we're not doing it. But that's not a good reason not to have these conversations.”

I stand by my statement. HonestReporting Canada is billionaire-funded. In December 2023, HonestReporting bragged about having “mobilized Canadians to send 50,000 letters to news outlets.” The group has also published a litany of attacks on journalists at CBC and other publications who've done accurate reporting on Palestine, and created

email templates to make it easier for their followers to complain to publications about specific reporters.

Other, similar pro-Israel groups like the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) and the Canary Mission employ similar tactics to try to silence journalists, academics, and activists who tell the truth about Israel-Palestine.

I told the manager it was telling that instead of following up on the racist comment I had heard from colleagues about Palestinians, I was the one being accused of antisemitism and discrimination — on the basis of words I hadn't even uttered.

The banality of whitewashing war crimes

When I handed in my resignation notice on November 30, I felt relieved that I was no longer complicit in the manufacturing of consent for a genocidal war of revenge.

Despite my experience, I still believe in the importance of the national broadcaster to act in the public interest by reporting independently of both government and corporate interests, presenting the truth and offering a diverse range of perspectives.

However, I believe that CBC has not been fulfilling these duties when it comes to its coverage of Israel-Palestine. I believe that in the future, historians will examine the many ways that CBC, and the rest of mainstream media, have all failed to report truthfully on this unfolding genocide — and in doing so likely accelerated their delegitimization as trusted news sources.

Before resigning, I raised the issue of double standards with various levels of the CBC hierarchy. While some members of management pledged to take my concerns seriously, the overall response left me disappointed with the state of the public broadcaster.

After my appeal to my coworkers in mid-November, I had a phone conversation with a sympathetic senior producer. He said he didn't think my words at the meeting would interfere with my chances of getting the permanent staff job I had long dreamed of. Despite this assurance, I was certain that I wouldn't get it now: I knew I'd crossed the line for saying



out loud what many at CBC were thinking but couldn't say openly. Indeed, I wouldn't have spoken out if I hadn't already decided to resign.

As a kid, I had fantasies of shooting Hitler dead to stop the Holocaust. I couldn't fathom how most Germans went along with it. Then, in my twenties, I was gifted a copy of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann In Jerusalem: A Report On The Banality Of Evil* by anti-Zionist Israeli friends. I've been thinking a lot about that piece of reportage when trying to make sense of the liberal media's complicity in obfuscating the reality of what's happening in the Holy Land. As Arendt theorized, those who go along with genocides aren't innately evil; they're often just boring careerists.

To be sure, while there are a number of senior CBC journalists who are clearly committed to defending Israel no matter its actions, many journalists just follow the path of least resistance. The fact that permanent, full-time CBC jobs are in such short supply, combined with threats of looming cuts, only reinforces this problem.

I still hear from former colleagues that pitch meetings are uphill battles. Some shows are barely covering Gaza anymore.

Being a journalist is a huge privilege and responsibility, especially in a time of war. You're curating the news for the audience; deciding which facts to include and which to omit; choosing whose perspectives to present and whose to ignore. I believe that a good journalist should be able to turn their critical eye, not just on the news, but on their own reporting of the news. If you're unable to do this, you shouldn't be in the profession.

I purposefully haven't given away identifiable information about my former colleagues. Ultimately, this isn't about them or me: it's part of a much wider issue in newsrooms across the country and the Western world — and I believe it's a moral duty to shed a light on it. If I didn't, I'd never forgive myself.

Just as I'm not naming my colleagues, I'm writing this using a pseudonym. Although the spectrum of acceptable discourse continues to shift, the career consequences for whistleblowers on this issue remains formidable.

I encourage fellow journalists who refuse to participate in the whitewashing of war crimes, especially those with the security of staff jobs, to speak to like-minded coworkers about taking collective action; to approach your union steward and representative; and to document instances of double standards in your newsrooms and share them with other media workers.

It was scary, but I have no regrets about speaking out. My only regret is that I didn't write this sooner.

“Molly Schumann” is a pseudonym for a former TV and radio producer who worked at CBC for five years. This article was published by *The Breach* on May 16, 2024. breachmedia.ca/cbc-whitewashed-israels-crimes-gaza-firsthand/

NOT IN MY NAME

Judy Rebick



Demonstrators in Toronto. Can Pac Swire, 2024.

About two weeks after October 7, I had a strong feeling that the movement in solidarity with Palestine was looking a lot like the youth uprising in the 1960's. Today, after the police assaults on the students at Columbia and across North America, there is no doubt. But an important difference is that today's movement has learned from the history of the anti-war movement that came before. I moved to New York and got a job working in a disability centre at Columbia University in the fall of 1968. The massive student protests where 700 students were arrested and beaten by New York City police took place on April 30. By the time I got there in October, there had been a profound radicalization. A meeting of the Students for a Democratic Society that I attended out of curiosity broke up in a fist fight because some of the leaders were forming

the Weathermen, later called the Weather Underground, a radical group that believed in violent direct action to promote a revolution in the United States.

The anti-globalization movement that arose three decades later was also disorderly at times. Even during the 2010 summit of the G20, when Toronto police arrested 1,100 innocent people, there were a handful of activists breaking windows on Yonge Street.

Today there is little violence in the movement for solidarity with Palestine. Here in Toronto, I've been to almost all of the weekly marches and seen no violence at all. The movement so far is completely peaceful.

So why the aggression from authorities? Why are peaceful student encampments being dismantled and nonviolent activists handed trumped-up criminal charges? They claim that there are antisemitic tendencies within the movement that need to be punished, but that is clearly a lie.

I am Jewish and have been involved in working in solidarity with Palestine for decades. In 2002, I went to Israel and Palestine on a fact-finding mission organized by Alternatives, a Quebec NGO specializing in international solidarity. On that trip I met leaders of the non-violent opposition in the West Bank, including Mustafa Barghouti who today is a prominent Palestinian spokesperson in Western media. I also met feminists in Gaza who were trying to counter the influence of Hamas. People were surprised that a Jew was supporting Palestinians, but I was welcomed with open arms. Anyone who has visited Palestine will tell you that they are among the most hospitable people in the world.

I have experienced antisemitism elsewhere in my life, however. When I needed financial support to pay my tuition at McGill in 1967 because my father had gone bankrupt, the loan officer said to me, "How can you need money? You're Jewish." Working later with Dr. Henry Morgentaler to legalize abortion in Canada was a deeper dive into antisemitism. The *Toronto Sun* had a cartoon of Morgentaler making him look like an evil hook-nosed Jew reminiscent of Nazi propaganda. Protesters in the front of his abortion clinic used to tell people, "They only kill Christian babies in there." He taught me that hate should not provoke hate. A holocaust

survivor, his philosophy was, “I who could have been a grain of sand, survived so that I could devote my life to helping women.” I was also one of “twelve prominent Jews” to get a live bullet in the mail in 2009 threatening to kill me. When I was the host of a TV show on CBC in the 1990’s, people would occasionally call with demands to “get that Jew off the air.”

In my experience, antisemites don’t distinguish between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli Jews, and often use a rise in anger against Israel as a moment to spread their hate. There is no excuse for antisemitism no matter what Israel does, but the instances of real antisemitism in the Canadian pro-Palestine movement have been few and far between.

We cannot accept that criticism of Israel is antisemitic. There are many anti-Zionist Jews. In fact, it is an historic debate among Jews going back almost two centuries. After I visited Israel in 1970 and found a deeply militarist, racist country that had nothing to do with my experience of being Jewish, I started reading about Zionism and the debate among Jews prior to WWII. The book *The Jewish Question* by Abram Leon



Protestors in Melbourne. Matt Hrkac, 2023.



Protestors in Washington DC during Benjamin Netanyahu's visit. Stephen Melkisetian, 2024.

written in 1942 framed the debate in a way that made sense to me. He said Zionism would ally Jews with the oppressor, the imperialists, not with other oppressed people. That's when I became an anti-Zionist.

But today, Israel's defenders are strenuously trying to conflate anti-Zionism and antisemitism. In 2016, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance defined anti-Zionism as antisemitism and since then many governments have accepted it as law despite the serious arguments against it.

I was one of eight Jewish women who occupied the Israeli consulate to protest their attack on Gaza in 2009. We didn't get much publicity in Canada, but it was big news in the Middle East. I was quoted in the *Toronto Star* saying, "We call on all Jews to speak out against this massacre

and demand that Israel stop the bombing, pull out of Gaza and make a just peace with the Palestinians.”

At that time it was rare for Jews to protest Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. We were few, but today we are many. Five hundred people, wearing shirts that said “Not in My Name” were arrested during a sit-in at the US Congress organized by Jewish Voices for Peace. Five thousand more people, mostly Jews, demonstrated in the streets of Washington DC at the same time. Even more demonstrated in the streets of New York a few days before. In Toronto, I was moved to tears by the presence of hundreds of pro-Palestinian Jews protesting at the Israeli Consulate at 8 a.m. on October 25, organized by several groups including Independent Jewish Voices. I feel that the strong presence of Jewish supporters at Palestinian events and in coalition with others for a ceasefire helps to ensure that anger at Israel does not spill over into antisemitism.

Despite — or perhaps because of — the unquestioning support of Western governments, thousands upon thousands of people have hit the streets in every city from Toronto to Seoul. One recent march in Toronto was the biggest mobilization I’ve seen in many years. There were Jews for Palestine, Sikhs for Palestine, Queers for Palestine, Artists for Palestine, and a crowd reflective of Toronto’s multiracial population.

Underneath the false claims of antisemitism, there is deeper reason that authorities fear the youth uprising: It is being led by young people in the Palestinian diaspora around the world. The Palestinian Youth Movement is an international grassroots movement that is better organized than any such group I have seen, and I believe they hold transformative potential. What will happen when imperialist powers can no longer claim to be the guardians of democracy, and when the victims of their violence and their children tell the truth about the oppression and violence in their countries of origin?

Israel’s story of a tiny plucky country of Jews fleeing the Holocaust and establishing a great modern democracy is wearing thin for a lot of young people when they learn about the daily violence and restrictions Israel inflicts on Palestinians, or hear the genocidal language — calling

Palestinians human animals, for instance — used by Israel's extreme right-wing government.

For the first time in many years, I feel a peace movement arising internationally that is profoundly challenging the status quo. Many are comparing these protests to those against the war in Iraq, which convinced then-prime minister Jean Chrétien to refuse to join the US in that fight. But to me it feels more like the mobilization against the Vietnam war. Youth led that uprising against US imperial might and for a brave Vietnamese people that stood up to it. A whole generation of youth mobilized then and are mobilizing these actions today. Perhaps a similar kind of youth movement will arise out of this struggle and transform society for the better.

Judy Rebick is an author, activist and educator. She has been president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, Canada's largest women's group, and was a prominent spokesperson for the pro-choice movement in the 1980s. She has authored several books — most recently a memoir, *Heroes in My Head* — and taught on Canadian social movements at McGill and Toronto Metropolitan University. The first version of this article was published on November 10, 2023, by *Rabble*. The present version has been updated for this pamphlet. rabble.ca/columnists/not-in-my-name/



The final day of the People's Circle for Palestine at U of T. Niko Block, 2024.

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Other Resources

Al-Haq: Defending Human Rights in Palestine – alhaq.org.

BDS Movement – bdsmovement.net.

B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories – btselem.org.

Palestinian Center for Human Rights – pchrgaza.org.

UN Humanitarian Affairs for Palestine – ochaopt.org.

The Electronic Intifada – electronicintifada.net.

Independent Jewish Voices – ijvcanada.org.

We Are Not Numbers: Palestinian Youth Tell the Human Stories Behind the Numbers – wearenotnumbers.org.

Sheryl Nestel and Rowan Gaudet. 2022. *Unveiling the Chilly Climate: The Suppression of Speech on Palestine in Canada*.

Wildeman, Jeremy, and Muhannad Ayyash, eds. 2024. *Canada as a Settler Colony: On the Question of Palestine*.

Wills, Emily Regan, Jeremy Wildeman, Michael Bueckert, and Nadia Abu-Zahra, eds. 2022. *Advocating for Palestine in Canada: Histories, Movements, Action*.

About the Socialist Project

The SP is a Toronto-based organization that supports the rebuilding of the socialist Left in Canada and around the world. Committed to the development of a more free, democratic, humane and sustainable society than the one we live in, the SP opposes capitalism out of necessity and supports the struggles of others out of solidarity. We support struggles aligned with working class emancipation, anti-oppression, democratic self-determination, planetary sustainability, and peace.

You may contact us at info@socialistproject.ca or visit our website at socialistproject.ca.



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