OTHER VOICES

FROM THE MIDDLE EAST CLIPBOARD

Compiled by Janet McMahon

Israel Isn't Debating a Palestinian State. It's Preparing for Expulsion

BY AMIRA HASS

Gadi Eisenkot, the election front-runner and leader of the Yashar party, has a stance on a Palestinian state that is ultimately irrelevant. What is at stake today is not a "diplomatic solution," but the very existence of the Palestinian people between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The Israeli forces striving to "erase" them recognize no limits or restraints. Their supporters are too numerous for us to rely solely on the steadfastness and resilience of a people that has already endured expulsion plans carried out by Israel.

The world stands by. The left is tiny, weak and hoarse from sounding too many warnings. The anti-Bibi opposition oscillates among downplaying the danger, remaining indifferent to it and outright supporting expulsion. The sporadic condemnations, prompted mainly by something the U.S. ambassador posted on X, are about as useful as a sieve in a rainstorm. The Jewish Phalangists attack constantly and everywhere, not only in Qusra.

The debate over one state, two states or a federation is more theoretical than ever. Any agreed-upon solution requires first acknowledging the problem and agreeing on what it is. Too many Jews in Israel have been conditioned to believe that the problem is the very presence in this land of a Palestinian people with roots, historical and economic continuity, cultural capital and material assets, a rich agricultural heritage and a profound love of homeland.

"Erasure" is the nightmare solution being written into reality every day. Knesset laws, politicians' declarations, military orders, school textbooks and the holy real estate battalions operating in Gaza, the West Bank and the Negev all work, together and separately, to advance this "solution" diligently and without fear of international condemnation.

Israeli policy is directed toward making life unbearable for Palestinians

VOL. 29 ISSUE 7—NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Israel Isn't Debating a Palestinian State. It's Preparing for Expulsion, Amira Hass, *www.haaretz.com* **OV-37**

International Condemnation of Settlements Does Not Target Israel's Colonial Plan, Ramona Wadi, *www.middleeastmonitor.com* **OV-38**

The U.K. Sanctions Are a Joke. Israel Is the Settlements, and The Settlements Are Israel, Gideon Levy, *www.haaretz.com* **OV-39**

Why We Shouldn't Call Colonial Israeli Settlers "Terrorists," Inès Abdel Razek, *http://mondoweiss.net* **OV-40**

Can a Party Be Leftist and Zionist?, Tamam Abusalama, *www.aljazeera.com* **OV-42**

Israel Is not Heading for Civil War, Ori Goldberg, *www.aljazeera.com* **OV-43**

Israeli Officials Promote Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories About Israel, Caitlin Johnstone, *www.caitlinjohnstone.com.au* **OV-44**

Israel's Culture Minister Threatens to Revoke Citizenship of Gaza Doc Filmmakers, Haaretz, *www.haaretz.com* **OV-45**

How the U.S. Tried (and Failed) To Learn From "The Battle of Algiers," Martin Di Caro, *www.responsiblestatecraft.org* **OV-45**

Israel Takes its War on Palestine Into the AI Age, Said Arikat, *www.aljazeera.com* **OV-47**

A Homeland on Canvas: Sliman Mansour and the Rise of Revolutionary Palestinian Art, Ramzy Baroud, *www.ramzybaroud.net* **OV-49**

After Iran, U.S. Signals Major Security Shift in the Middle East, Abdelrahim Shalaby, *www.responsiblestatecraft.org* **OV-50**

In Yemen, Dates Provide Lifeline For Farmers With Few Economic Options, Saeed Al Batati, *www.aljazeera.com* **OV-51**

wherever they live, so that their emigration can be described as an act of free will. Within Israel itself, the authorities give Arab crime organizations free rein to arm themselves and kill Palestinian citizens in their homes. In the West Bank, those same Israeli authorities give "God's battalions" free rein to arm themselves, kill and expel, while the official army continues its raids day and night. In devastated and thirsty Gaza, the government and the army cultivate armed militias of criminal collaborators, while Israeli pilots continue to launch missiles of revenge and retribution that claim the lives of still more children. All these testosterone-fueled displays are interconnected.

At the same time, Israel is destroying or severely restricting Palestinians' ability to earn a living. In Gaza, that mission has been completed. A "living dead" population of aid recipients, two million people carrying the weight of some 74,000 fresh graves, families and memories, talents and professions, and evaporated savings, is crammed into roughly 150 square kilometers of scorched earth. Creativity, resourcefulness and mutual aid are dwarfed by the scale of the destruction and by Israel's prohibition on rebuilding and recovery.

In the West Bank, the Finance Ministry's financial noose is tightening around the necks of approximately three million people and the Palestinian Authority. The systematic theft of revenues is compounded by the army's campaigns of destruction in cities and refugee camps, as well as by the other methods used to prevent Palestinians from cultivating and developing their land: checkpoints, bureaucratic prohibitions, fences and Israeli-Jewish shepherds.

Within Israel itself, the "Judaization of the Galilee and Negev" was and remains code for stealing land and resources from Palestinian citizens of Israel. Discrimination against them in allocations, subsidies and employment, along with building prohibitions and demolitions, has always featured prominently in official policy within the Green Line.

Let me reiterate: The very existence of the Palestinian people between the sea and the river is now in danger. Too many active forces are creating that danger: Israel's military might and capabilities; the cult of military service under all conditions and under every government; obedience as a value; weapons and military attacks as the default *modus operandi;* the normalization of PTSD among soldiers and of soldiers dying by suicide; the attractions of a military career and the doors it opens; the lure of an affordable villa in a Galilee exclusionary community or a settler suburb in Samaria; the falsehoods of official and unofficial propaganda; indifference to the hell on earth Israel has created in the Gaza Strip; denial of 60 years of occupation and forced rule; the Pavlovian response, "But October 7"; the synergy among the army, the government, the rabbis and the kippa-wearing militias in the West Bank; equanimity in the face of Lebanon's destruction; disregard for the occupation of more parts of Syria; the normalization of expulsion discourse; justice and education systems tainted by secular and religious racism; and the army of jailers who abuse thousands of Palestinian prisoners, both under orders and by choice.

Together, these and similar forces are creating the material, ideological and psychological infrastructure within Israeli-Jewish society for another mass expulsion of Palestinians and for what might accompany it: mass slaughter.

The heroes of the settler militias openly declare that expulsion is their goal. They clearly recognize the readiness of large segments of Israeli-Jewish society to participate in carrying it out, actively or passively, directly or indirectly. Through their daily provocations and crimes, committed in broad daylight and made possible only by institutional support, the Phalangists constantly seek to provoke a Palestinian act of rage and revenge that "succeeds," so that it can be exploited as the match that ignites a new holy war.

The Jewish Phalangists and the right-wing organizations that fuel them are counting on broad mobilization, including from the leaders, voters and supporters of Yashar and the liberal Democrats party, for a war that could already be given the slogan: "One people, one army, one land cleansed of Arabs."

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International Condemnation of Settlements Does Not Target Israel's Colonial Plan

BY RAMONA WADI

The discrepancy between Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's statements and those of the EU shows where the political deficiency lies. Predictably, the EU's failure to address settler-colonialism and Israel's existence as a colonial enterprise is failing to curb expansion. Words without action fulfil nothing except the publication of futile statements. Netanyahu, on the other hand, is adamant about settlement expansion in both rhetoric and action.

Speaking about illegal settlement outposts in the occupied West Bank, Netanyahu told the settlers, "You are fulfilling the vision of the Land of Israel, and this is our land." If it really was Israeli land, settlement expansion would not be illegal under international law.

However, declaring only part of Israeli settlements illegal while dismissing the structure that provides cover for

settlement expansion—Israel itself—only serves to create further impunity for Israel, and complicity within the international community.

On Sunday, the EU High Representative's office issued a statement condemning the publication of a tender for 1,200 housing units in the E1 area, saying that the plan "fundamentally harms the prospect of a two-State solution."

Every time Israel proceeds with settlement expansion, the EU response is to issue variations of the same statement. And yet, attaching the same criticism to each settlement project is not preserving Palestinian territory for the Palestinian people.

The EU, like the rest of the international community, treats each announcement separately from Israel's colonial existence and the concept of Greater Israel. EU statements, therefore, are characterized by phrase repetition and lack of continuity. They do not condemn colonialism and colonial expansion; only separate settlement projects.

A joint statement by the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Canada, Norway, the Netherlands and several other European countries used similar rhetoric, saying the E1 project violated "the territorial contiguity of the Palestinian territories" and undermined "Israel's international standing." What is meant by undermined, however, is not explained. Is Israel's international standing truly undermined, when settlement expansion and settler violence are ongoing without repercussions, not to mention the support Israel received from the international community for its genocide in Gaza?

Israel's standing is not truly undermined until repercussions for colonialism are implemented by the international community.

On the other hand, Israel is creating colonial continuity through its statements and colonial expansion. It knows that each settlement project harms the two-state politics, to the point that there is no more talk among Israeli officials of a hypothetical Palestinian state. It is only the international community that keeps the paradigm alive, knowing that both settlement expansion and international inaction against colonialism have eliminated any possibility of a Palestinian state.

The EU should not only address the illegality of Israel's settlement expansion; it should do so within the entire colonial context. It should also take note of its own role in enabling Israeli colonial expansion to continue by insisting upon a failed paradigm that serves nothing but international politics.

If a Palestinian state is impossible, then Palestinians are automatically excluded. Due to its defunct state, the two-state paradigm can only serve Israel and the international community. It has done so for decades now.

Ramona Wadi is an independent researcher, freelance journalist, book reviewer and blogger. Her writing covers a range of themes in relation to Palestine, Chile and Latin America. This article was first posted at <www.middleeastmonitor.com>, Aug. 27, 2026 under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.The views expressed in this article belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Middle East Monitor. *Reprinted with permission.*

The U.K. Sanctions Are a Joke. Israel Is the Settlements, and The Settlements Are Israel

BY GIDEON LEVY

Everyone is playing the game: Britain supposedly imposes sanctions, about a dozen other European countries pretend to join them and Israel responds with measures akin to a mouse striking back at an elephant so we can show the British a thing or two. Everyone is happy with themselves. The construction of settler homes on stolen Palestinian land will not stop, nor will the theft of livestock, because of what Britain has done, even if the world is delighting in these sanctions.

The new British government says ethnic cleansing is occurring in the West Bank, making it the first Western country to say that. This is grounds for hope and a moral act. Hurray for Britain, no cynicism intended. But Britain chose only to punish the settlers, which sets a dangerous precedent. By doing so, it is saying that there is Israel and there are settlers. There is a country and there is an occupation, there are Israelis and there are settlers.

How comfortable it is to make these distinctions, like distinguishing between Binyamin Netanyahu of wars and the opposition of peace. That way, perhaps no one will accuse Britain of anti-Semitism, except for Gideon Sa'ar, who specializes in blaming the world for that and punishing it accordingly.

But settlements are not an independent political entity. When Europe imposed sanctions on the occupied Crimean Peninsula, it also imposed sanctions on the occupier, Russia. How can you only punish the settlers without imposing penalties against those who initiated the settlements, fund them and defend and support them, namely the government of Israel?

The settlements are Israel and Israel is the settlements. The Green Line disappeared a long time ago, and no other line separates the West Bank from Israel, apart from the line of apartheid. All of us are Israelis and all of us are settlers. All of us bear responsibility for what is being done in our name.

If Britain thinks that there is ethnic cleansing, elements of which are among the most serious war crimes and crimes against humanity, then what good is it to punish the settlers? The settlers are supporting actors in the

horrors, and their responsibility is diminished. They are only the perpetrators—the soldiers carrying out the crime.

The settlement enterprise is an all-Israeli undertaking of the government and indeed the entire system. There is not a single official body not involved, directly or indirectly, either by action or by omission, undertaken with joy or with indifference. It is the state that should be punishing violent settlers, if it were a state of law; that is not the world's job. It is those responsible for the settlement enterprise who should be punished by the world because the Israeli government, like any government, cannot punish itself.

Therefore, Britain's decision to impose sanctions on the settlers provides the international community with a way to evade its responsibility. The world, which often deludes itself into believing that the source of all evil is Binyamin Netanyahu, must also remember that Netanyahu did not found the settlement enterprise. The entire Zionist enterprise stands behind the settlements, and with it the Zionist establishment throughout the world.

In terms of efficacy, sanctioning settlers will be of no consequence. The settlers are far removed from world culture, and nationalists believe Israel does not need the world. No sanctions on them will stop the extremists from running rampant over the stolen land.

Even the sanctions on imports of products from the settlements is of little consequence because only 2.3 percent of Israeli exports to Europe come from the settlements. At the Esh Kodesh outpost, the industry is hatred, not hi-tech; at Adei-Ad, the leading product is violence, not cherry tomatoes. The wine from the settlements is tainted, made from the grapes of wrath cultivated on stolen land.

Israel is not interested in the sanctions imposed on the settlements. The settlers are not overly bothered either, and rightly so. Less than a day after they were announced, the Civil Administration on Wednesday discussed building 747 housing units in the West Bank. The main thing is that in Westminster there is glee.

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Why We Shouldn't Call Colonial Israeli Settlers "Terrorists"

BY INÈS ABDEL RAZEK

On Aug. 9, dozens of Israeli settlers surrounded three Palestinian homes in Qusra, south of Nablus. They blocked residents from leaving safely, cut water and electricity, damaged water pipes, and prevented food and other essential supplies from reaching the families inside. Days later, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee—a longstanding supporter of the Israeli colonial enterprise—called those responsible "Israeli terrorists," echoing the growing use of the term in the mainstream media and by human rights groups, the U.N. and diplomatic circles.

For Palestinians who have endured over a century of systemic settler colonial violence, this rhetorical shift may be tempting to welcome as a step toward accountability. But embracing the "terrorism" framework would ultimately harm our cause and our people.

Settler colonial violence is, of course, real and terrifying, but "terrorism" is the wrong framework for understanding and confronting it, because it was designed to serve imperial designs and make settler violence look like an aberration. In this way, the label of "Israeli terrorism" often misleadingly characterizes settler violence as confined to the Israeli far right, even though it's the product of a broad Israeli consensus and a systemic feature of Israel's colonial regime.

THE ORIGINS OF THE "TERRORISM" LABEL

The terrorism framework did not emerge from positive or emancipatory values, but has been exclusively weaponized against oppressed and marginalized peoples in the service of imperial agendas. While in the 1960s, the terrorism framing was used by Western imperial interests against anti-colonial struggles (Algeria, South Africa, Vietnam, to name a few), the post 9/11 global "terrorism" narrative shifted to focus on a new "global enemy"—Islamic fundamentalism—and used to justify military occupations and atrocities across the world under the banner of the "War on Terror." More dangerously, it was used to build a legal arsenal encroaching on people's rights and freedoms, undermining the rule of law and peoples' sovereignty under the cover of legality.

Palestinians know intimately what this framework enables. For decades, the "terrorism" label has been used to criminalize the Palestinian liberation movement, from designating much of the Palestinian political spectrum as "terrorist," to carrying out colonial violence under the guise of "counterterrorism"—assassinating, imprisoning and torturing Palestinians in Jenin, Tulkarm and across Palestine. The same framework has been used to stifle Palestinian civil society, including through Israel's designation of six leading Palestinian organizations as "terrorist" organizations. And today, the language of counterterrorism has been used to justify the genocide in Gaza against 2.2 million Palestinians.

The Zionist regime even uses the counterterrorism framework to punish Palestinian victims of the settlers' violence. Case in point, the day after a group of armed settlers attacked Palestinian residents of the village of Til (framed as "confrontation" by the mainstream media), the Israeli army announced a "counterterror" operation in the entire northern West Bank.

There is a reason why terrorism has no agreed-upon definition under inter-

national law. It is a political tool whose meaning has been shaped by those with the power to wield it. A framework built and weaponized by imperial powers against colonized peoples cannot become the tool through which we dismantle colonial violence.

Another danger of embracing the "terrorism" label for settlers is that it exceptionalizes their violence, turning masked settlers who kill Palestinians, burn their homes and attack their villages into a violent fringe—º"bad apples" supposedly detached from an otherwise legitimate Israeli state and Zionist establishment.

But this violence is neither marginal nor new. Armed Zionist militias carried out expulsions, massacres and attacks on Palestinian communities long before the establishment of Israel, culminating in the *Nakba* of 1947–48 and continuing through the occupation that followed the June 1967 war. Today's settler violence belongs to this same continuum of dispossession.

Nor do settlers act outside the state. Their violence operates alongside—and is enabled and protected by—the military, police, courts and other state institutions that dispossess Palestinians. They facilitate the demolition of homes, the seizure of land, restrictions on water access and freedom of movement, the imprisonment of Palestinians and the forcible displacement of communities. Settlers are not an aberration from this system, but are among its agents.

The 1994 Ibrahimi mosque massacre illustrates this clearly. American colonial settler Baruch Goldstein murdered 29 Palestinian worshippers and was condemned by the Israeli government at the time as an extremist. Yet in the massacre's aftermath, it was Palestinians in Hebron who were subjected to collective punishment for a massacre they did not commit. The "extremist" could be disavowed while the colonial system around him was strengthened.

Today, calling violent settlers "Israeli terrorists," or insisting that figures like Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir "do not represent us" performs a similar function. While such rhetorical evolution is celebrated in Western establishment circles as a welcome widening of the Overton window, it does not arise from "miraculous epiphanies" driven by "moral urgency," to paraphrase Mohammed El Kurd's *Perfect Victims*.

On the contrary, it allows Western governments and Israel's supporters to distance themselves from the most visible brutality without confronting the system they continue to support. The selective sanctioning of a handful of "extremist settlers"—sanctions that can be imposed and removed according to political convenience—follows the same logic, offering the appearance of accountability while leaving support for the broader system intact. The "terrorist" label becomes a convenient smokescreen: remove the bad apples, and the system itself can remain unquestioned.

NOT A RIGHT-WING ISSUE

Framing settlers as "terrorists" reinforces another convenient fiction: that the violence of occupation belongs to Israel's extremist far right, rather than reflecting a much broader political consensus.

While there are differences in rhetoric, pace and strategic vision within Israeli politics—the so-called "left" favoring a more gradual and internationally palatable approach, while the far right openly advocates accelerated annexation and erasure—these differences obscure a large consensus within Israeli Jewish society calling for Palestinian dispossession and continued Israeli control. The divide is often less over the underlying project than over how aggressively and how visibly to pursue it.

This illusion is particularly visible during the current Israeli election campaign, as Western governments once again cling to the hope that ousting Netanyahu could restore Israeli institutions and reopen the path to "dialogue." Yet Israeli politicians themselves repeatedly expose the limits of this distinction. When the UK condemned the E1 settlement plan, Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar defended the Jewish people's right to live throughout the "Land of Israel," invoking the Balfour Declaration as having recognized that right. In June, Netanyahu again rejected Palestinian statehood between the Jordan River and the sea, while Smotrich openly advances annexation in support of the Greater Israel vision. Even within the supposedly centrist opposition, positions on Palestinian land and settler violence reveal far more continuity than the language of "extremists" suggests.

Calling the most visible settlers and far-right politicians "terrorists" helps preserve this illusion. It allows Western governments to imagine that the problem lies with Netanyahu, Ben-Gvir or a radical settler fringe—and that removing them could restore a more acceptable Israel—rather than confronting the structures that have sustained Palestinian dispossession for decades.

ERASING THE PALESTINIAN RIGHT TO RESIST

Finally, the terrorism framework reinforces the fiction of "two sides." Once a few government figures and settlers are framed as "terrorists," their violence can easily be mirrored against Palestinian armed resistance: Israeli terrorists on one side, Palestinian terrorists on the other. Colonization is thus recast as a tit-for-tat conflict between two equivalent violent actors, erasing the profound imbalance of power between colonizer and colonized and denying Palestinians' right to resist.

This false symmetry has concrete political consequences. When the EU sanctioned violent West Bank settlers, it simultaneously added Hamas figures to the same sanctions framework, as though condemning settler violence required an equivalent Palestinian target. The result is precisely the "both sides" logic the terrorism framework reproduces: an equivalence between the violence of an occupying power and the resistance of an occupied people.

The inconvenient reality is that decades of international impunity are the central reason why the colonial settlers' movement has reached such levels of unleashed violence today. Calling settlers "terrorists" offers another escape from that accountability: it isolates individual perpetrators while leaving intact the system that arms, protects and enables them.

I believe the "terrorism" label should not be used for any group, globally. West Bank settler violence is state-backed settler colonial violence. It is part and parcel of a century-long Zionist settler colonial project. Confronting this violence means confronting the institutions, policies and structures that produce it—not simply the individuals who carry it out. Call it what it is.

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Can a Party Be Leftist and Zionist?

BY TAMAM ABUSALAMA

Ahead of Israel's Oct. 27 elections, Israel's Young Democrats, the youth wing of the newly formed Democrats party, are seeking foreign allies. They recently announced a joint campaign with the Young Greens of Austria to support "progressive voices on the ground and work with them towards a sustainable peace."

Meanwhile, another youth group described as "leftist," Hamahanot Haolim (the Ascending Camps), is exploring plans to build a new *kibbutz* in the occupied West Bank, near Jericho.

When questioned about the impact on the Palestinian population, the group's director, Ilan Gazit, explained that since Israeli settlements are being built regardless, "the left" should make sure it is Israeli "leftists," not far-right settlers, who populate them. "We aren't ashamed of this, and we aren't hiding it," he said.

These two youth movements and their foreign sympathizers appear to treat "leftist Zionism" as a coherent political identity. But can a party, a movement, or an individual be both leftist and Zionist?

The short answer, from a Palestinian and anti–colonial perspective, is no. So why is it touted in Israel and beyond as a legitimate ideological belief? Because it is a political technology designed to shield Zionism from any critique while preserving the structures of oppression.

A QUESTION WITH HISTORY

The question about the viability of "leftist Zionism" is not new. Zionism emerged as an organized Jewish nationalist movement in Europe in the 19th century. At its core was the aim of establishing a Jewish national home, an idea shaped by European nationalism, European anti-Semitism and colonial expansion.

Its early political architects advanced two connected projects: redefining Judaism as a national identity and colonizing Palestine. Theodor Herzl, a Hungarian Jewish journalist who is seen as the founder of Zionism, was motivated not by religious zeal, as he espoused secularism, but by the growing anti-Semitism in Europe.

After Herzl's death in 1904, leftist ideas entered the movement as various socialist factions rose to dominance within the World Zionist Organization and in early settler communities in Palestine itself.

But these leftist elements were not driven by a genuine commitment to class-based struggle and internationalism. Rather, they used a socialist vocabulary to justify a settler-colonial nation-building project, carried out through *kibbutzim,* labor unions and diplomacy.

Whatever position early Zionists staked out on the political spectrum, what the movement ultimately produced—the state of Israel—was in direct contradiction with the anti-colonial, anti-racist politics the left was supposed to stand for.

In 1975, the United Nations General Assembly acknowledged this by adopting Resolution 3379, declaring that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination." The resolution was revoked in 1991, after sustained pressure from Israel and its allies and in the wake of the Soviet collapse.

The debate about "leftist Zionism" continues till today. The issue is not whether individual Zionists can hold progressive views on particular social or economic questions. Some might.

The real question is whether a political project organized around building and sustaining a state premised on Jewish supremacy through ethnic cleansing, dispossession, apartheid and now genocide can be reconciled with the left's foundational commitments: equity, anti–racism, decolonization and social justice for everyone.

It clearly cannot.

LEFTIST POLITICS IN ISRAEL

When considering the historical record, it is important to note that for decades, Israel was governed by parties that would self-describe as "leftist."

Mapai was established as a Labor Zionist party in 1930, led by David Ben-Gurion. It became the dominant force within early Zionist politics and the principal architect of the pre–state and early institutions, including the Haganah, which carried out various terrorist attacks and massacres against the Palestinians.

Mapai governed Israel well into the 1960s, giving way to the Labor Party, which dominated Israeli politics until the 1990s.

Labor Zionism spoke the language of workers' solidarity while building institutions that excluded Palestinians by design.

The Histadrut, Israel's dominant trade–union confederation, was founded in 1920 as an instrument of

the Zionist "conquest of labor": a project designed to build Jewish settlements by systematically displacing Palestinian workers from the economy and reducing dependence on indigenous labor. After 1948, this exclusion was institutionalized: Palestinian workers were either barred from membership outright or confined to second-class status for decades, denied voting rights and meaningful representation even as they paid union fees.

Today, even when on paper Palestinians should have the same rights as Jewish Israeli workers, in practice they do not. Collective bargaining agreements in key sectors, such as construction, are consistently not applied to them because their employment is rendered unstable, informal and "temporary" by design. In this way, the Histadrut functions less as a defender of workers' rights and more as a key actor in reproducing a settler-colonial order that segregates, exploits and disempowers Palestinian labor.

The school system set up by early Labor governments functioned as an instrument of ideological formation: forging Jewish national consciousness while erasing Palestinian presence, and recasting settlement as national redemption rather than colonization.

The *kibbutz* and *moshav* movements, the flagship institutions of Labor Zionism, were central to the project of land theft and displacement. Many *kibbutzim,* due to their location, served as staging grounds for Haganah operations in 1948, including the depopulation of nearby Palestinian villages, making the settlement map itself part of the operational infrastructure of the *Nakba*.

FALLING INTO THE LEFT-RIGHT ZIONIST TRAP

Despite the long historical record of crimes committed by Mapai and Labor governments against the Palestinians, many leftists in the West continue to fall for the "leftist" label within the context of Israeli politics. They appear to believe that what is happening in Palestine could be solely blamed on Israel's right-wing political forces led by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Campaigns like that of the Young Greens of Austria and Israel's Young Democrats seemingly reinforce this misguided belief. In the end, their ultimate aim is not to amplify "progressive voices" or deliver a "just peace" to the Palestinians, but to impose a political category—"leftist Zionist"—that is, in essence, incoherent and contradictory.

The constant reference to a "far-right Netanyahu government" does real political work. It implies that a "Zionist left" could be a credible progressive alternative, one that is capable of changing the colonial reality Palestinians live under and one that is not to blame for Israeli crimes.

That framing lets the underlying structure—Israel's settler colonialism—off the hook, treating it as a policy choice of the Israeli far right specifically, rather than the logic of Zionism itself.

Palestinians do not need political theory to see the truth. Generations of them know, in their flesh, that there is no difference between Zionism on the left and Zionism on the right when it comes to their dispossession. The occupation did not start with Netanyahu, and a change in government will not end it.

Any leftist party in Europe or beyond that wants to remain aligned with its own values has one path. It should listen to Palestinians, follow and support forces like the Green Party of England and Wales in naming Zionism for what it is: a racist, settler-colonial ideology. Not a policy to be reformed, but an ideology to be abolished.

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Israel Is not Heading for Civil War

BY ORI GOLDBERG

On Aug. 24, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu stood outside the Etzel Museum on Tel Aviv's seafront after the wreck of the *Altalena* was discovered. The ship, which belonged to the right-wing Zionist paramilitary organization Etzel, was shelled by the newly formed Israeli military in 1948. Netanyahu promised to raise it from the seabed and turn it into a symbol for future generations, centered on the message: "Civil war, never again."

Etzel, better known in English as Irgun, promoted a highly nationalistic vision of Jewish political life and advocated Jewish military supremacy. It had operated as an independent armed organization before Israel's establishment and resisted surrendering its weapons and autonomy to the new state. In June 1948, as it was being absorbed into the newly formed Israeli military, the *Altalena* arrived carrying more than 900 immigrants, medical supplies and a large shipment of weapons. Irgun and the government could not agree on control of the arms, and the dispute escalated into fighting. After an initial confrontation north of Tel Aviv, the ship sailed south toward the city. Left-wing Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion ordered Israeli forces to shell it off Tel Aviv. Etzel leader Menachem Begin, who was on board, urged his supporters not to retaliate and warned against civil war.

For the Israeli right, the *Altalena* became a symbol of the left's willingness to use force against fellow Jews to impose its political authority. The episode endured as a historical grievance, but it never became a constant feature of Israeli political life. For decades, it largely remained a symbolic tale, invoked from time to time before gradually receding into historical memory. Its re-

discovery in the middle of an election campaign has abruptly revived that symbolism. By invoking Begin's warning against civil war while resurrecting one of the right's oldest grievances against the left, Netanyahu was not simply calling for unity. He was also issuing a veiled threat: We remember what you did. If need be, we will come for you as you came for us.

Still, is Israel really headed for a civil war? This seems highly unlikely. The reason is simple: Israelis ultimately agree with each other. There is no deep ideological divide within Israeli public opinion. Instead, there is a broad and deep consensus. Security is the cornerstone of Israeli public life and identity, overriding all other considerations. The primary purpose of the Israeli state is to keep Jews alive, preferably by establishing their supremacy over their neighbors, first and foremost the Palestinians, with whom they are competing for control of the same resources. Security is considered "apolitical." The Oct. 7, 2023 attacks changed Israel's security doctrine virtually overnight. Notions such as peace or normalization were no longer compatible with a security doctrine centered on guaranteeing the safety of Jews.

Israel needed to be able to fight when, where and how it saw fit. Israel needed to increase its already unprecedented impunity and secure permission to exercise full discretion in pursuing its aggressive policies. All Jewish political parties—with "Zionist" now effectively serving as the code word for "Jewish"—agreed on this, even if they had differences of opinion regarding scope. This is, in other words, an agreement to ensure Jewish supremacy in Israel, to not even consider ending the occupation—which the International Court of Justice has found unlawful—and to continue a forever war that provides Israel with justification to "carry the fight to the enemy," wherever that might be.

In concrete political terms, this means that the Israeli public may abhor Netanyahu's personal ethics and standards of behavior, but the great majority still agrees with his policies. Reading the Hebrew press and social media, it is not difficult to see that, with the exception of, at most, several thousand people, Israeli Jews are willing to live with this tension and support Israel's genocidal policies with no end in sight.

This consensus is deeper and more powerful than symbolic games played with obsolete relics. The Israeli military would never fire on settlers attempting to drive Palestinians from their homes. The Israeli military is still Israel: it is the crucible in which Israeli nationalism has been forged. As long as Jewish supremacy remains the cornerstone of the Israeli military and the Israeli state, there will be no civil war.

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Israeli Officials Promote Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories About Israel

BY CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

Israeli officials have spent recent days circulating anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, with Binyamin Netanyahu boasting that he manipulated the United States into war with Iran, and Itamar Ben-Gvir sharing an AI video of Palestinians being sent to Nazi-style concentration camps.

In an appearance on Israel's Channel 12 on Sunday evening, Prime Minister Netanyahu said in Hebrew that he'd "been against Iran for almost 40 years" and had worked hard influencing the United States to join Israel in a war of aggression to topple Tehran.

"It took a long time to bring the United States in," the prime minister said. "I was able to do this because I had close to a thousand hours on American television, influence in the United States, and intimate knowledge of all its leaders—both those who support us and those who do not."

As we all know, it is a horrifying evil disgusting monstrous Nazi anti-Semitic trope to suggest that Washington is manipulated by Israel or that Israelis have anything to do with American wars. The Anti-Defamation League tells us that such assertions "play into tropes about 'Jewish control' of government and are unacceptable." Earlier this year the ADL Center on Extremism warned that the war in Iran is leading to "a rapid convergence of extremists, alleged anti-war activists and anti-Israel groups around a shared set of narratives, including that the strikes were launched for Israel's benefit at the cost of American lives, that Jewish or Zionist actors exercise illegitimate control or power over U.S. foreign policy."

So I am sure we can expect anti-Semitism watchdog groups to take a short break from yelling about Hasan Piker and instead spend some of that energy denouncing Binyamin Netanyahu's crazed and hateful conspiracy theories about himself and his own personal actions.

Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has also contributed to the rising tide of anti-Semitism by posting an AI video promoting the hateful blood libel that Israel treats Palestinians in the same way Nazi Germany treated the Jews.

In the video, which Ben-Gvir subsequently deleted in response to public outcry, a group of obese AI-animated Arabs are seen having their dreams of a happy future crushed as the national security minister loads them onto a conveyor belt feeding them into a concentration camp with barbed wire walls where they are seen weeping and

growing emaciated like Holocaust victims.

According to the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism which Western governments are firmly encouraging us all to comply with, "Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis" is an example of hateful discrimination against the Jewish people. By publicly boasting of Israeli policies that he himself is responsible for instituting which are clearly intended to evoke the memory of Nazi death camps, Ben-Gvir clearly now stands guilty of an anti-Semitic hate crime.

Since our society has decided that anti-Semitism is the single most urgent threat on our planet and must be placed front and center of our attention at all times throughout all of our politics and media, I trust that we will soon see these Israeli anti-Semitic blood libels treated with the widespread condemnation they so deserve.

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian opinion writer whose work, co-authored with her American husband, Tim Foley, is entirely reader-supported. Her newsletter is available on Substack *and her website is <www.caitlinjohnstone.com.au>. This article was first posted at both sites, Sept. 1, 2026. Reprinted with permission.*

Israel's Culture Minister Threatens to Revoke Citizenship of Gaza Doc Filmmakers

BY *HAARETZ*

Israel's Culture Minister Miki Zohar threatened Sunday to revoke the citizenship of Oscar-winning filmmakers Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor after their documentary film "NAZA" won the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival on Saturday.

Writing on X, Zohar described the film as "vile," saying it "constitutes treason."

"This is exactly the reason I led the important reform in cinema so that Israeli citizens will no longer have to pay out of their own pockets for the harm to IDF soldiers and the State of Israel," Zohar said, referring to his reform of government funding for the local movie industry.

According to promotional materials, the film details the "systems behind Israel's calculated mass killing of Palestinian civilians in Gaza," and features testimony from IDF intelligence officers and soldiers.

Abraham said earlier on Sunday that the film crew will do "everything" to distribute the movie "as widely as possible" in Israel, as it received condemnation from Israeli politicians and public figures for accusing "IDF soldiers of genocide" in Gaza.

In his first response after the award ceremony, Abraham said that it is important that Israelis "listen to the [IDF] soldiers" appearing in the movie.

The soldiers and officers "spoke in Hebrew because they wanted to reach out to the Israeli public. They wanted [Israelis] to hear what they did in Gaza," he added.

Opposition MK and former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman called Abraham and Szor "haters of Israel" and accused them of turning the October 7 massacre into a blood libel against Israel.

Yoseph Haddad, a media personality who joined Ofer Winter's right-wing Amcha Yisrael party earlier this month, also took to X, writing that Abraham and Szor "created an appalling movie whose whole purpose is to accuse IDF soldiers of genocide."

"The two know that the formula for winning an international award is creating a film that slanders the soldiers," he added.

Chairman of the leftist Hadash party congratulated the directors on the award, thanking them for [putting] "before the eyes of millions of people these horrific crimes and the brutal reality in Gaza."

The film premiered at the Venice Film Festival on Thursday, earning a record-breaking 25-minute standing ovation.

"The core of the film is a system of killing that has killed more than 70,000 Palestinians in Gaza—estimates say the real number is much higher—the way it worked and the way the world allowed it to happen," Abraham said in the news conference after the film. "This is the heart of what we want to do."

"NAZA" broke a previous festival record set by another film that deals with Palestinian civilians killed in Gaza—"The Voice of Hind Rajab," which tells the true story of a young girl trapped in a car in Gaza under Israeli fire, and received an ovation surpassing 20 minutes when it premiered in Venice last year.

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How the U.S. Tried (and Failed) To Learn From "The Battle of Algiers"

BY MARTIN DI CARO

The stern Colonel Mathieu, in shades and camouflage, stands cross-armed as flashbulbs pop a few feet away. The photographers' lenses and newsreel cameras are focused on a handcuffed resistance leader standing next to him.

An officer barks, "No more photographs," as one of the journalists packed into the military command room rises from his seat. "Mr. Ben M'hidi, isn't it cowardly to use your women's baskets to carry bombs, which have taken so many innocent lives?"

A bespectacled Larbi Ben M'hidi coolly responds, "Isn't it even more cowardly to attack defenseless villages with napalm bombs that kill many thousands of times more? Obviously planes would make things easier for us. Give us your bombers, sir, and you can have our baskets."

A second reporter asks, "Does the FLN still have some chance of defeating the French army?"

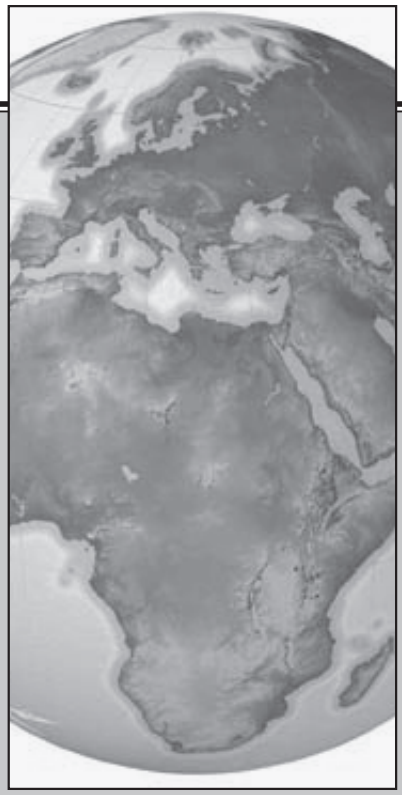
"The FLN has more of a chance of defeating the French army than the French have of changing the course of history," Ben M'hidi answered.

If the offended French delegates to the Venice Film Festival had gotten their way 60 Septembers ago, this important scene in a remarkable film may not have entered cinematic history. But festival management did not succumb to their pressure, and on Sept. 10, 1966, "The Battle of Algiers," directed by the Italian neorealist Gillo Pontecorvo, won the prestigious Golden Lion award. The film was banned in France.

Long after the height of decolonization, "The Battle of Algiers" still scintillates in grainy black and white. With only one professional actor among the cast, Pontecorvo enlisted hundreds of ordinary Algerians, their memories fresh, to recreate the Front de Libération Nationale's (FLN) existential battle against their colonizers.

Saadi Yacef's role must have come naturally. He was the FLN's military chief in Algiers. The struggle—both in real life and as depicted in Pontecorvo's masterpiece, shot in the narrow passageways of the Casbah—inspired national liberation movements, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization, while raising questions that continue to confront our modern world.

When is armed resistance legitimate? When does resistance become terrorism? Can torture ever be justified? Why do colonial or imperial powers wage asymmetrical "forever wars" against weaker yet stubborn foes? As soon as the film debuted in the summer of '66, French critics attacked Pontecorvo for romanticizing the FLN's heroes who had much innocent blood on their hands.



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The elite paratroopers under the fictional Colonel Mathieu (a composite character based on two real commanders) ruthlessly crushed the FLN's terror network in the Casbah in 1957. But *les colons* did not change the course of history. The colonizers eventually gave way to the decolonizers, ending 132 years of French rule when they departed Algeria in 1962. Their defeat flowed from the methods they used to put down the revolt, namely torture and disproportionate retaliation. They could not, in the end, impose a political solution through violence against insurgents committed to expelling them from their country.

As Americans reflect on the failures of the "global war on terrorism," it is worth remembering that U.S. military leadership once tried to learn from Pontecorvo's film. As Iraq disintegrated into chaos in late 2003, the Pentagon held a screening of "The Battle of Algiers" to "discuss the implicit issues at the core of the film—the problematic but alluring efficacy of brutal and repressive means in fighting clandestine terrorists in places like Algeria and Iraq," according to *The New York Times*.

The officers in attendance would have seen Pontecorvo's searing depiction of torture. They must have noted the French commanders, utterly inured to civilian deaths, congratulating themselves upon the apparent success of their counter-insurgency campaign: "The FLN is decapitated in Algiers. We'll hear no more of it." Then the dramatic finale: mass independence demonstrations suddenly broke three years of relative calm. Hundreds of women making "frightening rhythmic cries" confronting French riot police. A narrator intones, "Two more years of struggle still lay ahead. Then…the Algerian nation was born."

Did the U.S. military brass absorb the moral of Pontecorvo's story: the impossibility of imposing your will on a foreign people, even with over-

whelming firepower at your disposal? If they did, U.S. military conduct showed otherwise, undermining President George W. Bush's claim that the United States was helping Iraq become a free society. The battle for Iraqis' hearts and minds was lost almost as soon as it began. U.S. tactics catalyzed, rather than squelched, a gathering Sunni insurgency.

"Clearing out villages and towns involved house-to-house searches that frequently violated Iraqis' social norms of privacy (especially of women and girls) and honor (especially men). Many thousands of Iraqi men and boys were arrested in front of their families and sent to detention camps or prisons like Abu Ghraib without any evidence of wrongdoing,"the late historian John Tirman wrote in his 2011 study, *The Deaths of Others*.

"Some 120,000 Iraqis were detained. In the house-to-house searches, if Iraqis resisted in any way, violence could readily follow," Tirman continued. "The procedure itself was violent."

Photos of detainee abuse at Abu Ghraib, which had been a torture and execution center under Saddam, sparked international outrage in April 2004, while further strengthening the insurgency. Foreign *jihadists* flocked to Iraq to commit suicide bombings while the new Shi'i-dominated government in Baghdad did its part in fomenting civil war. "The Ministry of the Interior, which controlled the country's internal security, was populated by Shi'i death squads who were killing Sunnis," notes Peter Bergen in *All the Presidents' Wars*.

It took years for the Pentagon to change course. With the help of the Sunni "Awakening" movement that turned against al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Pentagon's troop "surge" combined with the construction of concrete walls separating Sunni and Shi'i neighborhoods to dramatically reduce violence. Yet Bergen concludes, "the surge didn't heal the political wounds in Iraq…you couldn't just kill your way to peace."

The French, too, believed they had won the battle. In reality, they corrupted themselves, humiliated their nation and lost the war. When reports of abuses in Algeria—torture, disappearances, rogue police bombings—reached France, public opinion spiraled down.

"In the Algerian War what led—probably more than any other single factor—to the ultimate defeat of France was the realization, in France and the world at large, that methods of interrogation were being used that had been condemned under the Nazi Occupation," said historian Alistair Horne in the preface to the 2006 edition of his classic book, *A Savage War of Peace*. The author sent a copy to then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to warn him of the evils of torture—to no avail.

No analogy is perfect. The French spilled blood intending to stay in Algeria forever. The United States envisioned eventually going home while leaving a stable, democratic Iraq in its wake. It didn't work.

Washington continues to overlook the lessons "The Battle of Algiers" so effectively conveys, whether by enabling Israel's brutality in Gaza or trying to bomb Iran into submission. Meanwhile, at this year's Venice Film Festival, Israeli documentarians—in the tradition of Gillo Pontecorvo—are receiving 25-minute standing ovations as they try to shock their countrymen's consciences.

Where is the American Pontecorvo?

Martin Di Caro is an independent journalist based in Washington, DC, and the host of History As It Happens *podcast. This article was first posted at <www.responsiblestatecraft.org>, Sept. 15, 2026. The views expressed by authors on* Responsible Statecraft *do not necessarily reflect those of the Quincy Institute or its associates.* *Copyright © 2026 Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.*

Israel Takes its War on Palestine Into the AI Age

BY SAID ARIKAT

The battle over Palestine has never been fought only on the ground. For decades, Israel and its powerful political, lobbying and public-relations networks have devoted enormous resources to shaping how the conflict is understood in Washington and across the Western world. But an investigation into an Israeli-funded influence operation suggests that this campaign has entered a new and potentially more consequential arena: the artificial intelligence systems increasingly used by millions of people to determine what is true.

Recent investigations exposed the Hanover Institute for Public Policy as a purported American think tank that appeared to have no real offices, identifiable scholars or meaningful institutional presence. Instead, the institute appears to have been created as a sophisticated propaganda operation aimed at shaping search engine results and influencing the answers generated by AI chatbots.

Documents filed under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) trace the operation's funding through advertising and public-relations firms to LaPam, Israel's state advertising agency. Piro Inc., the New York advertising firm involved, was operating under a $900,000 digital communications work order on the Israeli account.

What makes the case extraordinary is not simply that an Israeli government-funded operation sought to influence public opinion. Governments have always done that. What is different is the apparent attempt to influence the machines increasingly shaping public opinion.

In just nine days, the Hanover website reportedly produced more than 560,000 words across 124 academic-style reports. The material was structured around questions likely to be submitted to AI systems, including whether Gaza faced a policy of starvation and whether the Israeli military is "the world's most moral army."

Piro markets this approach as "AI Story Optimization," designed to make material highly visible to search en-

gines and easily digestible to large language models. The site also included technical features designed to make its material easier for AI systems to find and process.

The objective, therefore, was not simply to persuade readers. It was to influence the algorithms that increasingly determine what information those readers receive.

That represents a fundamental shift in the propaganda game.

Traditional propaganda can often be identified by its source, tone or obvious political agenda. More sophisticated propaganda is harder to detect because it disguises advocacy as neutral expertise. The Hanover material reportedly employed statistics, charts and graphs, cited legitimate primary documents and adopted the language of academic research while selectively framing evidence and omitting external links.

That is precisely the kind of material that can acquire artificial credibility when consumed by an AI system.

Consider the implications. A student asks an AI chatbot whether Israel has used starvation as a weapon in Gaza. A journalist requests an assessment of Israel's conduct under international law. A voter seeks a neutral explanation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

If a fabricated research institution has successfully inserted its material into the information ecosystem, an AI-generated answer could reproduce its framing without the user ever knowing the source was manufactured.

That risk is not merely hypothetical: in tests by *Politico,* both ChatGPT and Perplexity cited Hanover material in response to neutral questions about Gaza, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

The machine does not necessarily understand that an apparently authoritative institute is fictitious. It sees text, citations, statistics and repeated claims. If those materials have been deliberately optimized for discovery and synthesis, propaganda can acquire the appearance of independent knowledge.

That is what makes the episode so disturbing.

For years, Israel and its supporters have fought to shape the vocabulary through which Palestinians are discussed. "Security," "terrorism," "self-defense" and Israel's right to exist have often dominated the conversation, while occupation, settlement expansion, dispossession, blockade and Palestinian self-determination have struggled for comparable political weight.

The digital age initially appeared to offer Palestinians a way around traditional gatekeepers. Social media, independent journalism and videos recorded by Palestinians themselves allowed information from Gaza and the occupied territory to reach global audiences without passing through established media institutions.

The response now appears to be moving deeper: not merely controlling what people see, but attempting to influence the systems that determine what information they receive.

That is a far more ambitious form of narrative warfare.

The FARA disclosures are particularly significant because they demonstrate why transparency requirements matter. Investigators reportedly traced the Hanover operation through documents filed by Piro, which described work on the institute's website. The trail led through Havas Media's German operation, reportedly handling a much larger Israeli government account, and ultimately to LaPam.

The paper trail matters because foreign influence becomes especially dangerous when disguised as independent American expertise. Americans are entitled to know when an apparently neutral research organization is actually part of a foreign government's communications strategy.

But the incident exposes a vulnerability extending far beyond this particular conflict.

Artificial intelligence systems do not possess an independent window into reality. They depend on information ecosystems created by humans. If governments, corporations or political organizations can deliberately flood those ecosystems with strategically crafted material, they may be able to influence the information from which AI systems construct their answers.

Palestine is an especially revealing testing ground because the conflict already unfolds within an intensely contested information environment. Its documentary record encompasses decades of occupation, settlements, displacement, wars, restrictions, humanitarian crises, diplomatic initiatives and international investigations.

A credible information system should expose users to that complexity. A sophisticated propaganda system seeks to manage it.

That is why the Hanover affair should concern far more people than those who follow the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If a foreign government or its contractors can create a fictitious think tank to influence AI systems today, other governments, political campaigns, corporations and wealthy interest groups may attempt similar operations tomorrow.

The precedent is bigger than Israel.

But Israel's alleged role makes the episode particularly revealing because it shows how an established lobbying and public-relations infrastructure can adapt to a new technological environment. The battle is no longer confined to Congress, television networks, newspapers, universities or social media.

It is moving into the architecture of knowledge itself.

The question facing AI companies is therefore urgent: Who is teaching the machines what to tell us about Palestine—and about the world?

AI developers need stronger safeguards against coordinated influence operations, fabricated institutions and synthetic bodies of research. Search engines must improve their ability to distinguish genuine institutional expertise from websites created primarily to manipulate algorithms. Journalists and academics should scrutinize authoritative-looking sources that lack verifiable institutional foundations. Governments must enforce foreign agent disclosure requirements when foreign states seek to shape American public discourse.

Most importantly, users must understand that an AI-generated answer is not automatically an independent assessment. It reflects the information available to the system—and that information can be deliberately engineered.

The Hanover investigation should therefore be understood as more than another episode in the long-running struggle over Israel's image.

It is a warning about the future of the Palestinian question.

For decades, Israel and its supporters have fought to shape the narrative surrounding Palestinians through politics, lobbying, diplomacy and public relations. The new frontier is algorithms.

If the objective is to manufacture an alternative reality—one in which inconvenient facts disappear, contested claims are recast as consensus, and Palestinian experiences are erased or rewritten—the battlefield has become far larger and more dangerous. The most insidious propaganda may no longer be what we recognize as propaganda, but information an AI system confidently presents to us as neutral fact.

Said Arikat is a Washington-based journalist. This article was first posted at <www.aljazeera.com>, Sept. 4, 2026. The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial stance. Copyright © 2026 Al Jazeera Media Network. Reprinted with permission.

A Homeland on Canvas: Sliman Mansour and the Rise of Revolutionary Palestinian Art

BY RAMZY BAROUD

The death of Palestinian artist Sliman Anis Mansour stirred powerful memories.

He passed away at Al-Makassed Hospital in occupied East Jerusalem on Aug. 24, at the age of 79, bringing to a close a legacy that cannot truly be described, but only experienced.

His life almost exactly spanned the age of the Palestinian *Nakba*. He was born mere months before the mass expulsion of the Palestinian people from their homeland. Yet his death in an occupied city tells us that the story of Mansour, his art and the Palestinian struggle for freedom is far from over.

Oddly, for years, I knew Mansour through a single painting: Jamal al-Mahamel ("The Camel Carrier of Hardships").

The title itself requires a pause. The phrase is rooted in Palestinian and Levantine popular culture. It describes one who shoulders the collective struggles, pain and responsibilities of others.

In Mansour's post-*Nakba* world, that person is an elderly Palestinian porter, a barefoot worker carrying the burden of an entire homeland on his back. That homeland is represented by Jerusalem, with the Dome of the Rock, one of Islam's holiest sites, rising above it.

Mansour, however, was not a Muslim. He belonged to the once-thriving, though sadly shrinking, Palestinian Christian community and came from the town of Birzeit, near Ramallah in the West Bank.

Let that sink in. One of the most iconic Palestinian paintings of the modern era, celebrating the centrality of Jerusalem and one of its most recognizable historic Islamic sites, was painted by a Christian man.

In the age of Israeli extremists like National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and his "religious wars," this may appear unusual. For Palestinians, it is anything but. Though deeply spiritual, Palestinians have historically transcended religious divides in their long struggle for freedom.

A mosque is never just a mosque, and a church is never just a church. They are powerful symbols of history, culture, roots, spirituality and continuity. Mansour entrusted the Camel of Hardships with carrying all of that alone, as the world watched an old man bent beneath an unbearable weight, yet fierce and unbroken in his resolve.

Though the painting was created in 1973, it exploded in popularity during the first intifada, the popular uprising that unified Palestinians everywhere. It took on a renewed meaning: we Palestinians may be standing alone, exhausted by time and the betrayal of others, but we remain as steadfast as ever.

The last time I saw that painting hanging in the living room of my old house in the Nuseirat refugee camp in Gaza was also the last time I saw my father, most of my brothers and many of my childhood friends.

My father died years later. The house was bombed. The painting no longer hangs where it once did, at the heart of our old refugee home.

Ironically, it was only after I left Palestine that I discovered that Sliman Mansour was far more than the creator of a single painting. He belonged to an artistic movement that taught visual *sumud,* steadfastness, to an entire generation.

My lack of knowledge was not a fault of my own. Artists such as Mansour, Ismail Shammout, Fathi Ghaben, Vera Tamari, Tayseer Barakat and Nabil Anani, among others, were simply forbidden by Israeli military ordinances.

Israel is afraid of Palestinian art, particularly art that preserves memory, asserts steadfastness and speaks of revolution. During the intifada, the Israeli army would storm Palestinian refugee camps almost daily, particularly before dawn, to ensure that artistic expressions on the walls were painted over.

The soldiers did not paint over the walls themselves, of course. They dragged weary refugees from their sleep and forced them to erase every piece of graffiti, every image and every word. The soldiers may have thought they were carrying out a military duty, somehow protecting Israel's national security. In reality, they were trying to erase evidence of a people whose roots

in the land ran far deeper than the occupation itself.

But the evidence was never erased. It could not simply be painted over, even when the artist himself disappeared, because true art is more than an arrangement of colors on canvas. It is one of the deepest forms of documenting one's own existence.

Fathi Ghaben, who became a close friend of my family, had, like most Gazans, more than his share of suffering. He was a refugee from a once-serene village called Hirbiya, north of Gaza. His family sought refuge in Gaza during the *Nakba*.

Ghaben had no memories of the village he lost as a child, yet its colors filled his paintings. For him, Palestine was a beautiful woman, powerful in her determination yet gentle in her gaze. Her eyes, always sharply defined, embodied the beauty of a homeland that never abandoned him. She was the worker, the farmer, the student, the protester, the fighter.

Ghaben was repeatedly imprisoned by Israel for emphasizing the colors of the Palestinian flag in his art, accused of "incitement through his paintings." The occupation army killed his young nephew in 1982, and many of his relatives were killed in the genocide.

Ghaben himself died during the genocide, in February 2024, after being displaced from his home.

For me, and dare I say for many of my generation, it is difficult to process art that does not carry this kind of weight—art that goes beyond mere "expression" and becomes an experience of blood, sweat, tears and the burden of memories that can only be put to rest when justice in Palestine finally prevails.

I think back to the Camel of Hardships, and I am convinced that Mansour's figure represented more than Palestine and the Palestinian. Perhaps unknowingly, he was also painting the Palestinian artist himself.

They, too, carried an immense responsibility on their shoulders. Without them, several generations might never have truly appreciated the colors of Palestine, smelled the powder of revolution, or understood the true meaning of losing a homeland.

Dr. Ramzy Baroud is a journalist, author and the editor of The Palestine Chronicle. *He is the author of eight books. His latest book,* Before the Flood, *along with* Our Vision for Liberation, My Father was a Freedom Fighter *and* The Last Earth, *are all available from Middle East Books and More. Baroud is a non-resident senior research fellow at the Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA). This article was first posted at his website, <www.ramzybaroud.net>, Sept. 3, 2026. Copyright © 2010-2026* RamzyBaroud.net. *All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.*

After Iran, U.S. Signals Major Security Shift in The Middle East

BY ABDELRAHIM SHALABY

When President Donald Trump congratulated Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan for signing the Mecca Pact, describing it as a "BIG, BOLD, IMPORTANT FIRST STEP," he was not simply trafficking in diplomatic pleasantries. The Trump administration also tacitly endorsed a multilateral, Saudi-led maritime initiative to protect shipping in the Red Sea, sending senior U.S. military officials to the meeting where the arrangement was agreed to.

The thread running through both initiatives is clear: regional states taking greater responsibility for their own security.

Behind Trump's flattery, something more important appears to be taking shape. According to Pentagon planning reported by *The Washington Post,* the Defense Department is exploring a broader reduction of its forces in the Persian Gulf, which would entail moving units, command centers and aerial capabilities west toward Jordan, Israel and Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast. This would mean abandoning large, fixed bases in favor of small, hardened positions. The Pentagon views the destruction caused by Iranian attacks on U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf as a "once-in-a-generation chance," in the *Post's* words, to rethink America's force posture in the region instead of simply rebuilding it.

After six months of war with Iran, the efforts suggest that the U.S. is considering a dramatic adjustment to its force posture in the Middle East—one that would put far more emphasis on regional self-sufficiency. But it's a far cry from a U.S. withdrawal from the region.

The logic for the potential adjustments is straightforward. Moving troops to Jordan, Israel and the west coast of Saudi Arabia places them behind better air defenses, giving them longer warning times in case of future Iranian attacks, while maintaining the ability to carry out strikes of their own in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb. Such smaller, more dispersed bases would be a practical response to a genuine weakness exposed by Iran's missile and drone attacks.

There is an aspect of this that could easily be lost in the discussion: for years, Iran has demanded that the U.S. reduce its military presence in the Gulf as part of any efforts to de-escalate between the two countries. So any troop adjustments that Washington undertakes to protect its forces can also become a bargaining chip for talks with Tehran—one that wouldn't involve any real concession. In one fell swoop, the U.S. could transfer some of the burden of protecting the Gulf, harden its forces, and open the door to diplomacy with Iran.

There has yet to be a final decision on this issue. A Pentagon official described the military's analysis to the *Post* as "prudent planning," not a withdrawal order. Any serious change in the size of America's military presence in the region, currently estimated at 40,000-50,000 troops, would require the approval of Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

Still, the direction is clear. America wants to remain in the region but with forces that are smaller and harder to target. The Pentagon's planning makes clear that Washington expects regional powers to take on a bigger part of the regional defense burden and financial burden even as the U.S. lightens its presence.

Trump's public comments are consistent with this interpretation. While the administration has offered a range of objectives for its operation against Iran, Trump made his priorities clear in a recent post on Truth Social: "The number one Goal is, and always will be, that Iran cannot have, in any way, shape, or form, a Nuclear Weapon."

This is a far more modest goal than regime change or even opening the Strait of Hormuz using military force, which would require a large, continued U.S. presence around the Persian Gulf. If stopping Iran from getting a nuclear weapon is the first priority, and that goal has largely already been secured, Trump can reduce the U.S. military footprint without it looking like a retreat.

Of course, history suggests this proposed process of burden-shifting will not go smoothly. Arab states have tried and failed to shoulder the regional defense burden on numerous occasions, including through efforts like the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Damascus Declaration of 1991, and the abortive Middle East Strategic Alliance, which Trump attempted to create in his first term.

But the key difference with today's regional efforts is that they are taking place as Washington appears to be seriously considering reducing its troop presence. Such a drawdown would significantly increase the incentives for Middle Eastern states to take on a greater role in their own security.

Such a shift does not mean abandoning Israel militarily. Some of the forces that would move away from the Gulf would move to Israel, in addition to Jordan and the west coast of Saudi Arabia. Yet it's notable that Washington is openly supporting the creation of an Arab-led security architecture, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan and possibly Egypt down the line, that would take on some of America's prior responsibilities in the region.

Trump appears to like these regional arrangements because they contain Iran without requiring the U.S. to shoulder the burden. The possibility that these groupings may one day restrict Israel's freedom of action does not seem to be part of Trump's concerns.

Given Tel Aviv's close ties to Washington, Israel's reaction to these emerging arrangements could play an important role in their success or failure. For now at least, Israeli officials and politicians have avoided addressing them directly, even as they express growing concern about a growing "Sunni axis" backed by Turkish military power. Pro-Israel analysts in the U.S. have echoed these concerns, even as they've endorsed the potential movement of more American troops to Israel as beneficial for both countries.

America is not leaving the Middle East. At most, it is fortifying its presence and shifting some of the burden for regional security to allies who are willing to shoulder it.

A new regional order is taking shape, one not designed with Israel's interests in the forefront, but also not one that is explicitly opposed to those interests. Whether this trend will remain comfortable, for the U.S. or for Israel, may be a more important question a year from now than whether America is withdrawing from the Middle East.

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In Yemen, Dates Provide Lifeline For Farmers With Few Economic Options

BY SAEED AL BATATI

Hajr, Yemen—Under the scorching sun of eastern Yemen's Hadramout region, locals—young and old—immerse themselves in the annual date harvest, working among dark mounds of freshly harvested fruit spread across stones.

Farmers here in Hajr, about two hours west of Hadramout's provincial capital of Mukalla, picked the dates about a week ago from vast palm groves nearby. They then brought them to this open ground so the dates can be dried, cleaned and eventually sold, following traditional techniques that have endured for centuries.

Nabeel Ahmed and his family arrive before sunrise and head directly to their spot on the rocky ground, where their dates are spread out.

"My wife, my brothers and I come here before sunrise and stay until the sun gets hot," Nabeel tells Al Jazeera, as he runs his hands through a pile of dates and holds up a handful.

Farmers and their families return every day to turn and sort the dates, removing rotten or damaged fruit before preparing the harvest for sale. Their aim is to make the dates as attractive as possible to buyers.

"These rocky grounds are used to spread out the dates, clean them, and sell them to customers," Nabeel says.

As the farmers work, buyers move between the piles, inspecting the fruit in search of good-quality dates at the lowest possible prices. Nabeel is fortunate: someone eventually agrees to buy some of his harvest.

"I harvest the dates and sell some of them, while keeping some for my family to eat. I put some into small bags for Ramadan and other days. We usually eat dates with coffee every day. This is my sole source of income," he says, pointing to small bags filled with dates.

Beyond providing an annual source of income, dates also offer a basic food safety net for some of Hajr's poorest families. "If a farmer cannot provide food for his children, he gives them dates and coffee, because some families cannot even afford fish and rice," Nabeel says.

A STRUGGLING DISTRICT

Hajr consists of scattered communities along a long valley filled with palm trees and traversed by a river. The main road connecting the district with other parts of Hadramout has deteriorated after years of poor maintenance, while roads linking its communities are largely unpaved and dusty. The district has no electricity, and mobile phone services are poor.

It has also experienced repeated outbreaks of cholera, which locals and health officials attribute mainly to inadequate sanitation and a lack of access to clean water.

Hajr might be far from Yemen's front lines, but it is still suffering from the effects of more than a decade of war in the country, and the lack of a stable government that can alleviate poverty.

It's why Hajr's vast date palm groves are a lifeline here, providing income and opportunities. There are no official figures on the number of palm trees or the district's annual date production, but local officials told Al Jazeera that there are at least two million palm trees in the district.

The palm trees are effectively the center of Hajr's economy.

At the open-air drying ground, which turns into a temporary market during the harvest season, Rashed Mohammed, a father of four, has turned down offers from several buyers at prices he considered too low.

But he worries that if he cannot sell his harvest during the few remaining days of the season, he will be unable to repay his debt to a local grocery shop.

"I owe 1 million Yemeni riyals [$640] to the grocery, and I will not be able to pay it back if I don't sell the dates," Rashed says.

Like many farmers in the district whose main source of income is selling dates, Rashed buys essential food for his family on credit throughout the year, promising to repay the shopkeeper after the harvest. Other farmers put off weddings, building houses or buying essential goods until they have harvested and sold their dates.

At the end of the day, if no buyers arrive, family members return home while Rashed and other farmers stay behind, sleeping in makeshift shelters built from palm fronds. They remain partly to protect their harvest from thieves and stray dogs, but also to be available around the clock in case a buyer turns up. "The customer can come at any time, so I sleep here," Rashed says.

ABJECT POVERTY

Farmers say one reason they continue to market their dates at the open-air market is that they cannot afford to transport their harvest to larger markets elsewhere in Yemen. Poverty is so severe, they say, that some farmers do not have enough cash to pay drivers to transport their dates and instead compensate them with plastic crates filled with dates.

Awadh Mubarak, a farmer and the head of a local farmers' committee in Hajr's Jawl region, says many farmers have abandoned agriculture for other jobs, including joining the security and military services, as palm trees die and date production dwindles.

Farmers say floods a few months ago destroyed a small dam that diverted water from the river to their farms, significantly reducing the amount of water reaching their palm groves and contributing to the death of trees.

The damage is visible along the road through Hajr, where numerous palms stand bare or nearly leafless, their dried fronds hanging from dead and dying trunks.

Awadh says rebuilding the dam is the farmers' most pressing demand.

"Our primary demand is the reconstruction of the dam. The situation is extremely difficult. Many farmers have abandoned their palm groves and gone to other jobs, or emigrated," Awadh says, showing Al Jazeera water flowing away from farmland instead of being diverted towards the groves.

Farmers have also called on investors and the government to build a date-processing and packaging factory, saying it would save them time and help them market their produce.

"We need a date-packaging factory to handle the large quantities of dates produced in the district," Awadh says. "Instead of my family and me going out every day to clean the dates, for example, we could take them to the factory, where they could be processed in a day, saving us time and effort."

For buyers such as Omer Mohammed, who travelled from a mountainous village in Hadramout, the reputation of Hajr's dates and their perceived health benefits make the long journey to the district worthwhile.

"Hajr dates are the best in Hadramout because they are low in sugar," says Omer, as he rests inside a makeshift shelter while workers pack the dates he has bought into bags.

"Back in my school days, when doctors needed blood, they would take it from residents of Hajr because they ate dates," he says, recalling a local belief about their health benefits.

"I buy enough dates for myself and my relatives to last the entire year. If I have dates in my house, I feel food secure, even if I don't eat them."

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