

MIDDLE EAST REPORT

# MER

## The New Landscape of INTERVENTION



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**COVER** Clockwise from top left: Aid workers talk with internally displaced people in Iraq (Lam Duc Hien/Agence VU/Redux); A renovated Libyan fighter jet at Misrata air base (Ismail Zitouny/Reuters); USAID sign in Hebron, West Bank (Oren Ziv/Activestills); Construction at Rawabi, West Bank (Tanya Habjouqa/Panos Pictures).

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The Middle East is both laboratory and crucible for our understanding of what it means to intervene. While the concept of intervention at once brings to mind foreign military actions that violate a sovereign jurisdiction, this issue of *Middle East Report* identifies other, increasingly prevalent, ways in which the lives of people in the Middle East are being shaped by forces beyond their borders. Intervention is no less significant when it is under the guise of economic sanctions, humanitarian action, border security, development projects or democracy promotion. Many forms of intervention are invisible in their permeations, as they enter the social fabric through new methods like urban planning, infrastructure development, crisis research and medical deprivation—what might also be called biopolitical interventions.

Even as the 2000's saw the return of traditional forms of imperial intervention—with the US deployment of military forces in Afghanistan and Iraq in pursuit of a quixotic and unwinnable War on Terror—there are increasingly new forms of intervention that must be understood, assessed and mapped. Intervention is a diverse but interlinked phenomenon driving social, political and economic change across the region.

Despite talk of an empire in decline, the relative US withdrawal from the Middle East is just that—relative. In the context of President Obama's pivot to Asia and a belated effort to remove the United States from costly ground wars, current policy is more of a reterritorialization of US power than its disappearance. The US military still entwines the region with bases, rapid reaction forces, interrogation facilities and enormous weapons caches. But President Trump's America First proclivities and his characteristically abrupt announcement in late 2018 of an immediate withdrawal from Syria is furthering this trend. The overall arc may be diminishing levels of direct US military intervention in the Middle East—more of a course correction that will engender the rise of other forms of intervention.

US withdrawal is most clear in cases where a regional client state is eager to assume the role of hegemonic power and shake off even the minimal restraint exerted by its imperial patron. Yet, as Lisa Bhungalia, Jeannette Greven and Tahani Mustafa show in this issue, giving Israel completely free reign to violently dispossess Palestinians while simultaneously withdrawing aid for food, schools and hospitals has had the unintended consequence of weakening key levers of influence the United States holds over Palestinians. As unbalanced as American policy has always been, the United States has at times restrained the realization of Israel's maximalist settler-colonial ambitions while its aid served to constrain Palestinian opposition.

One way of understanding the new landscape of intervention, then, is through the lens of a relatively declining US empire. Students of history draw many parallels to the violent and chaotic breakdowns of previous empires, where foreign policy vacillated between nativist isolationism and launching new invasions and where allies and adversaries increasingly extend their own agents to fill the emerging void.

The growing diversity of interventionist actors is making many regional conflicts more rather than less intractable, as multiple sides find themselves unbound from their previous US fetters. Jacob Mundy shows how the ongoing Libyan civil war is only the latest iteration of an increasingly globalized process

of state unmaking that has become familiar across the greater Middle East since 2001 in places like Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and most recently in Yemen. Since the NATO-led intervention that toppled Libya's long-standing dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi in 2011, various forms of overt and covert influence—military, financial, ideological and otherwise—by multiple and competing actors have exacerbated divisions within Libya's transitional post-revolutionary polity and prevented UN-sponsored mediation from taking hold.

Relatedly, as Catherine Besteman points out, a new form of global intervention is taking shape in the rise of militarized borders, interdictions at sea, detention centers, indefinite custody and generalized criminalization of mobility around the world. The Global North—the United States, Canada, the European Union (EU), Israel, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, the Gulf states and East Asia—is investing in militarized border regimes that reach far beyond particular territories to manage the movement of people from the Global South.

As forms and modes of intervention have multiplied, new directionalities of intervention are also being made clear. The Middle East is not only a destination for intervention, but also its point of origin. In the Horn of Africa, the Gulf states are using their financial power to exert increased control over regional economic flows, as well as forming patron-client relationships with regional security forces and engaging in influence campaigns aimed at local elections. In an eerie replay of post-uprising Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have pledged financial and political support to the military junta—a titular transitional council—that has ruled Sudan since a popular revolt drove President Bashir from power.

The war on Yemen demonstrates clearly how wars make particular geographies into zones of overlapping and concurrent interventions along a wide spectrum of scale and intensity. Rafeef Ziadah, for example, investigates the rise of humanitarian logistics hubs such as Dubai International Humanitarian City, where private firms and international organizations coordinate on the movement of data and material to conflict and disaster zones. Although ostensibly humanitarian, these hubs are a key mechanism of intervention and increasingly a central element in the projection of power for the Gulf regimes.

As always, the tentacles of global empire eventually spread so far they double back to entwine the metropole. The United States is also now a major target of influence campaigns funded by foreign states, including the Gulf states. No longer content with strategic gifts to established research centers, the three most powerful states—Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar—have all established their own think tanks just blocks from the White House. Long a source of lucrative contracts for lobbyists, the Gulf states have ramped up and diversified the list of government relations, social media, and communications firms on their payroll.

In a different register, Sarah Parkinson describes the growing popularity of extreme research—scholarly research conducted in crises zones amongst conflict-affected populations in the Middle East and North Africa. Yet such field-based research is also a mode of intervention that can impose serious harm on individuals, communities, local partner universities and even humanitarian program staff.

An equally subtle vector of intervention taking place in the region's urban fabric is examined by Hiba Bou Akar, who describes how domestic religious-political organizations in Lebanon use land classifications, zoning regulations, building policies and real estate transactions to create militarized sectarian enclaves that presage a war yet to come. The process, which is also driven by global networks of finance, fundraising and religious allegiances, often displaces existing communities, erases history and reinforces segregation. Similarly, Sami Tayeb examines how a multitude of privately financed urban development projects in the West Bank are creating a form of colonization that parallels that of Israel. Unlike Israel's settler-colonial urbanism, however, this form of urban colonization is driven by global, and particularly neoliberal, capitalism, as it consumes Palestine's remaining agrarian land at an unprecedented rate.

This issue also complicates our traditional understanding of intervention by exploring forms of intervention such as those undertaken through denial or deprivation. Omar Dewachi traces the rise of antibiotic resistant bacteria in war-related wounds—which US military doctors labelled *Iraqibacter*—to the biological legacy of decades of sanctions, war and intervention in Iraq, which is increasingly found in other conflict zones in the region. The devastating human and health consequences of intervention by deprivation are also noted by Ron Smith's account of Israel's decade-long siege of Gaza, whose dynamics are similar to the catastrophic sanctions regime imposed by the United States on Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War and the siege warfare utilized by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen today. Siege itself is an ancient tactic of waging war against civilians, yet while siege regimes typically seek a defined outcome (such as a change in policy or alliances) Israel's siege of Gaza, aided and abetted by the international community, is unique in its permanence: The siege is the outcome it seeks.

This issue is not the first call to rethink the definition and understanding of intervention, but it coincides with a global shift in the dominant patterns and players that have been central to major forms of intervention in the past half century. Periodically revisiting such complex concepts helps us reshape our theoretical and empirical tools to better understand our contemporary moment. This enhanced—and we hope more encompassing—understanding of intervention also allows us to identify its points of origin and weakness, and thus clarify where to target our initiatives of resistance and confrontation. ■





A sign thanks the emir of Qatar for supporting Libyan rebels, in Benghazi, Libya, 2011.

BRYAN DENTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

# The Globalized Unmaking of the Libyan State

Jacob Mundy

Various locations in the Libyan capital of Tripoli were struck on May 2, 2019 with Chinese-manufactured Blue Arrow air-to-surface missiles fired from Wing Loong drones. Neither armament had been directly supplied by China to the forces ostensibly using them, those of the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and based in eastern Libya. These weapons had likely been supplied to the LNA by its main foreign backers, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt. It was also likely that the drone

pilots, and perhaps even the spotters on the ground in Tripoli helping guide the missiles to their targets, were foreign as well.<sup>1</sup>

A few days after these drone strikes in Tripoli, a French-made Mirage F1 fighter bomber was shot down by LNA forces just outside the capital. Video of the captured pilot showed a slightly wounded and delirious man speaking Portuguese. While he insisted that he was a civilian and not a mercenary, he nonetheless admitted that he had been hired by the internationally recognized Government of the National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli to bomb roads and other infrastructure vital to the ongoing LNA siege.<sup>2</sup>

*Jacob Mundy is an associate professor at Colgate University and currently a Fulbright Scholar with the Université de Tunis (2018–2019).*

These episodes are only two examples of the many ways that the ongoing civil war in Libya, which has claimed at least 10,700 lives since 2011,<sup>3</sup> has been interwoven with emergent global geopolitical alliances, transnational military labor and global armament industries. Such extensive external assistance to Libya's warring factions is in flagrant violation of the existing United Nations (UN) arms embargo. This embargo has been in place since 2011, when a popular uprising against the longstanding regime of Muammar al-Qaddafi quickly devolved into an eight-month civil war. Libya's 2011 revolution was abetted by a US-backed "humanitarian intervention" that saw NATO and the Arab League—at the behest of a UN Security Council mandate—use significant air power in the name of protecting Libyan civilians from Qaddafi's forces.

Since the NATO-led intervention, various forms of overt and covert assistance—military, financial, ideological and otherwise—have enhanced growing divisions within Libya's post-revolutionary polity. Those divisions ruptured in 2014, when the transitional authority cleaved into two rival governments, each supported by shaky domestic political and military coalitions and each backed by different foreign actors with vying geopolitical agendas. Libya's unmaking was further complicated when a franchise of ISIS planted its flag in Sirte in 2015 and called on jihadists far and wide to join its ranks. As North Atlantic powers simultaneously sought to mend the rift between Libya's rival governments and

extirpate the cancer of the Islamic State, Haftar's LNA, with its Emirati, Egyptian and Saudi backers, along with increasing French support, began to expand beyond its stronghold of Cyrenaica in eastern Libya. The LNA took over strategic oil infrastructure and eventually laid siege to the remaining government-held cities in and around Tripoli and Misrata.<sup>4</sup>

The ongoing Libyan civil war and its significant international dimensions are the latest iteration of an increasingly globalized process of state unmaking that has become familiar across the greater Middle East since 2001 in places like Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and most recently Yemen.

Though the internal history of modern Libya has been uniquely animated by various forms of external involvement, the current disorder is not merely the result of a failed humanitarian intervention, which allegedly collapsed the state. Global currents and processes have also combined with local forces to unmake the Libyan state. Like the other cases of globalized state unmaking in the region, a new phase in Libya's history opened in 2011 and has yet to be closed. It is one in which the order of Libyan disorder has been constituted by global networks of interpenetrating relations within and beyond Libya's borders. Today, Libya illustrates the fictions of modern sovereignty as an ideological crystallization of arrangements that operate in—yet cumulatively transcend—geographies of the local, national, regional and global. The chief irony is that the visibility of sovereignty's fiction in Libya today has been made possible by the violent and internationalized "parcelization" of Libya's sovereignty since the 2011 intervention.<sup>5</sup>

## Internationalization of Internal Divisions

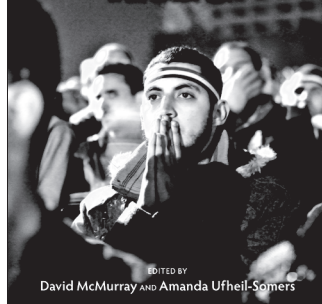
The LNA assault on Tripoli in early April 2019 constituted the third effort in eight years to seize control of the capital. The first was in August 2011 when Libya's rebel forces, backed by NATO and Arab League airpower from above and covert special forces on the ground, finally dislodged the Qaddafi regime after over four decades in power. Libya's revolutionary militias eventually tracked down and executed the sexagenarian dictator—again with extensive assistance from foreign military and intelligence assets—outside of Sirte. The second was in 2014 when Libya's transitional national authorities collapsed during a contentious effort to create a new interim parliament through a widely boycotted election. This vote took place in the midst of fighting between the countless armed militias that had sprung up largely after the 2011 revolution ended.

The civil war that erupted in 2014 between rival governments in Libya was itself embedded in larger regional contests involving Sudan, Turkey and Qatar on one side and Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Russia on the other. The North Atlantic community, quick to intervene militarily in Libya's 2011 revolt, proved just as quick to abandon Libya to its post-revolutionary fate.

FROM INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS

### THE ARAB REVOLTS

Dispatches on Militant Democracy  
in the Middle East



EDITED BY  
David McMurray and Amanda Ufheil-Somers

#### The Arab Revolts

*Dispatches on  
Militant Democracy  
in the Middle East*

Edited by  
David McMurray  
and  
Amanda Ufheil-Somers

Written for a broad audience of students, policymakers, media analysts, and general readers, *The Arab Revolts* reveals the underlying causes for the Arab Spring by extending analysis back over the last two decades to investigate some of the most important historical forces leading up to the recent insurrections.

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The “winner” of the 2014 war for Tripoli was an amalgamation of militias calling themselves Libya Dawn, made up of forces from the western port city of Misrata along with prominent militias from Tripoli, from Libya’s Amazigh heartland of the Nafusa mountains and those battling Haftar’s forces in Benghazi and Derna in the east. Politically, Dawn backed the continued authority of the General National Congress, the interim governing body that was initially elected in July 2012 and was ostensibly replaced in the June 2014 elections by the House of Representatives.

The presence of salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood among the ranks of the Congress-Dawn alliance, reinforced by material and ideological support from Turkey and Qatar, has often led to the incorrect characterization of the 2014 civil war as pitting Islamists against secularists. It has become clear that both sides include the entire spectrum of Islamist tendencies among their ranks, but also that the more salient division since 2014 is between two political tendencies.

On the one hand, there is the post-2011 revolutionary tendency seeking to purge the new state of all vestiges of the Qaddafi regime, from individuals to institutions. On the other hand, there is a countervailing accommodationist tendency seeking to incorporate the experiences and organizations of the ancien régime into the new state. Veterans of Libya’s bureaucracy and military often found themselves increasingly marginalized, if not persecuted, during the initial transitional period of 2012 to 2014. Embracing the latter tendency, Haftar’s initial operation to allegedly liberate Cyrenaica from “terrorism” in 2014 was called Dignity—a rallying cry for the recently politically marginalized. Haftar’s ranks grew when the House of Representatives moved to the east, seeking protection under Haftar’s Dignity operation. Haftar’s opponents, however, view this accommodation as not only an evasion of justice for 42 years of authoritarian excesses but also as a trojan horse for Qaddafi regime loyalists.

With the consolidation of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi’s rule in Egypt, the House-Dignity alliance received increasing levels of military support from Egypt, the UAE and Jordan. Support included the construction of an expanded airbase at al-Khadim in the east, where satellite images revealed the presence of various new kinds of armaments, from US-made low flying AT-802 planes—crop-dusters redesigned for counterinsurgency use—to Wing Loong drones. Given that these weapons were likely delivered and are serviced by Egyptian and Emirati military, it is suspected that the actual pilots and other systems personnel were with the infamous UAE-based mercenary firm Academi, formerly known as Blackwater.<sup>6</sup> Haftar’s forces also appear to be enjoying covert support from France. In June 2016, it was revealed that several French special forces had been killed when their helicopter was shot down over Benghazi.

By contrast, Turkish and Qatari assistance to its Libyan clients was not nearly as conspicuous, though it was nonetheless easily facilitated through the port of Misrata and, to a lesser extent, the Tunisian border.

## Libya as Counterterrorism Laboratory

Not to be outdone, the United States rendered clandestine and overt assistance to all sides in the Libyan civil war, albeit in the name of counterterrorism operations, especially against the Islamic State and al-Qaida’s Maghrebi-Saharan affiliates. In fact, one of the major factors driving the international push in 2015 to consolidate Libya’s rival authorities into the Government of National Accord was the need for a legitimate central authority to sign-off on foreign counterterrorism initiatives in Libya, from Special Operations Forces actions to drone strikes. It was a testament to both the security situation in Libya and the contentious nature of the UN-sponsored 2015 Libyan Political Agreement that the new head of Libya’s third transitional authority, Fayez al-Serraj, had to be smuggled into the capital by boat due to threats against his efforts to reach Tripoli by air.

Though increasingly held hostage to the interests of the militias controlling the wider coastal Tripolitania region, Serraj nonetheless served his primary international function by allowing Libya to become a counterterrorism laboratory. During the long siege in Sirte to “degrade and destroy” ISIS in 2016, US Marine aircraft and helicopters operating under the authority of US Africa Command (AFRICOM) worked hand-in-hand with the Misratan forces leading the grueling urban fight. Upon the completion of this “successful” operation, one that saw entire neighborhoods in Sirte totally demolished, the United States was quick to describe it as a model for the upcoming battle for Mosul in Iraq.

## The Political Economy of State Unmaking

As the LNA grew in military sophistication (despite the ongoing UN arms embargo), it also grew more socio-politically precarious. Prior to the disclosure of a significant cash injection from Saudi Arabia, the funding of Haftar’s operations was utterly opaque. In the context of the 2014 oil price crash and the inflation that war premiums had generated in Libya, social dependence on state salaries and black market activities—both of which help fund militias—only deepened.

Haftar’s seizure of core oil facilities in late 2016 and early 2019, however, served to revive Libyan production and exports, and helped inject cash back into the economy via state salaries, welfare payments and subsidies on imports. Much was made of apparent Russian diplomatic and military backing of Haftar during this period, though perhaps the most significant material benefit the House and the LNA received from Moscow were deliveries to the east of the country of nearly

10 billion in Libyan dinar bank notes printed in Russia that had not been authorized by the internationally recognized Central Bank in Tripoli.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond financials, Haftar's power was also increasing based on an expanding network of complicated social and ideological alliances with armed groups across the country, and even some from neighboring states. The latter included militias from Sudan's Darfur region and Tebu and Tuareg militias from the tri-border Libya-Chad-Niger and Libya-Algeria-Niger regions respectively. Explicitly pro-Qaddafi militias have also been documented among the LNA's ranks, waving the green flag of the defunct *Jamahiriyah*. Receiving the most attention, however, were the LNA's salafi militias, especially followers of the Saudi religious scholar Rabee Madkhali, whose orthodox teachings emphasize deference to what it considers legitimate political authority.<sup>8</sup> Libya was increasingly bombarded with salafi religious programming from unregulated radio and television broadcasts produced by unidentified sources in unknown locations.<sup>9</sup>

After advancing slowly and patiently from the far east to the southwest, effectively controlling most of the country apart from coastal Tripolitania and its mountainous backdrop, the Nafusa, Haftar's LNA launched its assault on Tripoli on April 4, 2019 in response to two major developments. First, Haftar reportedly received promises from the Saudi monarchy to bankroll his campaign during a meeting in Riyadh on March 27. Saudi and Emirati agencies have also waged a sophisticated online propaganda operation in Haftar's favor on Arab social media.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, the UN peace process, led by former Lebanese academic and politician Ghassan Salamé, was trending in a direction that would have been less favorable to Haftar, leading to an attempt to hold a UN-backed national conference on the country's future in April, which Haftar opposed.

Haftar's victories on the battlefield had earned him a seat at the table in various bilateral and multilateral peace-making fora, including several direct and proximity talks with Serraj hosted by France and the UAE. But Haftar's refusal to accept anything less than total and unrestricted control over all armed forces has been a nonstarter for many Libyans who fear a slippery slope to military rule. Having reached an impasse with Serraj and Haftar, Salamé attempted to marginalize and shame Libya's myriad armed spoilers and implacable transitional leaders by organizing a large-scale national conference so as to solicit alternative opinions on the country's future from Libyan civil society broadly defined. Haftar's April offensive on Tripoli made it impossible for the United Nations to hold this meeting. By the end of May, Haftar's siege on Tripoli, according to the World Health Organization, had caused 562 deaths, nearly 3,000 other casualties and tens of thousands of internally displaced persons.

The official reason for Haftar's attack on Tripoli is to purge the capital of "terrorists." By this, LNA discourse—squarely aimed at actual and potential patrons in Cairo, Riyadh, Amman, Dubai, Moscow and Washington—is referencing the allegedly Islamist militias that have increasingly ruled over Tripoli since the 2014 collapse of the transitional process. Yet, to describe Tripoli's militias as Islamist is about as accurate as describing Haftar's forces as secular since both coalitions represent an amalgam of political and social orientations.

The real threat posed by Tripoli's militias is their direct and indirect influence over the economic and political levers of power that come with controlling the capital. At the end of 2011, Tripoli's militias were highly fragmented and competed with occupying militias from cities like Misrata, Zintan and Tarhuna to dominate the capital's infrastructural resources. Recent years, however, have seen Tripoli-based militias coalesce into larger armed formations, some of which have been deputized as official security, military and naval forces. Emerging out of a variety of backgrounds—from neighborhood protection gangs to Islamist networks dating back to the failed jihad against Qaddafi in the 1990s—these militias have become an important element of the now official security forces backing Serraj's leadership. Critics, however, allege that Serraj is just as much their prisoner as their enabler.<sup>11</sup>

Some of these militias are also aiding the extension of Europe's borders into Africa, further illustrating the multiple and contradictory nature of globalized interventions. Bilateral and multilateral EU efforts to stem the flow of seaborne migration from Libyan shores have engaged local militias to run detention centers and to act as a coast guard. In the case of the former, it is now clear that these overcrowded centers have not only become spaces of disease and inhumanity, but also another source of rent for militias at the center of the ongoing Libyan civil war.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the latter, elements of the nascent Libyan coast guard, largely funded by a xenophobic Italian government, are simply human traffickers who have parlayed their smuggling skills and knowledge into something even more valuable: international legitimacy.

## Global Sacrifice Zone

Libyan society is often described as uniquely local in its habitus and thus historically opposed to centralized leadership. Observers of the ongoing conflict refer to this tendency to explain the ability of local militias to gain so much power. But, if one looks beyond the headlines, outside of Tripoli and below the level of the country's top leaders, one finds a different reality—of intercommunal peacemaking, robust civic engagement and development initiatives.<sup>13</sup> These trends raise questions as to why control over the capital of an increasingly



fragmented state is considered worth the price in either blood or prestige.

The answer lies in the incentives created by the international “peace process” since 2014. The North Atlantic powers, through their financial control over Libya’s ability to fund its basic governmental functions, have attempted to put constraints on who benefits from oil exports and its revenues. The primary mechanisms of this control are the Tripoli-based National Oil Corporation and the Central Bank of Libya. Indeed, the United States went so far as to dispatch a team of Navy SEALs in 2014 to seize a North Korean oil tanker that had been loaded with crude oil by a rogue Cyrenaican militia then controlling a major export terminal.<sup>14</sup>

But for there to be any oil export revenues, there first has to be oil exports, and this is how Haftar made himself indispensable to the peace process: by seizing control of the country’s major oil extraction, circulation and processing infrastructures. Haftar is thus in the enviable position of being able to strangle the country financially, but he does not have hegemonic control over revenues. That power continues to rest in Serraj’s executive body.

As everyday existence in Libya depends on the Central Bank to facilitate direct cash payments, basic imports and public employment, the real kingmakers in Libya are the North Atlantic powers who control the Central Bank’s ability to receive oil revenues and, once there is a comprehensive peace, the billions in cash reserves currently frozen in foreign banks since the 2011 uprising. These are, of course, the same North Atlantic powers that have legitimated both sides in the ongoing civil war through counterterrorism interventions and anti-migration assistance.

This “shit show” in Libya, as Barack Obama described it in one of his final interviews as president,<sup>15</sup> is in part a consequence of foreign policies pursued by his administration and those of his successor, Donald Trump. In the wake of the disastrous war in Iraq and the 2008 financial collapse, the Obama doctrine was, if anything, an insistence that the continual efforts to regenerate US hegemony in and through the Middle East since the end of the Cold War would now require more indirect and covert forms of intervention. The 2011 NATO-Arab League operation in Libya, the 2016 campaign against the Islamic State in Sirte, and hundreds of ongoing drone strikes by AFRICOM all across Libya represent “successful” tests of this policy only in so far as one could bracket off the general collapse of the Libyan state, which these interventions helped intensify.<sup>16</sup> Even more important was the extent to which this new vision of American empire ruled out the very policy that might have benefitted Libya after the fall of Qaddafi: a UN-led stabilization force.

Since 2015, international peacemaking in Libya has taken a back seat to US counterterrorism and EU anti-migration initiatives, resulting in US, French and Italian security assistance being given to militias on both sides in

the ongoing civil war. In this way, UN efforts to resolve the conflict in Libya have not only been held hostage to geopolitical maneuvering at the regional and global level; peace in Libya has in fact been delayed by the domestic politics of advanced capitalist countries struggling to recover from the 2008 financial collapse and the new political forces it unleashed—from Brexit to Trump.

The result, as seen across the region, is that the unmaking of Libya today has been made possible by the violent and internationalized parcelization of Libya’s sovereignty since the 2011 intervention. This parcelization, of course, serves a larger global function. The permanent, though geographically shifting, state of war in the world’s primary oil producing zones is an outgrowth of the way US hegemony (power) and the petroleum-dominated energy systems (profit) of the North Atlantic world have become entirely dependent on conflict and instability in North Africa and the Middle East since the 1970s.<sup>17</sup> The Trump administration’s apparent endorsement of Haftar’s latest assault on Tripoli thus makes sense in a global context where US predominance and North Atlantic capitalism have effectively rendered the Middle East and North Africa as a specific kind of sacrifice zone over the course of the last 50 years. ■

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A stretcher is carried to the scene of a suicide bombing outside the offices of the International Red Cross, 2003 in Baghdad. JOAO SILVA/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

# *Iraqibacter* and the Pathologies of Intervention

Omar Dewachi

In the wake of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, US military surgeons began reporting on an “invisible enemy” that they called “*Iraqibacter*.” The moniker referred to *Acinetobacter baumannii*, a bacterium which was causing serious infections among wounded US military personnel. Subsequent reports in the US media created a major hype about this bacterium, often using the moniker to indicate that it was carried from US field hospitals in Iraq back to the United States along military evacuation lines.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, *Iraqibacter* was infecting non-military patients as well.

In 2012, the popular PBS science show, *NOVA ScienceNOW*, dedicated an entire episode to *Iraqibacter*, entitled Killer Microbe. In ominous terms, the reporter described the rise of this dangerous war pathogen:

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There is a killer on the battle-torn streets of Iraq, but it does not carry a gun. It is attacking injured soldiers... Here is the culprit, it is a bacterium called *baumannii*, referred to in Iraq as *Iraqibacter*. It is named for microbiologist Paul Bauman, who researched it in 1968. But even he couldn't predict what this tiny single-celled organism would one day become. Like most bacteria, it lives in colonies and its constantly reproducing, simply by dividing and dividing again. A single bacterium can give rise to five million trillion in only a day. This bug used to be relatively harmless. Yet somehow it found a way to transform itself into a drug resistant killer.

The major challenge faced by military doctors and scientists was the bacterium's increasing capacity to develop resistance against the strongest antibiotics while surviving for weeks on hard surfaces of hospital beds, door knobs and medical



equipment. The episode delved deeper into the microbiology of this bacterium and explained how this “previously harmless bacteria” has become a major menace in war settings. The bacterium does not cause infection in otherwise healthy individuals—rather it opportunistically preys on patients with weakened immune systems or those with deep tissue damage, such as war wounds. In hospital settings it has a history of appearing in intensive care units where patients are hooked to ventilators for long periods of time.

*A. baumannii* also has a high tendency to acquire resistance genes from other bacteria that it comes in contact with. Over time, this bacterium has evolved to form biofilms—a phenomenon where bacterial communities stick to each other to survive on hard surfaces and to resist disinfectants. Most importantly, the biofilm allows the bacteria to communicate with each other and exchange genetic matter that helps it develop resistance to a wide range of antibiotics. One of the scientists in the episode explained how examining the genetic makeup of the bacterium shows multiple resistance genes condensed in its DNA structures, illustrating the ability of the bacterium to be a reservoir for resistant genes from its environment.

The NOVA episode, like much of the media coverage and scientific discourse about the bacterium, was littered with War on Terror tropes; the bacterium is described as an “invisible enemy” or “blood insurgent,” and even naming the pathogen *Iraqibacter* is war-tinged sensationalism. Sporadic outbreaks of resistant strains of this bacterium, in fact, had been reported in US military hospitals and other non-military settings prior to the invasion of Iraq. Moreover, reports from across conflict zones and major treatment centers in the Middle East—from Lebanon to Syria, Gaza and Yemen—have shown this pathogen is one of the main causes of wound infections in those healthcare settings.

Until recently, much of the reporting of *A. baumannii* in Iraq was done by the US military, which counterintuitively attributed the general increase in such infections among the military to the improved wounded-to-killed ratio from prior wars. Wounds are more likely to “carry organisms of environmental origin into hospital settings.”<sup>2</sup> Others have suggested that the increased resistance of this pathogen is mainly due to contamination of both military and civilian hospitals where injured military personnel and civilians are treated.<sup>3</sup>

The association of *Iraqibacter* with the US-led war in Iraq, however, is a more complex and contentious story. At the heart of the mystery is not whether the emergence of this bacteria can be attributed to the war, but whether the increased resistance of this bacteria is driven by military activities and interventions. Thus, while the increased reporting on this bacterium during the Iraq war gave rise to its notorious name there has been little attention to what is particularly Iraqi about *Iraqibacter*, given that it has been found elsewhere in the region.

Drawing upon a more environmental approach and focusing on war ecologies, the rise of *Iraqibacter* can be explored, and possibly explained, as less a matter of an inherent link to Iraq itself than an outcome of the wars that have taken place in

Iraq over the past few decades. Asking what is particularly Iraqi about *Iraqibacter* may also encourage greater attention to the environmental degradation of decades of sanctions, bombing campaigns and military interventions that have transformed innocuous bacteria into dangerous drug-resistant strains.

## ***Iraqibacter* and the Biology of History**

I first came to know about *A. baumannii*’s infections during my ethnographic research on conflict-related injuries in the wake of the 2011 Arab Uprisings. In 2012, I began an ethnographic project documenting the experiences of wounded Iraqi patients travelling to Lebanon to seek healthcare in Beirut’s high-tech public and private hospitals. Patients there sought various forms of medical and surgical care, including treatment for cancer and reconstructive surgery. Some patients were moving back and forth between Iraq and Beirut, flying in as frequently as once a month to receive chemotherapy or undergo staged reconstructive surgeries for injuries they had incurred in Iraq. Patients and their families were on a quest for quality healthcare that was either unavailable or untrustworthy in Iraq’s war-torn healthcare infrastructure.<sup>4</sup>

These journeys were part of a broader phenomenon of medically-driven travel, delineating a sort of “therapeutic geography” of war linking zones of fighting in Iraq, Gaza, Syria, Libya and Yemen with humanitarian hospitals and medical hubs across the region in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iran and India.<sup>5</sup>

But in one Beirut hospital in particular, Iraqi cases seemed to present a significant clinical challenge to local doctors. “We see many tough cases from Iraq,” explained one of the surgeons at the hospital, whose workload has been transformed by the influx of wounded Iraqi patients. “Many are presenting with very aggressive types of wound infections. We are struggling with high rates of multi-drug resistance bacteria among those who are injured in suicide bombings and the ISIS war. These bugs could be transmitted to other patients, and we often put Iraqis in quarantine before admitting them into the regular wards.”

In this Beirut hospital, patient records revealed that at least half of the wounded Iraqi cases treated at the hospital had multidrug-resistance infections, with the majority caused by *A. baumannii*. Many cases of people injured in the ongoing civil war in Syria treated at the same hospital showed similar infection profiles, though at slightly lower rates for *A. baumannii*. Communications with different regional hospitals and humanitarian organizations revealed a wide spread of this pathogen in Syria,<sup>6</sup> Gaza,<sup>7</sup> Yemen<sup>8</sup> and Libya—all zones of intervention and war.<sup>9</sup> The scope of the problem reflected the difficulty of treating large numbers of war-injured patients in civilian and humanitarian hospitals across the region and the scramble of these hospitals to deal with an endemic problem of colonization by drug-resistant bugs—a problem with long-lasting public health and financial burdens on patients and health systems.

Medical explanations of the general global rise of drug resistance, including *A. baumannii*, often attribute it to the lack of infection control in hospitals and the ungoverned use of antibiotics—problems that often worsen during wartime. But, such an explanation fails to consider the complex context of war and its contribution to the changing ecologies of antibiotic resistance.

On the other hand, Iraqis I interviewed expressed ambivalence about the cause of such stubborn infections, attributing them to a wide range of problems including “pollution,” “insecurity,” “corruption,” “the United States,” “sectarianism,” “stress,” “Saddam” and so on. Their narratives, though general and confusing, consistently pointed to the broader political, environmental and social entanglements of these ailments in a toxic history and ecology shaping the conditions of their everyday survival.<sup>10</sup>

Driven by intuition, speculation and emerging ethnographic evidence about the experiences of war and injury in the region, the mystery of *Iraqibacter* and its increasing drug resistance in war settings is open to a number of historical and environmental hypotheses. Such theories are based on an understanding of the history of war interventions and their microbiological and environmental legacies. This type of analysis draws upon historian of science Hannah Landecker’s notion of the “biology of history” in researching the rise of antibiotic resistance in today’s post-industrial life.<sup>11</sup> Through understanding the biology of history, defined as the physical registration of human history in bacterial life, Landecker shows how the mass production of antibiotics on an industrial scale has shaped the biological evolution of today’s bacteria and the scale of antibiotic resistance that exists today globally. She argues that the industrial scale production of individual therapies targeting single pathogens, as well as the extensive use of antibiotics in animal farming, are “environmental events” affecting the evolution of bacteria far beyond our unregulated use of antibiotics in individual bodies.

Landecker thus invites us to think more dialectically about the “materiality of history and historicity of matter” to consider the dynamic entanglements between human activities and the development of antibiotic resistance both locally and globally. In the biology of history, bacteria are an archive of changing human ecology. Information captured through the genetic analysis of historical and contemporary samples of bacteria and soil might give us insights into the historical developments of antibiotic resistance.

What could such an archival project of *A. baumannii* samples from different war zones look like? What would it reveal about the history of political and environmental events and processes that have shaped the antibiotic resistance of *Iraqibacter*? While such an analysis to document the biology of war does not exist yet, there are a number of theories that can be considered based on an understanding of the historical context of war and interventions in Iraq and the potential ways toxic legacies of war drive the rise of antibiotic resistance.

## Antibiotic Anarchy

Since 1980, Iraq has experienced the full spectrum of militarization which may have significantly impacted the rise of antibiotic resistance. The first conflagration, the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), is considered one of the longest conventional wars of the twentieth century. Fought along the borders of both countries, it left close to 1.5 million (mostly military personnel) dead and injured. Treatment in both countries took place in relatively advanced military hospitals, where antibiotic resistance was mostly under control.

Unlike the Iran-Iraq war, which was waged largely on battlefields, the First Gulf War (1990–1991) and sanctions regime on Iraq (1990–2003) destroyed the national infrastructure and undermined the country’s once advanced healthcare system.<sup>12</sup> The massive US bombing campaign in 1991 targeted the country’s vital networks of electricity, water sanitation and communication and left the provision of healthcare severely challenged. The restrictive 12-year sanctions regime which followed drove healthcare workers abroad, cut off a range of basic medical supplies, including a wide range of first-line antibiotics used to treat common infections, and contributed to skyrocketing child and maternal mortality rates.<sup>13</sup>

The 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq was a direct assault on the entire country that brought carnage to Iraqi cities and triggered unprecedented political violence, death and war wounds. For nearly a decade, counterinsurgency warfare and resistance operations transformed the country’s urban landscape and neighborhoods into a war zone characterized by communitarian political violence, where the health infrastructure was severely compromised. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been killed and injured as a result of both military operations and terrorist attacks.<sup>14</sup> In their pursuit of spectacular demonstrations of violence and injury, suicide bombings specifically targeted markets, mosques and busy roads—all densely-populated public spaces where projectile debris and the proximity of the wounded aid the contamination of such wounds.

To understand the links and interactions of biology and the history of Iraq’s war ecologies, it is important to note that according to available literature from the 1980s and based on interviews and conversations with Iraqi microbiologists, drug resistant *A. baumannii* was not a known pathogen during the Iran-Iraq War. Problems attributed to antibiotic resistance came from other bacteria such as *Pseudomonas* and *Staphylococcus*, which presented clinical problems for both military and civilian physicians. One of the earliest reports of *A. baumannii* in the Middle East during the 1980s came from Lebanon, where microbiologists at the American University of Beirut reported a hospital epidemic of the bacterium after treating patients injured by Israeli bombardments in the mountains in 1986.<sup>15</sup> It was not until a decade later that the pathogen was reported again among Kuwaiti patients in a Saudi Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in 1994–1995. Outbreaks





Men sweep debris from a damaged pharmacy after a car bomb attack in Hilla, Iraq, 2014.

ALAA AL-MARJANI/REUTERS

were also reported following the Marmara earthquake in Turkey in 1999 and in a Saudi neonatal ICU in 2002.

But the absence of reports about *A. baumannii* in Iraq during the 1990's does not necessarily signify the absence of this pathogen, only that there was no active documentation of drug resistance during that period. Many laboratory consumables were unavailable or expired, rendering accurate microbiological cultures unreliable, while treatment tools such as surgical sutures and disposable gloves were often reused. These conditions translated into not only a loss of information about pathogens but also a rapid deterioration of infection control as surveillance and sanitation systems collapsed.

In response to the everyday shortages and the deterioration of health facilities in Iraq under the sanctions regime, Iraqi doctors became accustomed to using broad-spectrum antibiotics as a preventative strategy for surgical procedures in hospitals to address the rising problem of infections in the wards. This practice meant that doctors prescribed three antibiotics for every case in order to cover the range of possible bacterial and microbial infections.

For 12 years, the collapse of infection control at hospitals and the responsive overuse of antibiotics were further complicated by the continuous interruptions of antibiotic supplies and access

under the UN economic embargo.<sup>16</sup> Certain antibiotics would be available one day and disappear another. Doctors switched antibiotics regularly, not according to treatment protocols but according to availability. Patients and their families begged relatives abroad to mail back supplies, or otherwise scrambled to locate scarce antibiotics spread across the country's pharmacies stocked with counterfeit and expired medications. It was antibiotic anarchy, where the present-day ecology of antibiotic resistance in Iraq was a distant concern.

Could *Iraqibacter* be a byproduct of the antibiotic anarchy brought on by the Gulf War and sanctions? In the Iraqi context there have been no studies thus far documenting the extent of antibiotic resistance, yet stubborn infections continue to define clinical practice in hospitals, especially among wounded patients. At the same time, since 2003 and the lifting of the international embargo, a large variety of antibiotics have been reintroduced. Doctors and pharmacists explain that patients are often given third and fourth generation antibiotics as a first resort, often because there is a dread among patients that the first-line antibiotics—such as amoxicillin—have no effect. As one pharmacist put it when referencing patients' persistent refusal to accept such medicines, "Even our bacteria are resistant."

## Toxic Legacies

In addition to the antibiotic anarchy theory, another hypothesis links the rise of antibiotic resistance in war settings to the toxic environmental legacies of war, which are considerable in the case of Iraq. Scientific literature over the last two decades has shown links between heavy metal contaminants and the rapid development of resistance in bacteria. The environmental concentrations of such metals can increase dramatically in war zones, where large-scale infrastructure is pulverized and the explosion of large amounts of munitions leave a legacy of toxicity. Studies of contaminations in industrial and agricultural settings have shown how *A. baumannii* can become resistant to antibiotics after exposure to heavy metal contaminations in soil and water.<sup>17</sup> In scientific terms this is known as cross-resistance—where an organism develops tolerance to one substance as a result of exposure to a different substance.

Heavy metals exist naturally in the environment and each locality has its unique geo-history of heavy metal signatures. War introduces new elements to these ecosystems—from weapons, bomb-damaged infrastructure, oil fires and spills, the destruction of industrial facilities as well as hospitals, farms and so on. This process could explain the tendency of antibiotic resistance to arise alongside natural or human-made disasters marked by the destruction of the lived environment and failures of reconstruction which allow contaminants to linger. Despite this symbiosis of resistance and destruction, studies have not yet been devised to catalogue the scale and extent of environmental contamination-driven antibiotic resistance in war settings.

## A Pathology of Intervention

The moniker *Iraqibacter* has been used to describe an antibiotic resistant “superbug” that is linked to US military casualties in Iraq and its movement back to the United States. Despite the racial overtones of linking a bacterium to Iraq, asking what is “Iraqi” about *Iraqibacter* unravels links between decades of war and interventions and the increasing prevalence of antibiotic resistance in Iraq and other conflict zones in the region.

From bombing campaigns, to sanctions, to full scale invasion, to the so-called War on Terror, Iraq has been at the forefront of Western interventions over decades which have changed the very ecosystem in which people live. In such a context, *Iraqibacter* may be the culmination of many things: the decades of militarization and wounding, the collapse of infection control and infrastructure, the movement of the injured across the region to seek healthcare, the overuse and misuse of antibiotics driven by sanctions, the proliferation of poor-quality drugs and counterfeit medicines and the destruction and contamination of the natural and lived environment. All define a toxic legacy of decades of war that are endured in the wounds and bodies of Iraqis and their care projects.

Given the potential links between decades of militarization and the changing ecologies of wounds and antibiotic resistance, there is a need to expand our analytical perspectives to rethink what an archive of war history would include. Part of such history could be inscribed in the genetic life of bacteria—something that modern-day gene sequencing technologies could help us identify. What would it look like if we plot genetic kinship trees of bacteria onto a history of political events and changing healthcare practices? Understanding the links between history and biology will require a major scientific and research endeavor that brings together laboratory and environmental scientists and clinicians with historians and anthropologists to trace the historical splicing of resistance in the genetic makeup of the bacteria. Unravelling the genetic life of bacteria in time and space would just begin to link the microbiological biographies with the biographies and ecologies of war and intervention.

*Iraqibacter* is a true pathology of intervention. It stands as an archive of a cruel history, the manifestation of which runs deep through the wounds of Iraqis and the genetic make-up of their environments. ■

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USAID sign in Hebron, 2012.

OREN ZIVI/ACTIVESTILLS

# The Shifting Contours of US Power and Intervention in Palestine

Lisa Bhungalia, Jeannette Greven and Tahani Mustafa

**T**he modern history of Palestine is one of continuous intervention. International actors have long supported the overarching aims of the Zionist movement, and later Israeli state-led colonization, while attempting to manage the effects of Palestinian dispossession through various forms of development and humanitarian assistance.

The United States has been at the forefront of efforts that paradoxically attempt to buffer the impacts of Israeli settler-colonialism on the Palestinian population while directly enabling it to continue. Today, Washington stands as Israel's primary patron, providing it with roughly \$3.8 billion in

military aid per year. Since 1967, US military aid to Israel has totaled over \$120 billion.<sup>1</sup> The United States has also been the largest contributor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), established in 1949 to administer relief to Palestinian refugees, and is among the top six donors of aid to the Palestinians since the Oslo Accords of 1993—committing over \$5 billion in bilateral assistance.<sup>2</sup> Since the 1970s, Washington has also sought to retain stewardship over the “peace process” and assert its dominance in the Middle East by promoting a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From Camp David in 1978 to the 1993 Oslo Accords to the Annapolis Conference of 2007, Washington has safeguarded Israel's political objectives while promising to deliver a compromise between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>3</sup>

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US intervention in Palestine has long been defined by a mix of hard and soft power, which includes material support and coordination for Israeli and Palestinian security forces as well as funding for UNRWA and United States Agency for International Aid (USAID) civilian aid projects for Palestinians. The United States has used these levers of power to shore up Israel's settler colonial project while helping Israel manage and control—often through aid—the Palestinian population.

In light of this dynamic, one might presume that recent US aid cuts to Palestinians under the Trump administration—slashing the budgets for UNRWA, USAID projects and limiting support for Israeli-Palestinian security coordination—would be a welcome development. The implications, however, are more complicated. As Washington sheds any pretense of concern for the Palestinian population by waging unprecedented pressure policies, the Trump administration is undermining its own ability to pacify Palestinians and manage political dynamics on the ground. This moment may provide a promising opening. At the same time, as skewed as American policy has always been, the United States has at times restrained Israel's most maximalist aspirations. In the absence of any kind of counterweight to the realization of Israel's full-throttled settler-colonial ambitions, the future appears grim for Palestinians.

In the context of the shifting realignment of US power and intervention in Palestine, the rapid demise of US soft power has three interrelated but distinct effects. First, the United States has undermined its ability to project its will through indirect modalities of rule and governance built into civilian aid and security programs. Second, the Trump administration policies have undermined the long-term viability of US leadership on the international stage. At the same time, however, the US assault on the Palestinians inflicts very real violence, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where sudden US cuts to UNRWA have created significant resource shortages for some of the most vulnerable. This moment is one of uncertainty rather than definitiveness. Amidst these rapidly shifting configurations of power in Palestine the status quo is unraveling; the direction politics will take in the foreseeable future remains to be seen.

## A Foregone Veneer

Few following the Trump Administration's bellicose rhetoric about the Middle East during his presidential campaign would be surprised by the hardline direction in Washington's new approach toward the Palestinians. While Trump-the-candidate expressed interest in toppling established norms in order to compel the Palestinians to capitulate to Israeli demands, his inner circle departs from precedent only through its even more ardent embrace of Israel. The Trump administration has embraced a zealous Christian Zionist outlook that vocally denies Palestinian national

rights and endorses Israel's most maximalist claims, all the while consorting with anti-Semites and elevating a hyper-militarized vision of the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

This vision is apparent in the way the Trump administration has broken a number of long-standing norms of US diplomacy such as recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital in May 2018 and expelling the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) office from the US capital that September. Taken together, these moves return Washington's approach to the era before the 1991 Madrid Conference when the United States refused to recognize the PLO. In substance, American-Palestinian diplomatic relations have all but disappeared.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to shifts in the diplomatic arena, the Trump administration ended American civilian aid to the Palestinians in 2018, thus relinquishing the historic US semblance of concern for the welfare of the Palestinian population. In August 2018, the United States ended its contributions to UNRWA, which totaled \$360 million in 2017 and constituted over a quarter of the agency's annual budget. These cuts immediately jeopardized health care, education, employment and food security for Palestinian refugees. Recent reports estimate that over 1 million people in Gaza face dire food insecurity if UNRWA's budget crisis is left unresolved. The agency has also been forced to slash mental health and short-term employment programs, cutting lifelines to a population under a decade-long siege.<sup>6</sup> Washington's aggressive new stance went even further in January 2019, when it announced that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was ceasing all operations in the occupied Palestinian territories. USAID has since dismissed all but a handful of its staff, abandoned half-finished infrastructure projects including water, road and sewage systems and left underfunded local municipalities to pick up the pieces.<sup>7</sup>

The Trump administration unambiguously framed its decision to cut US assistance to the Palestinians as a political maneuver to compel them to the negotiating table. Some have speculated that the Trump administration's moves are part of a larger goal to unilaterally remove key issues (such as refugees and Jerusalem) from the negotiating table in time for the grand reveal of Trump's "Deal of the Century."<sup>8</sup> More sinisterly, however, American defunding of UNRWA can also be read as an attempt to dissolve the category of refugee altogether. As one Palestinian Authority (PA) official remarked, "UNRWA is a preamble to the refugee issue."<sup>9</sup> The velocity of the changes Washington has enacted amounts to what Ilana Feldman aptly terms a "full spectrum assault on Palestinian politics."<sup>10</sup>

## Security Footprint on Aid Governance

Despite the Trump Administration's hardline approach to the Palestinians and withdrawal of civilian aid that historically had been used to manage Palestinians in support of longer-term US



and Israeli interests, the US impact on foreign aid governance over Palestinians is still viscerally felt. This impact is the result of the decades-long US imposition and amplification of aid securitization. The American model of securitizing aid has subsequently been adopted by almost every major donor operating in Palestine and will likely remain for the foreseeable future.

The post-September 11, 2001 moment marked the intensification of a heavily securitized aid approach by US organizations. On September 23, 2001, President Bush signed Executive Order 13224, a proclaimed “strike on the financial foundation of the global terror network.” Part of a growing legal infrastructure of American terrorism financing law, the order prohibited US monies from being channeled to US-designated foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs). This order had direct implications for Palestinians. Given the deep entanglement of the American and Israeli security apparatuses, there is considerable crossover between groups bearing the terrorist classification on US lists and those identified as such by Israel. Groups designated as FTOs include Hamas and a number of Palestinian leftist organizations. In addition to freezing the US assets of official designees, the order imposed a host of other criteria that could result in being denied aid, ranging from having a relative in Israeli prison to inscribing the name of a martyr on a building or other edifice.

The tethering of US counterterrorism law to civilian aid has produced expansive policing and surveillance regimes over the past decade as responsibility for ensuring compliance with US law has been offloaded onto the many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private contractors that handle American monies.<sup>11</sup> As part of this risk-transference, civilian agencies that implement US funded projects are responsible for collecting the personal information of potential aid recipients. This data is then screened through US and Israeli intelligence apparatuses. Prospective aid applicants must confirm that they will not work with any group or individual bearing the designated terrorist classification through the signing of an anti-terrorism certificate (ATC). The conditionalities and prohibitions imposed by US terrorism financing law on aid to the Palestinians have impeded necessary coordination and networking between groups and individuals cleared by Washington’s intelligence apparatus and those denied clearance or consigned to the banned FTO category.

The reverberations of this securitization regime have been profound. To ensure a consistent flow of aid money, many NGOs and contractors have built anti-terror infrastructures into their programs, such as screenings, certificates and restrictive contractual terms to ensure they are viewed as low risk investments. Likewise, it was in fact the United States that coined the notion of “terrorist infrastructure” to target Islamic charities and organizations, before Israel adopted the term to put Hamas in the crosshairs.<sup>12</sup>

These measures have not been adopted without challenge, however. When USAID introduced the ATC in 2003, many Palestinian NGOs and charitable organizations boycotted

American funding to protest the US imposition of the term terrorism on Palestinian politics. For many in Palestine, signing the ATC directly sanctioned the American equation of Palestinian resistance with terror. As one Palestinian NGO worker in the West Bank noted, “No group actually wants to use the funds to support terrorism. Rather, this is a battle over principle. Who has the power to define?”<sup>13</sup> In perpetuating the premise that Palestinian charitable bodies must adhere to American and Israeli political demands in order to be legitimate, the United States exacerbated fragmentation and exclusion in Palestinian collective organizing.

Despite the Trump administration rollback of American aid, therefore, the securitized norms the United States instituted after September 11 continue to persist in Palestine today. As the director of an NGO in the West Bank remarked, the War on Terror gave rise to infrastructures of surveillance that are fundamental to the way aid works in Palestine today. “This is now normalized,” he stated, and “the US paved the way for this trend.”<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, another director of a Palestinian development NGO reflected on intensifying aid securitization throughout the foreign aid regime in Palestine:

The ATC emerged in 2003, and we boycotted this. It’s not our role to do vetting; it’s not our role to replace the police. [However] it didn’t stop with USAID. It spread [to] UN agencies. They [other donors] started adding some articles in their contracts. Then it went to other organizations like the Scandinavian countries, and they started adding a BDS [boycott, divestment and sanctions] condition.<sup>15</sup>

The counterterrorism paradigm aggressively promoted by the United States, which has grown to encompass large facets of Palestinian political life, will be difficult to roll back—whether or not American civilian aid to the Palestinians resumes.

Perhaps more perniciously, the Palestinian Authority has appropriated the counterterrorism framework for its own purposes. Charges of terrorism are a useful tool to prevent Islamist political organizing and to exclude Hamas from the PA, ensuring the hegemony of Fatah—the political party in power in the West Bank and that dominates the PA. The PA’s self-identification as a partner in the War on Terror is a key obstacle to Palestinian pluralism. The counterterrorism imperative criminalizes resistance and empowers draconian decrees like the 2017 Electronic Crimes Act.<sup>16</sup> The PA enacted the law at the request of the Israeli government as part of a censorship system whose premise is to combat terror online.<sup>17</sup>

## Security Incongruities

Emblematic of the US aid securitization paradigm—and its intractability—is the office of the US Security Coordinator (USSC), the main channel for American-Palestinian security coordination, based in Jerusalem. Against the backdrop of US aid cuts, the USSC is today the only direct forum for



Members of the Palestinian security forces detain a demonstrator at a protest against arrests by the Palestinian Authority in Hebron, 2017. MUSSA QAWASMA/REUTERS

American engagement with the Palestinian leadership. The role of the USSC exemplifies both the incongruity of recent US policy changes, and the insidious effects of US interventions in Palestine.

Established in March 2005, the USSC was originally mandated to oversee security arrangements related to Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip later that year. The USSC ensured that all multinational efforts to fund and implement reforms in the West Bank foregrounded Israeli security concerns after the Second Intifada (2000-2005). Between 2007 and 2009, the USSC oversaw the PA-led counterinsurgency campaign against armed militias that returned the West Bank's Area A to PA control. Funded through the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), the USSC was mandated to retrain the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF), vetted by Israel, to fully cooperate with the Israeli security and intelligence establishments. By 2009, its head of mission Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton was able

to claim that the USSC was responsible for the creation of battalions of "new Palestinians."<sup>18</sup> The USSC has since been instrumental in the construction of the police proxy regime in the West Bank, which is wracked by civil and human rights abuses.<sup>19</sup>

Under the Trump administration, however, the USSC has quickly become a site of entangled interventions. Since its inception, the USSC has relied upon key allies—a British Support Team and the Canadian Proteus mission—to build capacity in the PASF.<sup>20</sup> Recent US government policies have, paradoxically, threatened the USSC's ability to smoothly insert Israeli security demands into the fabric of the Palestinians' limited self-governance.

In the first instance, Congress passed the Taylor Force Act in March 2018, which charged the PA with incentivizing violence by providing the families of martyrs and prisoners in Israeli jails with financial support. The Taylor Force Act ended all American civilian program funding to the PA. It similarly set the stage for Israel to punish the Palestinians



in February 2019 by withholding taxes that Israel collects on behalf of the PA.<sup>21</sup> Combined, these cuts sparked an expanding budget crisis that compelled the PA to slash Palestinian civil servants' salaries, including those of its security forces.

Secondly, the Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act (ATCA) of October 2018 caused unforeseen complications in PA-Israeli security coordination. Pursuant to ATCA, entities that accept American aid "consent" to personal jurisdiction under US law. As such, they can be sued for past acts of terrorism—the definition of which, under existing US "material support laws," is expansive.<sup>22</sup> In effect, ATCA renders any recipient of American aid vulnerable to multi-million-dollar lawsuits in the United States. Recognizing the crippling impact ATCA could have, the PA subsequently announced it would cease to accept US funding.

As a further repercussion of ATCA, Washington defunded the INL office in the Consulate, cutting off the USSC's official stream of support. ATCA also accelerated the closure of the Jordan International Police Training Centre, host to trainings for regional partners in America's War on Terror including the PASF since 2008. Similarly, plans for construction at the US-funded Central Training Institute campus in Jericho slowed and are now being transferred to the PA, which will have to locate funding or face lawsuits from local subcontractors.

Following public outcry by Israeli security officials, who understand the intrinsic value to Israel of security coordination with the PA, current coordinator Lt. Gen. Eric Wendt travelled to Washington in December 2018 to compel legislators to see the folly of their decision. As a State Department official clarified, ATCA's impact on the PASF was "unintentional," despite the fact that the bill was the handiwork of pro-Israel groups explicitly devoted to bankrupting the PLO and PA.<sup>23</sup> Cognizant that ATCA poses a distinct threat to the PA's ability to pacify Palestinians, on which Israel relies, American lawyers have drafted up a fix—endorsed by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) as a "legislative priority"—which would eliminate "personal jurisdiction" from strategic funding streams.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the diplomatic downgrading of the US Consulate General in March 2019 complicated the relationships the United States depends upon to intervene in Palestine. The USSC physically sits in what is now the "Palestinian Affairs Unit." The continued British, Canadian and Turkish role in the USSC was called into question as the explicit American subordination of its relationship with the PA to Israel contradicts these states' positions.

The USSC's existence today—without any diplomatic framework and only tenuous international support—reveals how fragile the American stranglehold over securitized aid to the Palestinians has become. The USSC's behind-the-scenes endurance makes glaringly clear that the United States values the PA—at its core—as a native police force to meet

Israel's demands. Because of the Trump administration's priorities, funding to the USSC persists without the State Department's support.<sup>25</sup> In doing so, Washington pushes its allies and the PA into an increasingly untenable situation. As of April 2019, the PA's financial crisis became so severe that it withheld 50 percent of civil servants' salaries, while channeling nearly 30 percent of its total budget to the PASF, which serves Israel.<sup>26</sup> How much longer can Washington compel the PA to uphold Israel's demands when acquiescence to the United States yields only humiliations?

## Non-Ruptures

Despite the uncertainties that emerge from the forceful approach to the Palestinians adopted by the Trump administration, its policies are less disruptive than they appear. Trump acts upon the same Israel-focused "security first" perspective that has persisted throughout the peace process from the Oslo Accords to the Bush-era Road Map for Middle East Peace.<sup>27</sup> Though the Road Map was an abject failure, the model for progress it enforced—endless Palestinian reform to meet perpetually-moving, Israeli-determined performance benchmarks—is deeply entrenched in the aid community today.

At a structural level, the Trump administration is an aberration in US policymaking primarily in the manner in which its policy toward the Middle East is decided. One State Department official described an ideologically-driven coterie of decision-makers—a "black box"—dictating to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The State Department is disconnected from the decision-making process: The recent endorsement of Israel's illegal annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights, for example, was not previewed at any level within the State Department.<sup>28</sup>

The upheaval ushered in by the Trump administration is nevertheless significant because it strips the pretense of measured liberalism from American interventions. In substance, however, the yet to be unveiled "Deal of the Century" developed by US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, Senior White House Advisor Jared Kushner and White House Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt promises to sustain the combination of "economic peace" and technical fixes to Israeli control that Washington has long promoted.<sup>29</sup> While Trump's associates are more explicit in their disregard for Palestinian national claims, the same calculation was the backbone of US engagement with the Palestinians under the George W. Bush and Barack Obama presidencies. Indeed, as one State Department official hinted, Kushner's plan for the blockaded Gaza Strip is sure to include a package of securitized aid modelled on the 2008 Jenin Initiative—which tied economic aid to security reforms by the PA—and Palestinian businessmen are his target audience.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, while European policymakers may proclaim that they disagree with Trump's brash disregard for

international norms, in reality they consistently adhere to American and Israeli-determined lines toward the Palestinians. European donors are prominent supporters of programs designed to improve the rule of law and promote the principles of good governance and accountability within the PA's governing apparatus through justice reform initiatives. Yet, these European-funded initiatives have only served to facilitate the PA's transformation into an authoritarian proxy. By funding capacity-building programs for a judicial system that answers to no one but donors and a president with an expired mandate, these programs keep the wheels spinning in Ramallah while insulating the PA from civic dissent. Funds are disbursed in exchange for compliance with a status quo—Palestinian self-policing—that serves Israel.<sup>31</sup> In such circumstances, promoting the “rule of law” in Palestine is a euphemism for fine-tuning Israeli control.

With less room to maneuver, European partners dismayed by erratic shifts in American policy struggle to find viable alternatives to the United States' driving role in Israel-Palestine. A State Department official pointed to the recent Israeli expulsion of observers from the Temporary International Presence in Hebron as an example of the Europeans' limited political leverage.<sup>32</sup> Where the Europeans can contribute, they struggle to break out of the confines of the security-driven aid paradigm the United States established. In one telling example, Sweden moved to fill the funding gap to the PA security forces left by the United States. Despite Sweden's pretenses of solidarity by recognizing Palestinian statehood, Sweden in fact upholds US and Israeli-driven priorities through aid to the Palestinians.<sup>33</sup>

Cosmetic shifts in the provision of aid to the Palestinians aside, the PASF will continue to benefit from the largesse of an international community entrenched in an endless program of “reforming” and “strengthening” Palestinian institutions. Further, patronage of the PASF's Preventative and Intelligence services through bilateral backchannel funding and logistical support is sure to grow. Covert support has long underpinned Fatah's dominance in the West Bank, designed to prop up a compliant proxy and combat targeted groups like Hamas. In September 2018, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) hosted Majed Farraj, head of the Palestinian General Intelligence Service, and a potential replacement for aging PA President Mahmoud Abbas.<sup>34</sup> As open channels of bilateral American aid fade and Israeli demands for security coordination persist, covert support to the PASF is sure to increase in importance.

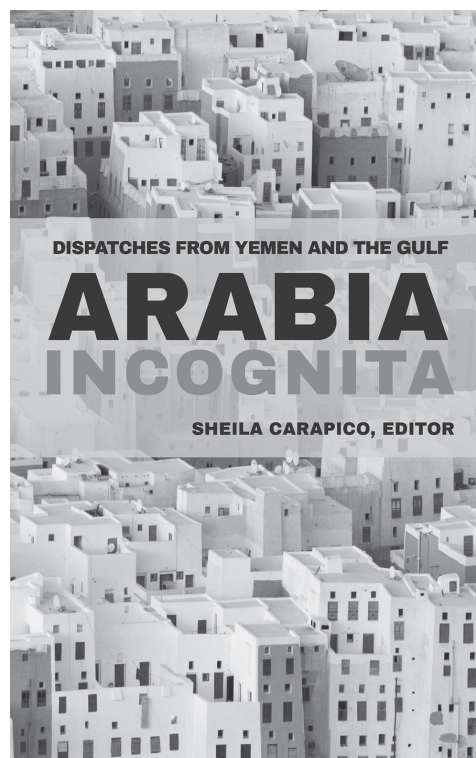
## Future Pathways

While the rapid succession of moves made by the Trump administration are audacious, they cannot alter certain fundamental truths. Defunding UNRWA will not, as Toufic Haddad observes, liquidate the Palestinians' “legal

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claims, memories, organizing efforts, and institutions.”<sup>35</sup> US endorsement of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital does not change its internationally-recognized status nor Palestinian political claims to it. While Trump’s characteristically spectacular maneuvers constitute a new round of fire on the Palestinians, this latest onslaught may very well have the opposite effect.

What the Trumpian vision has done is reaffirm US support for unqualified Israeli sovereignty and political claims over the land and affirm that the United States views the Palestinians as the problem to be dealt with. Equally, Washington’s recent moves remove its facade as a neutral broker, if it was ever taken seriously in the first place. Perhaps even more crucially, Trump may ultimately narrow US influence and leverage by so starkly isolating the United States from other international players and forces in Palestine. It is here that productive openings may emerge for those promoting Palestinian rights.

It is notable that few other states have followed Washington’s lead. Only Guatemala, Romania and Australia have relocated their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem—and Australia limited its recognition to West Jerusalem. Likewise, on the aid front, multilateral, European, Asian and other donors have not shown any significant shifts in their posturing, aside from lacking any forward-thinking political vision, a long-standing problem.

At the same time, the political transformations taking shape through the close alliance between the Trump and Netanyahu administrations have real and dire implications that will extend well beyond their tenures: Israeli lawmakers are explicitly drawing on American recognition of Israeli annexation in the Golan Heights as a model for justifying the application of Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank. In this context, inescapable questions plague Washington’s moves. If Israel annexes the West Bank, with American approval, what happens next? How long can the PA survive, financially powerless yet continuing its policing duties? Can the United States underwrite a policy of blatant apartheid after the PA falls? Will international actors distance themselves from the American position? What voices for justice for Palestinians will emerge in these shifts and fissures? And most importantly, how are Palestinians mobilizing and responding to this moment and the political openings it presents?

Much of the danger in recent American moves resides, perhaps, in the slow, grating, shifting of norms surrounding key issues: Jerusalem, the right of return, Palestinian political representation, and most of all, broad-based support for Palestinian dignity and freedom. To refuse normalization of the right-wing politics of the present is perhaps the most urgent task at hand. But this is in effect a negative demand. More productively, this moment presents a series of openings and reconfigurations of power in Palestine that have the potential to fundamentally alter the status quo—but

in which direction remains to be seen. This direction depends, in large part, on how those on the outside relate to these shifting dynamics, as much as how and in what ways Palestinians on the inside and beyond are supported in their long—decades too long—struggle for justice and dignity. ■

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# Urban Interventions for the Wars Yet to Come

## An Interview with Hiba Bou Akar

In this age of large-scale urbanization, cities have become a major battleground between different forces vying for political, financial and cultural power. Urban spaces have become targets of militarized interventions as well as sites of economic extraction and dislocation. Hiba Bou Akar's new book, *For the War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut's Frontiers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), provides a window into how urban planning is being used to turn some neighborhoods and urban peripheries in the Middle East into militarized frontier zones between competing political, military and sectarian organizations. MERIP editor Steve Niva interviewed Bou Akar by email in May 2019 about how such interventions can become a form of war by other means.

**Your book shows us how the seemingly unplanned and unfinished urban expansion of Beirut since the end of the civil war in 1990 is actually the planned outcome of multiple sectarian-political organizations intervening in Beirut's urban fabric in anticipation of a future war—a kind of war in the time of peace. What is the logic of this kind of war and how is it being fought?**

The end of the civil war in Lebanon did not bring peace, rather mutations in the logic of war. Geographically, this resulting war in times of

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peace is not fought with tanks, canons and rifles—it is fundamentally a territorial conflict where the fear of domination of one group by another is first fought over land and apartment sales and waged through zoning, planning and infrastructure projects. These territorial battles are mostly waged by religious-political organizations who often operate along sectarian lines. The result is that Beirut's south eastern peripheries have been transformed into contested frontiers of urban growth and sectarian violence in anticipation of future violence according to the logic of, what I call in the book, the war yet to come.

Temporally, the logic of the war yet to come involves a present moment from which the future can be imagined only as a time of further conflict. Spatially, it invokes a regulating logic according to which Beirut's





A housing complex in Sahra Choueifat, one of the author's research sites, at the south-east periphery of Beirut, 2017.

HIBA BOU AKAR

peripheries are envisioned not only as spaces of urban growth and real estate profit but also as frontiers of future wars. The logic of the war yet to come is ultimately not about an inevitable future of war, but about how the anticipation of future wars shapes the present.

The outcomes we see in Beirut's urban peripheries, then, are actually planned spaces that are often low income and have overlapping industrial and residential zones, highways that are never finished and playgrounds that are never built. These spaces are continuously reconfigured through recursive cycles of violence, producing patchworks of destruction and construction, lavishness and poverty and otherness and marginality. These spaces are what I describe as the geographies of the war yet to come.

**You appear to be suggesting that the ultimate decisions about urban planning in these areas are not determined by state or city planners. Who are the main agents of urban planning for the war yet to come?**

In Lebanon, it is the former civil war militias who are key to shaping the geographies of the war yet to come. Since the end of the war, these militias have become major religious-political organizations and are the primary spatial and development actors. The four main actors I focus on in these areas are the Shi'i organization Hezbollah, the Sunni Future Movement, the Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and the Maronite Christian Church, which is associated with several religious-political organizations.

Rather than being located outside the state or in opposition to it, each of these religious-political organizations functions through a constellation of affiliates that span the public and private sectors. Their networks of loyalists include cabinet ministers, heads of municipalities, street-level bureaucrats, bankers, housing developers, landowners, draftsmen in public and private planning agencies, police officers, militiamen, religious charity workers and even asphalt company employees. As hybrid entities they cannot be defined simply as non-state actors

or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Neither are they just political parties, since in addition to participating in the government, their activities range from organizing militias to distributing religious-based charity, passing through all other forms of social and political engagement in between.

Lebanon's religious-political organizations thus challenge established divisions between state and market, private and public, government and insurgency. Together, they provide soldiers for the Lebanese army and contribute to the government functions essential to the maintenance of state sovereignty. Yet, individually, they operate separate NGOs and paramilitary groups that have played roles in local and transnational wars in ways that challenge national sovereignty to varying degrees. For example, the importance of the state is considered to fade in the largely Hezbollah dominated area of al-Dahiya, where the state is seen as absent and indifferent to the struggle of the Shi'i poor. The state's role here is widely assumed to have been taken over by Hezbollah, which is often described as a state within a state. Yet, when discussing the reconstruction of downtown Beirut, the same state had been invoked as capable of mobilizing massive power in consolidating capital, eventually privatizing the heart of the city while provincializing its poor peripheries.

The rising power of such complex actors is not unique to Beirut. Religious-political organizations have played important social and political roles in a number of other post-conflict and post-colonial cities, making it critical that we understand how such actors continuously shape the state while also constituting what is "outside it," especially in our current neoliberal moment as states continue to roll back whatever social services they had provided for their citizens, leaving it to actors like religious-political organizations to provide alternative forms of socio-economic and political security and safety nets.

**How does the transformation of Beirut's peripheries into militarized frontiers differ from the gentrification of downtown**

## **Beirut into high end condominiums and shopping malls after the civil war—a form of urban planning based on a neoliberal logic of profit maximization rather than the anticipation of future war?**

Beirut's peripheries tell us a much different story about planning and its temporalities than the one usually told about post-war Beirut, seen through the prism of its downtown post-war reconstruction project that was characterized by neat colorful master plans, glittering buildings and emptied out streets. In contrast, Beirut's fast-urbanizing peripheries suddenly emerged in 2008 as frontiers of renewed sectarian conflict when dozens were killed in an episode of violence that was reminiscent of the civil war.

Of course, the neoliberal logics pursued by successive post-war governments have shaped the production of space in these peripheries through a range of policies, including decisions to give monetary compensation packages for the war displaced instead of developing comprehensive relief plans. It is thus important to consider central and peripheral Beirut in tandem because the two geographies are interlinked: Many of the war displaced families that were evicted from downtown Beirut sought affordable housing in the city's southeast peripheries. Simultaneously the gentrification caused by postwar developments in Beirut caused an outflux of people to peripheral areas.

Profit-making is also central to how Beirut's peripheries are arranged. Yet, these are contentious places, where profit making is but one aspect of space-making, and the territorial contestations in fear of future wars include other calculations. Ultimately, these peripheries are inhabited by low and middle income families who cannot afford to live in municipal Beirut. The post-war reconstruction of downtown Beirut, in contrast, was predominantly driven by profit, resulting in a project that dispossessed local populations of their claims to Beirut's center and building instead a downtown that mostly targeted foreign capital.

**There has been a surge in military urbanism with the United States and Israel leading the way in conceptualizing cities as future battle spaces in which to fight their asymmetrical opponents. Israel has also waged a continuous war against the Palestinian population under its control through massive infrastructure projects of walls, road systems and zoning practices that encircle and divide them. The Russian and Syrian militaries have simply targeted cities for destruction through a policy of urbicide. How does the militarization of urban planning in Beirut differ from these approaches?**

The space-making practices of the actors I examine in Beirut's peripheries after the civil war illustrate a complex relationship between space and violence. These are not solely geographies of destruction and annihilation, or fragmented geographies of apartheid and neocolonialism. The geographies of the war yet to come, instead, are shaped by construction as much as destruction, resulting in interlaced geographies of sameness and otherness that are crafted, negotiated and contested on a daily basis. In Beirut's peripheries, planning, zoning and real estate transactions are central to the transformation of peripheries as frontiers of both skyrocketing urban growth and sectarian violence. These

practices produce a nested geography of a thousand frontiers, where wealth and poverty, hope and fear, neighborliness and estrangement, empty and built spaces, women in bikinis on mixed-gender beaches and bearded men in white robes can coexist.

In addition to ruling the real estate and housing markets, religious-political organizations vie to control strategic hilltops and maintain access through residential zones in expectations of future wars. In one moment the window of an apartment is an ordinary window, but in future wars it could become a sniper location. This ever-present duality collapses the separation between housing and militarized spaces. The result is a militarization of everyday life.

Despite the wars these actors are waging, in the end, however, they manage to collectively run the Lebanese government while their alliances are in constant ebbs and flows. The geographies they produce are therefore a honeycomb of partnerships and differences, where many resources are shared even when disputed. In turn these practices create daily forms of contestation, but are also marked by forms of coexistence. In addition, the residents of these peripheries are all considered equal Lebanese citizens.

These conditions set these geographies apart from, for example, the experience of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories where the state in charge of arranging territories is an ethnonational colonial state that is providing housing for Israeli citizens through the dispossession of Palestinians. The complexity of the Lebanese political system also makes it difficult to square the contestation in these spaces fully within the framework of urbicide, which translates to the "killing of cities." At the same time, the intervention of religious-political organizations positions these everyday spaces as potential targets of urbicide in larger regional conflicts such as when Israel targeted peripheral neighborhoods in Beirut's southern district during its 2006 war on Lebanon.

## **How does the militarization of everyday urban life express itself in Beirut's expanding peripheries?**

This militarization of everyday life can be seen in the widespread talk and rumors about war and militarization that have accompanied the construction frenzy in these areas. For example, in Doha Aramoun, there were many rumors circulating around one housing development that stood on the corner of the main road that leads to Doha Aramoun, which, in contrast to the large flats in the apartment building behind it, has smaller affordable apartments with tiny windows and balconies that overlook both the Old Saida Road and the airport, barely 500 meters away.

One rumor was that the developers were Hizbollah affiliates who acquired this strategic site through quasi-legal maneuvers in order to put it in a position to place snipers and fighters at the entrance to Aramoun, Bchamoun, and Choueifat—as well as the airport and Beirut—in the event of war. Others questioned the logic of why the development had such small apartments rather than more expensive and larger apartments, implying that such density makes no sense as a housing development strategy but only makes sense in military terms: larger units would have generated higher returns for the developer, but smaller units allow for a denser concentration of residents likely to sympathize with (and fight alongside) Hizbollah.

These rumors circulated not only in beauty salons and grocery stores but also in municipal offices. Fast forward five years, however, many of



the people who were anxious about this development stop by on their daily trip home to buy from the grocery stores and shops that line its ground floor. This development clearly illustrates the logic of building war in times of peace—and although life there has now assumed a quotidian normality, the same rumors have merely moved on to other sites of housing development.

**In many parts of Beirut, the ruined buildings from the civil war have been replaced by new developments, yet in other places they remain. Why do we see ruins in some areas but not in others?**

There are many reasons why ruins stay as ruins. The most famous is the Holiday Inn in downtown Beirut, where contestation over its future by its multiple owners has stalled redevelopment. The peripheral sites where I work, in particular Hayy Madi-Mar Mikhail, are a checkered geography of ruins and new construction. When I asked why some buildings were still in ruins while many others had been demolished and replaced, I learned that the church had intervened to stop the sale of many of these ruins to Shi'i developers. This checkered geography thus reflects the territorial battle between the Maronite Church on the Christian side, and Hizbollah affiliated real-estate developers on the Shi'i side. Ruins that stayed as ruins indicated that the land had been bought by the church. Ruins replaced by a new development indicate that the land had been bought by a Shi'i developer. The area had become one of the major frontiers where Christians and Shi'a are struggling over land. Thus, in this contested geography civil war ruins are the ruins of a contested past as much as they are ruins in contested presents and futures. This doubleness—ruins as products and leftovers of the civil war and as indicators of a territorial war in times of peace—illustrates one of the ways in which peripheries are transformed into contested frontiers.

**The modern practice of urban planning is one of arranging spaces of progress and development toward a more harmonious collective future, but you suggest that in Beirut's peripheries we are seeing a distinctively dystopian form of urban planning without development and seemingly without a future. Are we seeing this elsewhere?**

Although the task of organizing cities is an old one, it was the Western project of modernity that imbued it with a teleology of order and progress, which became the normative discourse within the planning profession. Even during the darkest days of the civil war in Lebanon, officials and planning experts were still imagining a future of peace, order and prosperity after the war. However, since the end of the war, this expected future has increasingly become less about peace or development and more about the inevitability of future conflict. As a result, the practice of urban planning emerged as a tool of conflict and war as much as that of peace and order. Within this alternative planning regime, innovative techniques are deployed to craft a spatiality of political difference in an attempt to keep war at bay while enabling the powerful to profit from ongoing urban growth.

In this context, contemporary planning practice in Lebanon has become little more than an exercise in ordering space, a tool of power

brokerage in sectarian battles. Planners have mostly become the technicians of this new regulating logic, signaling a shift in their approach away from deploying urban planning as a tool of development aimed to alleviate poverty in urban peripheries, toward planning as a tool to manage these peripheries as frontiers of sectarian conflict.

These spatial practices challenge the common conception of planning as a tool through which to order the present in the interest of an improved future. They also debunk modern narratives about peace, order, and progress by collapsing distinctions between peace and war, order and chaos, construction and destruction, progress and stagnation.

Such conditions, however, are neither exceptional nor limited to the paradigm of "cities in conflict" like Beirut, Belfast or Medellín. Today, we are at a global moment in which the imagined future in most places in the world—in both the Global North and South—is one of conflict and contestation characterized by ecological crises, anticipated terror attacks and unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants—a horizon of the war yet to come. Fears generated by these anticipated bleak futures have rendered the ability to organize towards futures that are fully inclusive of a racialized, religious, ethnic and gendered other increasingly more difficult. Understanding and exposing the many forms of exclusionary practices and atrocities committed in the name of these fears is therefore crucial to configuring projects of social change.

**Yet you still suggest that urban planning could be a powerful tool for building a different and more just and inclusive urban future. What forms could this take?**

Despite my criticism of planning practices in Lebanon, new movements that use the tools of urban planning are emerging through the cracks of this dystopian tableau—movements that may one day challenge sectarian-based political alliances and their geographies of fear. In Beirut, these movements are experimenting with using the tools of planning, as attendant to more general processes of space-making, to initiate dialogue among city residents about their built environment, providing opportunities for public participation and stimulating new imaginings of collective futures.

These processes have the potential to craft new spaces for social engagement and knowledge circulation and offer platforms for organizing toward a different horizon, one that sees beyond the inevitability of new wars. We recently caught a glimpse of such hope in the work of Beirut Madinati (Beirut My City), a movement of professionals, academics, and activists that managed to win 40 percent of the vote in Beirut's municipal elections in 2016, and with Naqabati (My Syndicate) that won the presidency of Beirut's Order of Engineers and Architects in its 2017 elections.

I am also working with local civil society groups and NGOs to use planning tools as sites of research that allow urban activists to collect data and present findings to the public to mobilize beyond sectarian divisions towards new formulations of the public interest. Such practices might also speak to the possibility of imagining a different future for spaces of conflict across cities of the Global South and North. They involve reimagining the scope and purpose of planning practice in places where differences may be so extreme that the future cannot always be imagined as peaceful or uncontested, and where work has to be done to craft collective futures beyond the inevitability of conflict. ■



A showroom promoting homes for sale in Rawabi, the first Palestinian planned community to be established in the West Bank.

TANYA HABJOUQA/PANOS PICTURES

# The Palestinian McCity in the Neoliberal Era

Sami Tayeb

**P**alestine today is increasingly subject to two urban forms of colonization. One form is produced by Israeli settler-colonialism while the other, newer form, is produced by neoliberal capitalism. While the two forms are distinct—each has its unique history and primary drivers—they both work in ways that reinforce and solidify the other's hold on the terrain.

The most visible and intrusive urban form of colonization on the Palestinian landscape is the vast expanse of illegal Israeli hilltop settlements implanted throughout Palestinian territory under Israel's military occupation of the West Bank following the 1967 Six-Day War. Jewish settlement in the West Bank began as a messianic project informed by the logic of settler-colonialism adopted by early Zionism—which seeks to replace an indigenous population with settlers from the colonizing entity. In the 1970s, the Israeli militarist and later Prime Minister Ariel Sharon transformed the settlement movement into a state colonization project when he became head of the government's settlement committee in the Occupied Territories. He began

applying his “defense in depth” strategy, which he had developed during Israel's military campaigns in the Sinai, to the planning for Israeli civilian settlement expansion.<sup>1</sup> Each settlement location was chosen according to a strategic military logic to form a network of fortifications that would disrupt and bisect the preexisting network of Palestinian communities.

The settlements that circle and crisscross the hilltops and valleys of the West Bank typically consist of large gated residential communities—often with swimming pools and shopping malls—and also serve as “optical devices on a suburban scale” in order to surveil and visually remind Palestinians on a daily basis of their domination.<sup>2</sup> In conjunction with the massive Israeli wall and fence barrier that pushes deep into the West Bank and Jewish-only bypass highways and hundreds of checkpoints throughout the territory, the settlements are one piece of the spatial regime of incarceration that dominates the Palestinian population's space and movement.

Less visible is the emergence of a new urban form of colonization through a multitude of private Palestinian urban development projects that are advancing across the Palestinian

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countryside and are urbanizing the remaining agrarian land at an unprecedented scale. These projects often take the form of suburban tract housing, mixed-use suburban developments and semi-privatized spaces of consumption such as shopping malls. This urban form of colonization is driven by global, and particularly neoliberal, capitalism. The most grandiose of these projects to date is the planned city of Rawabi, which is located north of Ramallah and is expected to house a population of around 40,000. Rawabi is the first private, master-planned, mixed-use city in the West Bank. The primary agents of this urban form of colonization are Palestinian capitalists and elites backed by the Palestinian National Authority (PA). They are linked to broader regional and global financial networks and interests, including multinational business “action tanks,” global project management firms and the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA).

Although Rawabi and private Palestinian urban development projects have been presented as an assertion of Palestinian “state-building” and local agency—and even as part of a broader path towards “peace” with Israel—these projects do nothing to challenge Israel’s spatial regime of settler-colonial occupation and are instead compliant and subordinate to it.

The social relations of settler-colonialism and neoliberalism are not mutually exclusive and, in this case, work in complementary ways, so that transnational capitalists and the Israeli settlement regime are both able to solidify their hegemony over Palestinians. They both employ a variety of strategies that critical geographer David Harvey refers to as “accumulation by dispossession.”<sup>3</sup> They exploit the existing, often inequitable, political and economic networks at their disposal to accumulate profit or territory. Rawabi is an exemplary material manifestation of this new form of neoliberal urbanism, a neoliberal McCity that ultimately does little to address Palestinians’ most immediate and salient social issues—unemployment, poverty, food and water insecurity—or their struggle for liberation from Israeli occupation.

## The Emergence of the Palestinian McCity

The emergence of this new form of urban colonization alongside Israel’s settler-colonialism is indicative, arguably, of a third wave of spatial transformation in Palestine since early Zionist settlement at the end of the nineteenth century. The first major transformation of Palestinian space was the 1948 Palestinian exodus, or Nakba, when Zionist forces took over large swathes of Palestinian land to establish the State of Israel. The Nakba not only shattered Palestinian space by dislocating Palestinians from their urban centers and villages, but it also shattered the social fabric through their expulsion to other villages, countries and refugee camps. Palestinian space was again dramatically transformed when Israel conquered and occupied Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the 1967 war. Israel transformed Palestinian space by appropriating over 50 percent of Palestinian land in the Occupied

Territories, creating a colonial frontier that is “deep, shifting, fragmented, and elastic” through a series of unilateral military practices and settlements.<sup>4</sup> The West Bank has also been used as a testing ground and laboratory for Israeli-made weapons, military strategies for occupation, policing, surveillance and for its own economic and neoliberal policies.<sup>5</sup>

But over the past few decades, the West Bank has also become a laboratory for the new production and arrangement of Palestinian urban space. This third wave of spatial transformation is most visible in the recent proliferation of Palestinian private urban development projects across the West Bank, such as Rawabi. This still unfolding spatial transformation began when the Oslo Accords of 1993 led to the establishment of the PA and opened up the West Bank to global capitalism.

Since then, Palestinian development has been increasingly informed by the processes and practices of neoliberalism under colonial occupation. Unlike the Israeli settlement project, Palestinian developers have had to negotiate around Israeli spatial and permit restrictions in their efforts to create a space for the emerging Palestinian capitalist class and elites to live and work. For example, Rawabi’s developer has built an urban center so that the residents of Rawabi are not obligated to leave the city in their daily routine to confront Israel’s restrictive organization of Palestinian space, hence, Rawabi’s motto: “a place to live, work, and grow.”

Neoliberal doctrine promotes the privatization of public assets and free market solutions to public issues to enable the consolidation of class power through a redistribution of wealth upwards to the capitalist class. As a radical form of capitalism, neoliberalism is not concerned with human well-being or creating suitable living environments for people, but instead creates new strategies of capital accumulation through the extraction of wealth from the working and middle classes. Neoliberal urbanism creates cities that are highly surveilled, controlled and homogenous. By prioritizing capitalist speculation and consumption, developers seek to create a built environment where every social interaction in the city is reduced to a monetary transaction.<sup>6</sup>

Following Oslo, the process of opening up the Palestinian economy to foreign investment and private sector development accelerated when Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas appointed Salam Fayyad as prime minister in 2007. As a former employee of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, Fayyad’s plans for institutional reforms and national development—such as the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) presented at the 2007 Paris Donor Conference and subsequent national plans—paved the way for neoliberal development. The reforms were meant to lead to a Palestinian state, but only if Palestinians could first achieve good governance, economic growth and security, known as the “state-building narrative.” This shift coincided with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s proclaimed “economic peace” strategy, which promoted economic collaboration between Palestinian and Israeli businesses.

Neoliberal doctrines have been embraced to such an extent that they can be found in nearly every aspect of the Palestinian economy, such as real estate development, financial and banking services, the public sector, tax collection, security, education and telecommunications. The national development plans and institutional reforms implemented since 2007 have cleared the way for numerous housing projects scattered throughout the areas controlled by the PA and those controlled jointly by the PA and Israel (areas A and B respectively) of the West Bank. Along with small-scale projects such as Reef, al-Reehan, al-Ghadeer, al-Jinan, al-Worood, Surda Hills, Birzeit Heights, Etihad Villas and Moon City, other larger projects on par with Rawabi have been proposed such as the Jericho Gate project and a master plan to redevelop the entire Gaza Strip.

Since Palestinians lost their urban centers in 1948, there is no contemporary indigenous model for how Palestinians can or should urbanize. The developers of Rawabi seek to fill this void by advancing their own conception of urbanism, which is a design paradigm based on liberal free market solutions. The result is the emergence of the McCity.<sup>7</sup> In short, the central feature of the McCity is that it is a master-planned, neoliberal tract city that has been built upon a clean slate. What makes this development paradigm different from other types of tract housing projects is its scale and the new urban form that it embodies—it is not creating a subdivision or gentrifying a neighborhood, it is building an entire city. The developer's intention is that once Rawabi has been tried and tested, this prototype will be replicated throughout the West Bank ad infinitum.

While some design aspects of previous urban planning movements can be observed in Rawabi's form (such as modernism, new urbanism and new town planning) it is primarily a manifestation of a type of urbanism called catalytic development that has been touted in recent years by Washington, DC think tanks and social entrepreneurs. Rawabi's urban form ultimately conforms to a type of internationalized development that is oriented toward rent extraction and other methods of capital accumulation like high-end consumption, entertainment and tourism. As a completely privatized city, Rawabi has achieved neoliberalism's endgame by giving the developer hegemonic control over all operations, networks, modes of governance and economic activity within the city.

## Transnational Capitalist Networks

Rawabi is located nine kilometers north of Ramallah and its municipal boundary encompasses 1,560 acres of land. It first broke ground in early 2010 and construction is still ongoing, despite facing multiple delays. Rawabi only has a few thousand residents, but is expected to eventually house a population of about 40,000. While the initial costs for Rawabi were projected in 2008 to be around \$350 million, they have now risen to \$1.4 billion, which makes it, by far, the largest private sector real estate project in the West Bank.

The Rawabi urban development project was conceived in 2007 in close collaboration between Palestinian-American entrepreneur Bashar Masri and a British "action tank" (as opposed to a think tank) called The Portland Trust, which has offices in London, Ramallah and Tel Aviv. The Portland Trust played a crucial role in the realization of Rawabi by lobbying support for the project from both the Israeli government and the PA. Additionally, it was through The Portland Trust's chairman, social entrepreneur Ronald Cohen, that Masri was introduced to architect Raffie Samach, who worked at the US-based firm Architecture, Engineering, Construction, Operations, and Maintenance (AECOM). Through this connection, AECOM, in collaboration with professionals from the Palestinian universities Birzeit and an-Najah and Masri's in-house team of architects, created the Rawabi master plan—all of which was funded by The Portland Trust.<sup>8</sup> The Rawabi project was then proposed at the 2008 Palestine Investment Conference in Bethlehem, presided over by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The message of the conference was "you can do business in Palestine."

In order to finance Rawabi, Bashar Masri collaborated with Qatari Diar Real Estate Investment Company. Diar is the real estate branch of the Qatari government, which falls under the auspices of the Qatar Investment Authority and is overseen by the Qatari Minister of Finance. Masri's company, Massar International, and Diar came together to form Bayti Real Estate Investment Company, which is the development company overseeing the planning and construction of Rawabi. Even though Masri is the public face of the project, and Massar is financing a small portion of the project, it is Diar that is the main benefactor as it is financing nearly all of the construction costs.

Like other Gulf states, Qatar is dealing with the problem of capital overaccumulation from its oil and gas revenues by embarking on a real estate construction binge. Diar, founded in 2005 and capitalized at \$4 billion, has taken on numerous luxury construction projects throughout the world. The centerpiece of its investments is the \$45 billion flagship project of Lusail City in Qatar. By the time Qatar hosts the 2022 World Cup, Lusail is projected to have capacity for 260,000 residents. While the \$1.2 billion Diar has tied up in Rawabi may be a significant injection of capital for the West Bank economy, this project is financially inconsequential for Qatar when seen within the grander scope of Diar's investment portfolio. Moreover, Diar's investment in Rawabi unquestionably plays a role in Qatar's foreign policy objectives and its assertion of soft power. If Qatar has the political will, Diar will see the project through regardless of its profitability.

## Israeli and Palestinian State Support

Along with transnational capitalist networks, states also facilitate capital flows to support neoliberal urban development projects. The support for these projects in Palestine has largely come from the PA and Israel, as well as from the United States. While the





The Israeli settlement of Beitar Illit in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, 2019.

RONEN ZVULUN/REUTERS

PA initially promised \$140 million for Rawabi's infrastructure and public buildings through a 2008 public-private partnership signed with Bayti, it has yet to deliver. Despite this, the PA has helped bring the project to fruition in ways that do not incur a direct cost to its budget, but were nonetheless vital for the project to succeed. The PA has used its bureaucracy to facilitate obtaining permits and approvals for Rawabi. For example, the land for the project was carved out of territory located mostly in area A of the West Bank from the three surrounding villages of Ajul, Abwein and Attara. In a few years time, Masri was able to obtain 1,560 acres (6,300 dunums) of land. Although he was unable to purchase the land from private owners, an unprecedented 2009 eminent domain decree issued by Abbas allowed him to acquire the rest through expropriation. In the same year, the PA also approved Rawabi's master plan.

In 2013, the PA approved the establishment of the Rawabi municipality, which allows Bayti to control zoning, tax collection and the city budget, among two dozen other privileges.<sup>9</sup> The municipal council was appointed (not elected) by Bayti and consists of members from the public and private sectors. The only legal standing for the creation of such a municipality, in a city without residents, is a broad interpretation of a 1997 law on municipalities. Municipal status is generally granted only after a population reaches a certain threshold, which is then classified A, B, C or D according to the number of inhabitants. Therefore, the granting of municipal status to

Rawabi, before the city had any residents, is unprecedented in Palestinian history.

Masri has also worked closely with Israel. Despite contrary claims in numerous interviews with Masri, Rawabi's emergence does not defy the occupation, but is a project that acquiesces to its demands. Israeli suppliers are by far the main recipients of the capital expended on Rawabi so far. While Masri has gone to great lengths not to disclose his Israeli suppliers, he claims he does not use any materials or products made in Israeli settlements. Even so, at the height of Rawabi's construction, up to 95 percent of materials and supplies were being imported, upon which Israel collects import taxes. Additionally, according to the former deputy managing director of Rawabi, Amir Dajani, approximately \$80 to \$100 million was spent annually on Israeli suppliers.

While Rawabi has received some funding from US development agencies, the most significant American contribution to the project is the creation of the Affordable Mortgage and Loan program, known as AMAL. This US government-backed for-profit mortgage company was created in 2008 to support a spree of sizeable housing projects that were being developed in the West Bank, including Rawabi. The goal of this program is to encourage Palestinians to move into the housing projects by taking on American-style mortgages. The creation of AMAL was necessary because Rawabi's housing prices are too high for the average Palestinian. While it has yet to be seen, AMAL



potentially stands as being the second largest beneficiary of Rawabi after the Israeli suppliers.

## The Politics of Neoliberal Urbanism

Since the 2008 Bethlehem conference, Rawabi has been presented to the public as supporting the state-building initiative that the government set out to accomplish during Fayyad's tenure as prime minister. The narrative of state-building is a repackaging of Fayyad and Netanyahu's "economic peace" initiative in a way that is easier for Palestinians to accept: Becoming willing participants in "state-building" is more palatable than economic collaboration with Israel. Not only does the state-building narrative open up new and larger avenues of accumulation for Palestinian and Israeli capitalists, but prioritizing state-building over other concerns also serves as a justification for undemocratic practices around the West Bank. The eminent domain decree issued by Abbas and the approval of Rawabi's municipality and municipal council are perhaps the most startling examples of this to date.

Moreover, by prioritizing and facilitating Rawabi, the PA has stifled growth in other parts of the West Bank at a great cost to ordinary Palestinians who cannot afford to live in Rawabi. While there is no wall or fence that encases the entire city, other subtler means have been used to achieve separation. In acquiring six times more land from private owners than what it needs for the first phase of the project, Bayti has de facto created a boundary of separation from the surrounding villages. Then, to solidify this boundary, Bayti succeeded in obtaining municipality status from the PA and thus was able to inscribe a wide municipal boundary around the project. By using the existing, and inadequate, legal system to create a new municipality, the developer was able to effectively restrict the future expansion of the neighboring villages.

In addition to Rawabi benefitting Israel economically, Masri has done little to challenge Israel's spatial regime of control or the structural inequalities of the military occupation. He built the project in areas A and B, not C (Palestinian areas controlled solely by Israel), he asked the Israeli state for permission to use Jewish-only roads during the project's construction and it was Netanyahu who decided to appropriate more water for Rawabi as a quid pro quo that also gave Israeli settlements more water.<sup>10</sup> The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement has called Masri's activities with Israel "a shameless act of normalization of the worst type."<sup>11</sup>

The state-building narrative emerged shortly after the second intifada and the subsequently annulled 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections. With the emergency appointment (not election) of Salam Fayyad as prime minister, the state-building narrative took on a "carrot and stick" approach that Israel routinely uses on the Palestinian population. That is, if Palestinians choose to directly confront the occupation, they will be crushed as they were during the second intifada. It has

been well documented that the PA security forces have played an active role in suppressing resistance to the occupation by acting as Israel's security subcontractor in the West Bank.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, projects such as Rawabi function to incentivize Palestinians to debt-finance an apolitical upper-middle class lifestyle for themselves while forgoing any attempts at real political change.

## Rawabi's Contradictions

Rawabi offers an illusory hope of a better future for Palestinians. It suggests that Palestinians are in control of their own future, something unattainable before the establishment of the PA. Unfortunately, this control is only granted to the Palestinian capitalist class and political elites, and then only in the realm of capital accumulation and lifestyle. Alongside Israel's relentless colonization of ever more territory, this neoliberal form of urbanization leaves a majority of the Palestinian population powerless and in even less control of their lives and their environment than at any other time during the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Moreover, the current wave of Palestinian urban development reinforces Israel's spatial fragmentation of the West Bank by only building in places that Israel allows. While Israeli settlements and Palestinian urban development projects are racing to settle the hilltops of the West Bank and reshaping the landscape in their own image, this uneven and unequal development inevitably disadvantages the majority of Palestinians. The modicum of space that remains for future Palestinian growth in areas A and B is simultaneously being eaten away by development projects undertaken by Palestinian capitalists and by Israeli settlement expansion.

The possibility for the average Palestinian to have any control over how their space is transformed becomes slimmer with each passing day. Instead, Palestinians are left concerned with how to repay their financial obligations in order to maintain a certain lifestyle based on debt or how to merely hold on to what they already have. While Rawabi may seem like a space of hope for some Palestinians seeking social mobility, it will ultimately become a site of conflict once its contradictions become more pronounced over time. ■

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Norwegian Refugee Council lawyers conduct information sessions for newly arrived internally displaced people in Hamam al-Ali, Iraq, 2017.

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# Humanitarian Crisis Research as Intervention

Sarah E. Parkinson

**G**lobal crises feature complex interactions between state and non-state military actors, civilian populations, humanitarian organizations, journalists and private corporations. As zones of overlapping and concurrent interventions, these spaces of war, forced migration and humanitarian disaster often provide opportunities, inspiration—and sometimes the imperative—to conduct research.

As health sciences disciplines recognize most directly, such extreme, catastrophic and comparatively rare events embody moments that societies must understand but cannot ethically re-create in order to study. Researchers cannot intentionally trigger a Chernobyl-level reactor meltdown, an Ebola outbreak or a bombing campaign to examine their public health consequences. Rather, they wait for one to happen and then gather data in order to facilitate understanding, treatment, mitigation and even models of compensation.

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Many social scientists, on the other hand, do not confront the relationship between complex crisis and opportunity as overtly—it would be ethically unthinkable to create a war or humanitarian crisis in order to study its consequences. Researchers who work in such spaces often hope their research can be used to ameliorate those conflicts or help those affected by them, in part via critical examination of the effects of multi-faceted, concurrent interventions. Some scholars seek to capitalize on the latest hot topic to gain reputational and professional benefits associated with doing high-risk or extreme research (a process referred to as “outdangling”), or insist that they can provide immediate aid, despite limited evidence in this realm.<sup>1</sup>

Scholarly research is by definition an intervention: To develop a research question is to “intervene” in a debate. Research necessitates the researcher intervene into spaces, social relations and organizations whether through the application of a treatment (versus a control, though the decisions to control

or to not treat can also be forms of intervention), the arrangement of particular types of goals into a larger competitive field (governments versus human rights advocates) or embedding new theories and approaches within a broader scholarly deliberation. In fields such as economics and political science, scholars are also often asked for policy recommendations, which may become latent or active interventions.

Not all military, humanitarian and economic interventions are equally necessary, warranted or legitimate. The same applies to academic and research-based interventions; quite simply, not all are created equal. Academic interventions can impose serious harm on individuals, communities, local partner universities,<sup>2</sup> and even humanitarian program staff operating in crisis zones.<sup>3</sup> They may also—by design or not—be used to defend and enable other forms of intervention. Many of the social science disciplines—including anthropology and sociology—have their roots in interventionist colonial imaginaries and campaigns of conquest.

Given that research in crisis-affected settings necessarily involves intervention, important questions arise about how academic projects interact with those of other actors and how these can produce harmful effects. When are researchers unknowingly reproducing sensitive and dehumanizing interactions; fetishizing and commodifying human tragedy; or engaging in problematic labor dynamics? In a regional situation where reinvigorated authoritarian regimes are ratcheting up surveillance, harassment and violence against researchers, the ‘crisis zones’ of displaced persons and refugees have emerged as alternative sites where the state’s official coercive presence is seen as less obtrusive or threatening to researchers. As larger numbers of scholars gravitate toward these locales one must ask what benefit such research—as carried out by social scientists—in fact provides. Drawing upon a decade of observations and experiences from field-based research with armed actors, displaced persons and humanitarian responders in Lebanon and Northern Iraq, I ask if “do no harm” is a sufficient pre-condition for conducting social science research in crisis zones, and what kinds of practices research communities should consider moving forward.

## Dehumanizing Assessments?

The sun is barely over the horizon as the team of Iraqi medical workers piles into white, 12-person vans for the short drive to an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp south of Erbil. One of them tells me that in the past months, the number of residents has ballooned to approximately 30,000. Several thousand people arrived in the first week of August 2016 alone, walking through the hot dry agricultural plains outside of Mosul, Hawija, or Makhmur to escape the Iraqi Army’s and Kurdish forces’ salvos against ISIS, known colloquially by its Arabic acronym Daesh. Most of the arrivals are Sunni Arabs who, for one reason or another, had chosen to stay in their homes following Daesh’s takeover

in 2014. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) consequently established a screening system whereby men arriving at IDP camps were separated from their families and sent for questioning by security agencies before joining the camp’s population.

When we arrive, a community health team scans a section of the camp that hosts new arrivals, planning an assessment. The team consists of three medical workers who move systematically between households—tents—interviewing family members. At the doorway to each tent, the team leader leans down, greets anyone inside—all the flaps are open due to the heat—identifies the international non-governmental organization (INGO) and its purpose, asks if the team may conduct an interview and notes that a foreign researcher (me) is observing the INGO’s work that day. Everyone answers in the affirmative and invites us inside; many offer bottled water from their daily rations. While air coolers—fans that blow across pipes containing chilled water—sit at the far end of each tent, the electricity is not on yet for the day.

The very act of interviewing in this setting creates and reinforces the categories of aid worker and beneficiary, safe and vulnerable, mobile and immobile. These dichotomies are noteworthy because several of the medical workers are themselves IDPs from Mosul and speak with Moslawi accents. Yet their medical skills and employment place them in a different social category, vis-à-vis both their co-employees at the INGO and the IDPs they are interviewing. Team members click pens and begin the interview, asking the number of people in the household, their ages and about any health conditions they face (a wound, a cold, type 2 diabetes). The community health worker teaches the children in the tent how to wash their hands with sanitizer instead of water (which is in short supply) and demonstrates the technique while making a game of it for younger children. After between five and ten minutes we say our thanks, often politely refusing a lunch invitation and move down the row to the next tent, repeating the entire process.

Repeated interactions such as this one encourage people to relay extraordinarily emotional stories in a depersonalized, systematic, compartmentalized way. Though the new arrivals in the IDP camp were not yet accustomed to the system, interactions that I later observed in other camps and urban program sites immediately revealed a pattern: a beneficiary would encounter a humanitarian worker, state their name, if they were married, if they were widowed (and often the way they were widowed, as this factor can influence inclusion in an aid program), the number of people in their family, the number of children, the number of children under a certain age (an indicator of special needs), any health problems family members had, the physical state of their house, if they had returned home, and so forth. Female heads of households—considered a particularly vulnerable category in the humanitarian world—seemed particularly likely to organize initial interactions in this way, and often carried





International Committee of the Red Cross President Peter Maurer, right, and head of operations in Homs, Majda Flihi, visit a shelter, Syria, 2016. JEROME SESSINI/MAGNUM

a dossier of paperwork from past engagements with INGO and United Nations (UN) workers.

In northern Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan, as in places such as Zaatari, Jordan, the camps' built environments facilitate such assessments: Tents are clustered or in rows, with numbers to facilitate information gathering, distribution and monitoring. This level of organization also makes camps attractive locales for scholarly research requiring randomization and structured interviews; people are often home, with very little to do, few excuses to say no and they live in an environment where refusing interventions can be viewed with suspicion. There is pressure to accept visitors, the underlying understanding being that visitors are collecting information in order to provide material aid, services, protection and advocacy. Given the repeated interactions camp residents have with health and aid workers, they develop highly condensed and scripted statements that encompassed a vast range of personal circumstances designed to be delivered quickly and intelligibly to a range of aid workers. The fact that displaced persons deploy these strategies reflects both a strategic reaction to being sorted into particular categories as well as attempts to navigate often paradoxical and depersonalized aid systems with minimal frustration.

## Helping or Harming?

Researchers often view their projects as isolated endeavors. In reality, interventions—academic, humanitarian, medical, advocacy-based, government and journalistic—occur in the same spaces and in relation to each other. In violence-affected settings, people's past experiences with military actors shape reactions to humanitarian and researcher efforts in surprising ways. During the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, for example, the fact that external thermometers looked like pistols, worked by being applied to a person's forehead and were deployed at checkpoints contributed to associations of health workers with soldiers, generating intense fear of these interactions. The result was that people avoided these health stations, contributing to the spread of Ebola.<sup>4</sup> In humanitarian settings, populations often see researchers not as independent actors, but rather as part of this larger body of outsiders who are internationally mobile, well-paid, culturally distinct and politically removed from the milieu in which they work.

The eliding of professional distinctions and goals by on-the-ground populations was so thorough in Rojava and Iraqi Kurdistan that I was advised to simply tell people that I was working in humanitarian aid; a Kurdish friend argued that



is how people on the ground would understand me anyway. Similarly, Johanna E. Foster and Sherizaan Minwalla note of their research with Yazidi women: “One of the greatest challenges we faced in collecting our data was walking in the shoes of hundreds of journalists before us. Even when we went to great lengths to assure women that we were researchers and not journalists, some among the Yazidi community including the women we interviewed perceived us as journalists.”<sup>5</sup> In this setting, many Yazidi women perceived journalists’ work as predatory and dehumanizing and projected associated expectations onto other foreigners visiting the camps.

The nature of research methodologies, therefore, implicates academic interventions as potential influences on ongoing crises. Scholars have repeatedly grappled with questions related to the potential expectation of services and remuneration, as well as the question of whether people understand the distinction between researcher and humanitarian.<sup>6</sup> Yet the fact remains that on an even more basic level, seemingly innocuous styles of scholarly engagement—structured interviews, particularly when recorded, or random sampling for surveys—almost inevitably mimic those used by other actors with whom populations have negative associations (security forces who interview Sunni Arab men before granting them permission to live in an IDP camp; aid workers who conducted an assessment but could not provide sufficient resources in response). These methods thus carry the potential to perpetuate feelings of being surveilled and having their most immediate needs endlessly documented but continually unmet.

While engagement in these spaces is often premised on the idea that one’s contribution will help others, social science researchers rarely have the means to immediately improve people’s lives and work on much longer time horizons than journalists or aid agencies.<sup>7</sup> The result is that conducting research in some of the most seemingly favorable settings—often refugee or IDP camps that seem organized, relatively safe and easy to randomize—may thus produce ethically fraught, seriously biased, emotionally extractive and highly politicized research, even for responsible researchers. The lesson here is not that scholars should introduce themselves as humanitarian workers or promise aid that they cannot deliver; nor is it that scholarly researchers should moonlight as journalists simply to have immediate impact. Rather, they should understand their position as embedded in a broad political and professional class that practices intervention as a mode of knowledge creation; to design meaningful projects with these dynamics in mind; and to think seriously about whether the academic contribution they anticipate merits the extent of intervention they propose.

## Fetishizing Vulnerability and Trauma

Push factors for predatory research come from a range of interests, including intense competition at Western universities to provide on-the-ground research experiences for students at all levels. In the summer of 2018, a faculty member at a

university in the Middle East told me they had just rejected a partnership with an elite Western university. This university had approached them in the hope that their local researchers would provide support for a group of Western students who wanted to interview survivors of wartime sexual violence and other atrocities. The fact that such professionally coordinated and expensive programs are growing at a time when universities are often cutting support for foreign languages and other humanities reveals their true motivation, which is to increase student applications by offering curated experiential programs that promise high drama research for those with at most entry-level skill sets. A critical evaluation of such a program would reveal that this is not an appropriate project for most researchers, much less student researchers who do not speak the local language and are not mental health specialists.

Nor is the university partnership referenced above by any means an isolated example. Simply Googling phrases such as “study abroad research opportunity refugees” provides descriptions tailor-made for tuition-paying undergraduates hoping to meet refugees in places such as Jordan. One program blurb reads:

Visit Palestinian and Syrian refugee host communities, healthcare facilities, UN agencies, international relief organizations and local NGOs. You’ll also visit UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNICEF, Danish Refugee Council, International Committee of the Red Cross, various national NGOs and Jordan’s Ministry of Health. These field visits give you the opportunity to observe and experience program themes firsthand.

Such programs monetize educational access to vulnerable populations and contribute to a larger dynamic where refugees are expected to present their stories to strangers in the pursuit of empathy, aid and advocacy. Little is said about how participants have been identified, whether and how they are remunerated and what mechanisms exist for them to end their relationship with the program. It is thus extremely difficult to judge, from afar, the ethical commitments and power dynamics of these interactions. In joining such programs, students bypass many core aspects of research training, including the possibility of rejection by individuals and communities of interest. The very question of access has been resolved through admission to the program. By not developing relationships, fully learning relevant languages or navigating the complex realities of local communities, students leapfrog over the process of building the skill sets these programs purport to develop.

This focus on experience rather than knowledge implicates a deeper trend of cutting corners when it comes to proper cultural, methodological and ethical training. Interviews that I carried out with Yazidi psycho-social workers in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 2016 revealed several related dynamics that suggest these practices have long-term consequences. Despite interacting with multiple foreign researchers and being interviewed by journalists on multiple occasions, none of the



psycho-social or medical workers I interviewed had previously gone through a formal consent process. In our conversations, these workers emphasized that outsiders—mostly journalists, but also aid workers and UN representatives—always wanted the same, gruesome, sensationalist stories about sexual violence rather than other aspects of their experiences of captivity.

Yet as psychosocial and mental health professionals, my interviewees also expressed concerns about the tension they faced between protecting their beneficiaries and the immediate need to raise funds and advocate survivors' rights by facilitating access. Humanitarian workers—often heads of mission, sometimes hosting diplomats or celebrities—thus found themselves contributing to the same troubling, extractive dynamics in the name of donor mobilization and advocacy.<sup>8</sup> Workers at one organization noted that outsiders' sensationalist focus on sexual violence translated into retraumatization for their clients, who were repeatedly asked to re-live dark moments in the name of "bringing stories to light." According to their psychologists, Yazidi women frequently spoke of these encounters in group therapy sessions, expressing guilt and shame that they did not feel more comfortable telling their stories to strangers.

In this particular case, concerns regarding exploitation escalated to the point where the KRG's Joint Crisis Coordination Centre started requiring those wishing to interview Yazidi survivors to apply for permission before entering the IDP camps. This type of gatekeeping can be a protective necessity that denies access to harmful (or simply unprepared) actors. So can the implicit gatekeeping done by researchers such as Foster, Minwalla, Sukarieh, and Tannock, whose scholarship has emphasized the warped consequences of unethical journalistic and academic interventions and encouraged other scholars to consider these dynamics when designing and siting research.

## Unequal Academic Labor

Such privileged access to fieldwork experiences is echoed in recent studies of the labor dynamics within international research teams. Scholarship about scholarship, so to speak, demonstrates that local academics and research assistants who work for international scholars often experience discriminatory treatment, are exposed to unique risks, face amplified emotional burden, and feel as though they are valued differently than foreigners.<sup>9</sup> The rapid marketization of fixer or research assistant services—pay for access—in response to changing environments, specific events or growing knowledge that researchers will pay for access to certain types of people (local NGOs, military officers, members of the LGBTQ+ community) also creates perverse incentives for locals to transform their personal relationships into monetizable data points.

In crisis-affected spaces, the emergence of markets for these services increase inequalities and often contradict local populations' wishes. As such, even the act of hiring a translator, research assistant or fixer is an intervention in and of itself. Fair salaries paid, new skills taught and professional

recommendations written do contribute to both individual and community benefits. Highly educated, bilingual fixers or research assistants, however, also often explicitly ignore community requests because of the financial benefits offered. The explosion of demand for translation and research assistance in crisis zones can actually warp local labor markets. For example, a Palestinian friend who worked with journalists during the 2006 July War in Lebanon joked that while she didn't know the first thing about journalism, a foreigner offered her \$300 to take her around her destroyed southern Beirut neighborhood and talk to people for a day. Given that her existing salary was \$250 a month, she wasn't about to say no. She remembered feeling uncomfortable with the reporter's request to find the most miserable people she could to interview.

Another case in Lebanon involved a youth from a Palestinian camp in Beirut who repeatedly brought outsiders into the camp despite multiple requests from his neighbors to stop. Though I refused his services (which were offered unsolicited in a café) multiple foreign diplomats and researchers later spoke to me of this "terrific kid" who "needed to pay his university tuition" (he was not enrolled) and would "take them on a camp tour and to his mother's house to experience Palestinian cooking." I later learned that he also worked as an informant for an intelligence service, unbeknownst to his foreign employers. Here, the commodification of a camp space led to researchers bypassing important forms of local gatekeeping, generating exploitative dynamics, rewarding someone seen as "selling out" his community and presenting, in locals' views, biased representations of their neighborhoods.

## Beyond Good Intentions

The relational nature of research interventions means that even a "perfect" project conducted by an ideal researcher will inevitably feed many of these processes if it is conducted in certain settings. Researchers and advisors need to acknowledge the multiple ways that even well-intentioned and carefully planned projects can contribute to negative dynamics.

An obvious starting point is to pose a few simple questions at the development and planning stages of any project. Who is this research for? Is it a learning experience for a beginning, intermediated or advanced student; an entirely scholarly project; or a project with public awareness, legal and/or policy implications? Why does this particular population, site or case merit inquiry? Is there an alternate, less-studied or less sensationalized site that could serve the same purpose? What immediate potential does the project have to improve the lives of those being studied? Will the researcher or research team be a burden on those with whom they are working? How familiar is the researcher with the local context and concurrent interventions? Does the researcher speak the local language? How many other

*Continued on page 37.*



UNHCR relief supplies in their warehouse at Dubai International Humanitarian City.

PIETER VAN DEN BOOGERT

# The UAE and the Infrastructure of Intervention

Rafeef Ziadah

**W**hile devastating military conflict and mass displacement has focused attention on humanitarian relief efforts throughout the Middle East, an analysis of humanitarian logistics hubs in the context of these wars has received little scrutiny. Yet these hubs—where private firms and international organizations coordinate on the movement of data and material to conflict and disaster zones—are increasingly a key mechanism of intervention. They are also, moreover, increasingly a central element in the projection of power for the Gulf regimes that are the primary belligerents in the Yemen war. Thus, rather than reading military intervention separately from so-called humanitarian agendas, it is essential to trace the symbiotic relationship between humanitarian, commercial and military logistics.

A focus on the multiple concurrent forms of intervention by states like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which boasts

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the world's largest humanitarian hub, illustrates the role humanitarian logistics can play in amplifying and projecting military power. As the most aggressive partner in the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen, the UAE's military intervention includes a clear strategy to control Yemeni ports on the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, alongside the primary maritime trade route between Asia and Europe and a major chokepoint in global shipping, the Bab Al Mandeb passage at the intersection of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Three ports—Mukalla, Aden and Mokha—as well as the island of Socotra and an oil export terminal located in the eastern coastal city of al-Shihr, have all come under UAE control.

Alongside the occupation and control of these ports, the UAE has employed humanitarian aid as a tool to distract attention from its ongoing military campaign, with Emirati aid agencies inviting journalists to accompany them while distributing supplies to areas under their military control.



Indeed, although Yemen has become the largest recipient of all UAE foreign and humanitarian aid, this funding is increasingly aimed at supporting infrastructure projects that link Yemen's ports to regional shipping routes.

Along with its expanding port and infrastructure foothold in Yemen, the UAE has also been developing a growing network of commercial ports across the Horn of Africa, which are frequently attached to provisions for military, police training and/or military bases. This expanding presence amounts to a broader regional economic and military intervention from the Persian Gulf to the Horn of Africa, which would enable the UAE to significantly control and impact the circulation of goods in coastal areas including Sudan, Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia and Somaliland.

This overlap between the UAE's military, commercial and humanitarian practices illustrates the necessity to look much more closely at interventions within and through logistics spaces, which Deborah Cowen describes as "network space, constituted by infrastructures, information, goods, and people, and is dedicated to flows."<sup>1</sup> A focus on the multiple forms of intervention by states like the UAE illustrates how logistics spaces have become important arenas for geopolitical and geoeconomic interventions, ambitions and conflict. The UAE's rapidly expanding logistics space thus functions at the intersection of trade and war, with the production of distinct spaces such as Dubai International Humanitarian City (DIHC), the largest humanitarian logistics hub of its kind in the world.

In utilizing its logistics space for commercial expansion, war-making and humanitarian aid, the UAE is blurring the lines between all these modes of intervention, while simultaneously promoting the role of private logistics firms based in the country. The UAE's successful efforts to attract high-profile aid agencies and international donor organizations to DIHC has, moreover, allowed the government to leverage the surge of humanitarian logistics as part of a national branding campaign—positioning the UAE as a giving nation despite its intensified military intervention in Yemen and elsewhere.

## Expanding UAE Logistics Space

Despite its small size, the UAE has become an important nodal point within global logistics space: Its network of state-owned enterprises such as Dubai Ports World (DP World), and Etihad and Emirates airlines, position it centrally in international supply chains and global commodity flows. In addition to its physical infrastructures and large transnational corporations, the UAE's logistics space is underpinned by hyper liberalized trade regulations designed to facilitate circulation, including a network of interlinked free zones and incentives to corporations such as 100 percent foreign ownership and zero percent corporate tax for 50 years (a concession that is renewable).<sup>2</sup> Through major investments in transport infrastructure, it has also become a regional trade gateway and a re-export zone for commodities on the Europe/East Asia trade route.

But it is the UAE's location at the intersection of one of the globe's most militarized maritime routes that has made it a significant logistical node in regional wars. For example, during what came to be known as the Tanker War (attacks on oil tankers carried out by both sides during the Iran-Iraq War), the United States reflagged and/or provided US Naval escorts to oil-laden vessels from the Gulf monarchies to deter attacks. This had the immediate effect of increasing the US naval presence in the region and the long-term effect of increasing militarization of maritime trade routes. UAE maritime ports in particular have long been strategic assets for the US military in the region. The US military stations personnel at Fujairah port and at Jebel Ali, where the deep-water harbor is able to accommodate the larger US naval vessels.

Its mega transport infrastructure and naval capacity have been central to the UAE's military build-up and more aggressive foreign policy. This infrastructure is entwined with a flourishing private commercial and military logistics sector which cohered largely around the supply of logistical labour to the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the context of the US-led War on Terror, private logistics firms became more central to the US military, taking on contracts to move supplies and feed and house troops.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, several UAE-based logistics firms were initially established as contractors for the US military.<sup>4</sup>

In this militarized context, the UAE's military strategy has included bolstering its own naval capacity, as well as controlling or developing maritime ports and military bases outside its territory, which includes not only its recent intervention and port/infrastructure expansion in Yemen but also across the broader Horn of Africa. In Somaliland, for example, DP World signed a 30-year concession in May 2016 for the port of Berbera, which included the construction of a logistics park and free trade zone. In 2018, the UAE announced it was also building a military base adjacent to those DP World facilities. The UAE military also has a 30-year concession agreement for the Eritrean deep-water port of Assab.

The UAE's expansion into the Horn of Africa is an attempt to control an important trade route by developing new infrastructure while also protecting its existing ports by blocking future competition. DP World in particular is seeking new ports, but also aiming to maintain the advantage of established ports such as Jebel Ali. Despite many initial successes, regional states are beginning to grow wary of the UAE's intentions. In March 2018 DP World was forbidden from operation in Djibouti, where the government also repossessed Doraleh Port, which had signed a 30-year agreement with the firm in 1999. Somalia also viewed the UAE's expansion of port facilities in Berbera, Somaliland as an infringement on its national sovereignty. Somalia has no mechanism, however, to prohibit construction in the autonomous territory and the port project is going ahead.

## Leveraging Humanitarian Logistics

The aggressive territorial expansion of the UAE's maritime ports and related infrastructure has also included major investment in positioning the UAE as a regional and international humanitarian logistics hub, largely building on its existing commercial infrastructure. Thus, the UAE harnesses humanitarian logistical spaces in a branding exercise, attempting to make its authoritarian governance model more palatable for local and international consumption, not entirely different from the ways that Western interventions have relied on a blending of humanitarian engagements and military occupations.

Although logistics are historically associated with militaries and the organization of violence, logistics have been increasingly central to global humanitarian operations.<sup>5</sup> The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the catastrophic lack of logistical preparation and capabilities to meet the crisis helped spark the adoption of business logistics modalities and the internalization of market imperatives for humanitarian operations. The UN's Humanitarian Reform Programme entrenched the role of logistics by establishing topical clusters to improve disaster and crisis response, one of which was the Logistics Cluster. Part of this program included the formation of regional logistical hubs for multi-agency use for warehousing and pre-positioning supplies, the largest of which is in Dubai International Humanitarian City (DIHC).

The centrality of logistics to humanitarian operations has accentuated the role of private logistics firms in humanitarian action—whereby they can provide logistics functions equally across militaries and aid agencies. While logistics traditionally played a subservient role in humanitarian organizations, it has gradually come to define humanitarian strategy, with logisticians elevated to the top ranks of aid agencies.

DIHC, which was founded through a government directive in 2003 merging Dubai Aid City and Dubai Humanitarian City, is a clear illustration of the UAE's ambitions in humanitarian logistics. Situated within Dubai's broader logistics infrastructure encompassing Jebel Ali Port, Al Maktoum Airport and associated free zones for warehousing and commercial functions, all are connected through a customs-free corridor. As with other free zones in the UAE, the Dubai government encourages international aid agencies to relocate to DIHC by providing free space, support with visas, zero customs fees and exemption from the new VAT introduced in 2018.

Although largely unknown and hidden within a larger complex of free zones, DIHC's glass-fronted buildings and large depot provide warehouse facilities and operations centers for major international organizations, such as United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the

Red Cross. These warehouses store emergency aid items like water purifiers, emergency vaccines, vehicles, communications equipment, specialized foods, tents and blankets which are regularly shipped or flown out of Dubai. The space is part of a network of UN Humanitarian Response Depots, with additional locations in Ghana, Italy, Malaysia, Spain and Panama that manage the supply chains of emergency items for UN agencies and NGO partners.

DIHC members have procured and shipped materials from the hub to conflict zones in Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan, flood recovery and educational projects in Pakistan, and drought areas in East Africa. But the hub is more than just a warehouse—it is a networking space to nurture commercial partnerships. In addition to UN agencies and NGOs, DIHC hosts many private logistics firms that handle the movement of supplies to aid groups but also service various militaries operating in the region. For example, the firm Automotive Management Services (AMS) monitors and repairs large fleets of vehicles for militaries, police, and other government clients from its main office in DIHC. Originally headquartered in Great Britain, it followed UN agencies into Dubai because, in the CEO's words, "The UN tends to go to markets as they're developing, so we enter new locations with the UN, whether it's in Somalia, South Sudan, Mali or Chad, and then...we can develop that into a commercial model."<sup>6</sup>

The presence of DIHC in Dubai helps to reinforce the entanglements between military, commercial and humanitarian activities. The promotion of the UAE as a humanitarian logistics hub and major donor is intrinsically linked to its military interventions and competition over trade routes. Moreover, DIHC as a distinct spatial structure, although ostensibly liberal, should not be abstracted from the labor regime in which it exists. In Dubai's case, a highly hierarchical, ethnoracial labor regime underpins the operations of DIHC: A layer of upper and middle management, largely with previous UN experience and drawn from the region, manages the overall operations of DIHC, while the hard physical labor of logistics is provided by a mainly South Asian migrant work force. An added perversion is that some of these laborers (including Yemeni workers) come from the very same communities that are impacted by UAE military and commercial interventions.

## The Politics of Logistics Space

The UAE's commercial and military expansion into the Horn of Africa and attempts at incorporating Yemeni ports into its network of logistics spaces is part of a long term strategy to exercise control over multiple access points across existing and emerging trade routes.<sup>7</sup> This strategy has clear implications for wider power arrangements, especially in light of proposed networks like China's One Belt One Road initiative, which the UAE hopes to connect to and benefit from. Abu Dhabi's



accelerated efforts may heighten intra-Gulf tensions as well, as it has intensified regional competition that UAE commercial entities are keen to manage. For example, nearby Oman is vying to secure its space as a regional logistics hub with heavy investment and private-public-partnerships with European maritime terminal operators. Saudi Arabia is also investing in maritime infrastructure and building its own humanitarian hub—the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Relief (KS Relief).

The shape of post-conflict political arrangements in Yemen, Syria and Iraq will be powerfully shaped by developments and interventions across these logistics networks that underpin future flows of development and reconstruction assistance. Investments in and developments of the UAE's logistics space is itself a mode of intervention that will be

critical to shaping regional politics and reconstruction agendas in years to come. ■

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researchers have worked in this area previously? Will access require paying a program, fixer or research assistant? Does the researcher expect to form a long-term relationship with individuals and communities in the site, or will this be a one-time trip? If the project is about atrocity or sexual violence, does the project truly necessitate interviewing displaced people or survivors directly?

Each of these questions presents tradeoffs, rather than absolute conclusions. For example, much social science research necessarily does not have an immediate benefit for participant populations (and scholarly publication timelines alone mean that academics are not often the ones alerting the world to a fresh crisis). This fact does not imply that research should never be conducted in crisis zones; it means that when it is done, it should be particularly well justified, carefully designed and planned, conducted by skilled researchers and that scholars should consider if there are things they can do to provide benefit. If there are not enough good reasons to justify intervention—or if the intervener is clearly unqualified—then the research should not be done. Despite good intentions, it is also reasonable to suggest that allowing beginner students to practice their skills by interviewing vulnerable populations is ethically unjustifiable.

Perhaps the bluntest ethical guidance for researchers and their students is to be more original. One promising strategy is to research up, or across, rather than down in terms of power dynamics; that is, the researcher should explicitly aim to study powerful populations and actors rather than those considered vulnerable.<sup>10</sup> This move—which might, for example, involve studying government officials or humanitarian organizations and workers rather than those for whom they make policy or provide aid—must be accompanied by increased recognition of the challenges involved with accessing more powerful populations and building working relationships with them.<sup>11</sup> While the relative ease with which

marginalized and underserved communities can be accessed by researchers may be tempting, the relationships posited by many projects are not built on trust, but rather on latent coercion and practiced scripts developed before the researcher even arrives on site.

Conducting research among conflict-affected populations, a growing trend in the Middle East and North Africa given the major wars and humanitarian crises in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, takes particular care, innovation and an ethical sensibility. Acquiring knowledge of social and political processes in crisis contexts is often necessary and desirable. Yet field-based research in or adjacent to crisis zones is also a mode of intervention that inevitably affects those being researched. The dynamics described above are not "inconveniences" to be overcome—they are dynamic and persistent aspects of political and social life in humanitarian settings that scholars must center in their research design and planning. ■

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# Israel's Permanent Siege of Gaza

Ron Smith

**P**alestinians in Gaza began ongoing weekly demonstrations on March 30, 2018 to reassert their right of return to their ancestral homes and lands they were forced to leave when Israel was established in 1948. The “Great March of Return,” as Palestinians have called the protest campaign, represents a vital expression of social movement organizing by Palestinian civil society, which includes human rights and legal activists, grassroots organizers, artists, journalists, BDS activists, political representatives and intellectuals.<sup>1</sup> One of protest organizer’s goals is to raise global awareness about the fact that approximately two-thirds of Gaza’s over 2 million residents are refugees who have been denied their internationally recognized right to return to their homes and land. They also seek to revive the nonviolent protest tradition of the first Intifada of 1987, making great efforts to prevent militarization of the protests.

These nonviolent demonstrators are regularly met with sniper fire from Israeli soldiers along the fence that marks the 1949 armistice line separating Israel from the tiny (25 miles long and five miles wide) coastal enclave of Gaza. Marchers are fully aware of the deadly risks associated with entry into this “no-go zone,” an area unilaterally designated by Israel to be off limits to Palestinians. But the fence does not mark an internationally recognized border: Israel has never declared its national borders and still maintains complete control over Gaza—therefore it remains an occupying power under international law.

Since the demonstrations began, at least 270 Palestinians have been killed, including 49 under the age of 18, the majority shot by Israeli snipers. An additional 31,249 have been injured—more than 500 people each week on average.<sup>2</sup> Despite the toll, marchers continue to demonstrate against their hopeless situation. Gaza has been abandoned by both the international community and the Palestinian Authority (PA) that governs the West Bank. Gazans suffer an unbearably poor quality of life, are surrounded on all sides by one of the world’s most sophisticated and well-equipped militaries, are targeted by bombs, snipers’ bullets, tanks and drones on a daily basis and are subjected to periodic invasions and bombing campaigns that level entire neighborhoods.

The threat of being killed by a sniper is muted by the near-impossibility of life under siege. Siege refers to a regime of total blockade, where local sovereignty over borders, imports and exchange of people and goods is suspended by a hostile power. It encompasses the sanctions and blockade of Gaza, and also refers

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to the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure as a central objective. Israel’s decade-long siege of Gaza is similar to the catastrophic sanctions regime imposed by the United States on Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War, which targeted its civilian infrastructure, and to the siege warfare utilized by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen today, which targets food and medical infrastructure in areas under the control of its opponents. It also bears an affinity with punitive sanctions regimes recently imposed on Iran and Venezuela by the United States. Siege is war waged against civilian bodies—a form of war against the people—not the leaders. Yet while other siege regimes typically seek a defined endgame such as changing the behavior of a targeted actor, Israel’s siege of Gaza, aided and abetted by the international community, is unique in its permanence: It is the endgame.

## A Permanent Siege

It is difficult to identify a date when the siege on Gaza began. The population of Gaza swelled in the aftermath of the Nakba, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced from their homes in 1948 and ended up in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and beyond. In 1967, Israeli forces invaded the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula, marking the beginning of the military and civilian occupation of Gaza. Palestinians have been subject to military rule since 1967, while Israelis who settled there were provided the protections of civil law. Following the first Intifada in 1987 Israel tightened its external and internal control and by 1994 it had established a fortified external control zone around Gaza through fencing, walls and militarized zones and imposed strict limitations on entry and exit, thus beginning a policy of isolating Gaza.

In 2005, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon undertook unilateral disengagement from Gaza, removing all Israeli settlers and destroying the settlement homes and infrastructure in order to deny them to Palestinians. The international community hailed this withdrawal as an act of peace, but some observers—it turns out with great prescience—expressed concern that the terms of this withdrawal was a prelude to further isolation and violence. After the disengagement, Israel retained exclusive control over Gaza’s airspace and territorial waters, continued to patrol and monitor the external land perimeter (with the exception of its southern border where Egypt retained control and border crossings were supervised by European monitors) and continued to





**Palestinians wait in line to get water in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip, 2014.**

WISSAM NASSAR/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

monitor and blockade the coastline. By 2007 Gaza was facing a severe humanitarian crisis—employment, food and other needs were unmet. When the Hamas political party then won national elections in Palestine, rival Fatah forces refused to allow them to take power and the Israeli military and police arrested over 60 members of the Hamas cabinet. Attempts at unity governments between Fatah and Hamas have failed ever since.

Most commentators suggest that the siege began in earnest in 2007, after the capture of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit by Hamas fighters, but it is clear that the siege has been in effect for decades: The current situation is only a further deterioration, not a completely new innovation. Allegedly in response to Hamas' control of Gaza, in September 2007 Israel declared the political party and Gaza itself to be a "hostile entity" (a category with no meaning in International Humanitarian Law) and then sharply restricted the flow of people and goods in and out. As a result, Gaza has suffered a total economic collapse. About 70 percent of the workforce is unemployed or without pay, and about 80 percent of its residents live in poverty. Israel has bombed Gaza's only power station repeatedly, cutting off electricity to more than half of the inhabitants, while further targeting civil infrastructure including roads, communications, water delivery and sewage treatment.

Sanctions and siege regimes are, however, woefully ineffective at regime change but consistently and reliably effective at dismantling the infrastructure of society and impoverishing targeted populations. There are distinct parallels between the sanctions regime Israel imposed on Gaza after 2005 and the political and economic woes of Iraq after 1991. Iraq went from being one of the most developed countries in the Middle East to one of the

least through a regime of de-development composed of attacks on civilian infrastructure followed by strict sanctions from 1991 until 2003. During the 1991 war on Iraq (Operation Desert Storm) US forces targeted human infrastructure such as water distribution, electricity transfer stations, medicine factories, telephone systems and other targets as a means of weakening the population.<sup>3</sup> The devastating sanctions that followed were the harshest ever imposed on a country in the post-war period, ensuring that Iraq would have no means of repairing or replacing the destroyed utilities. The siege on Iraq prolonged the collapse of social and government resources through the daily denial of goods necessary to maintain society. Development indicators revealed a society losing quality of life and technological and medical progress, a process that has been described as "de-development."

In their description of the sanctions regime on Iraq in place throughout the 1990s, Tariq and Jacquelin Ismael explain the siege on Iraq as a "war against the people."<sup>4</sup> Their thesis can be extrapolated to siege regimes at large, including the contemporary siege on Gaza, the GCC siege on Yemen and the sanctions on Iran. The continued insistence on the use of siege as a practice against targeted populations indicates not a global desire to coerce or punish opponent governments, but rather a preference for targeting the health of individual bodies of their subjects by denying them the basic needs of any modern society, affecting the entire country. The punitive sanctions imposed on Iran and Venezuela by the United States serve a similar function—making civilians suffer in the service of geopolitics. What makes the Israeli siege of Gaza unique, however, is its permanence. International law provides a legal basis for a hostile

state to occupy territory in the interest of maintaining order and preventing lawlessness, but it is based on the assumption that it will be temporary. At some point, the occupying power must annex the territory—providing the full benefits of citizenship to the residents—or withdraw. The Israeli state has managed to make occupation permanent in Gaza by creating a state of permanent siege against the residents of Gaza.

Although Israel is legally obligated to support the Palestinian population in the territories occupied in 1967, the international community has refused to hold Israel to its responsibilities. Israel subcontracts its humanitarian obligations to the Palestinian Authority and numerous humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), the International Committee of the Red Cross and Norwegian Aid—all of which are incapable of providing the services necessary to support the population. These organizations have no sovereignty in Palestine and operate at the whim of the Israeli government. Further, these organizations cannot represent Palestinian aspirations and goals, and in the case of Gaza, are banned from coordinating with the ruling authority of Hamas because Israel and the United States classifies it as a terrorist entity. As long as the international community refuses to hold the Israeli government to its legal obligations, it subsidizes the siege by providing humanitarian aid that is the responsibility of the occupation authority.

## Anatomy of Israel's Siege

The infrastructure of Israel's siege of Gaza is rooted in the fortified and lethal fence and wall system that surrounds Gaza along the 1949 armistice line, where demonstrators show up to resist the siege and demand their rights. While Israeli spokespeople suggest that the fence system is fragile and weak, new additions to this fence and wall system are constantly devised and implemented.

Building upon the surface fortification of this line since the early 1990's, in 2018 Israel began construction of an underground wall system, littered with electronic sensors, designed to thwart Palestinian tunnel construction. Along the Gazan coastline, in January 2019 Israel completed the construction of a new submarine barrier with numerous sensors and detection systems. Israeli forces are also rebuilding the fence around Gaza, now extended to 20 meters in height. Although the United Nations has emphasized that approaching a border fence is not a crime that merits lethal force, Israel continues to attack unarmed demonstrators with sniper fire. The fence itself has long been fortified with a heavily militarized and automated infrastructure. So-called "lotus towers" house remote-controlled and automated heavy guns. The constant presence of drones and blimps keep watch on the population under siege.

The militarized fence and wall around Gaza should be understood as simply one facet of a larger infrastructure of siege. Israel maintains complete hegemony over Gaza, and all imports and exports are subject to Israeli and Egyptian

control. When the Oslo Accord agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) first went into effect in 1993 there were eight crossings between Gaza and the outside world. In the ensuing years, Israel has closed these crossings, leaving only three: Rafah on the border with Egypt, for travelers only; Erez in the north on the 1949 armistice line also for travelers only; and Karam Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) also on the armistice line, the only remaining cargo terminal.

Israel justifies this decrease in terminal space as a means of protecting its ill-defined national security. In effect, the closure of the other terminals limits the amount of supplies allowed into Gaza by the Israeli military. Because Israel banned trucks from crossing the armistice line, trucks must unload in the terminals and then reload the cargo onto trucks from the Gaza side. This process takes time, and because all cargo must go through the same terminal, the import of one type of good comes at the expense of another. When Israel allows in construction materials such as concrete or iron rebar, for example, it does so by limiting the trucks loaded with grain. In 2018, after weeks of non-violent protests, Israel unilaterally closed the Karam Abu Salem crossing after demonstrators attempted to set fire to the infrastructure in protest of the siege. For 45 days, the crossing was closed, increasing the suffering in order to exert pressure on Gazan society to stop the weekly marches. Though marches continued, the effects of closures are cumulative as Gazans work through their emergency stocks of food, medicine and other necessities.

While the imports allowed through Karam Abu Salem were augmented by Palestinian smuggling through tunnels for several years, the newer subterranean walls and the flooding of those tunnels with sewage and seawater by the Egyptian authorities has made Gaza once again completely dependent on the crossings. Tunnels still exist on the southern border, but they are rare and controlled and taxed by Hamas, which mostly uses them for its purposes rather than for consumer goods.

Aside from imports, Gazans rely on small-scale food producers—farmers and fishers—to supplement their diets. Because 30 percent of arable land in Gaza falls within the Israeli-defined no-go zones, many farmers risk their lives when they approach their lands since Israeli soldiers arbitrarily open fire with sniper weapons and automated gun-towers. Water for cultivation is pumped from the coastal aquifer, which means that food grown in Gaza tends to be contaminated with parasites, bacteria and industrial runoff from farms both within and without the strip. The land within the no-go zones has access to the cleanest water, free from some of the worst sewage contamination found across the rest of Gaza. After 2012, the Red Cross negotiated an agreement allowing farmers to grow crops of specific heights in the zones within 300 meters of the fence and larger crops within 1 kilometer, but farmers are still at risk of being shot each time they enter the zone. Rudimentary irrigation infrastructure like simple reservoirs and gas water pumps are often targeted by Israeli machine gun and rocket fire, making farming extremely difficult and fraught with danger.<sup>5</sup> Further, Israeli military planes fumigate the farmers' plots without warning or explanation of





Tears gas canisters are fired by Israeli forces toward Palestinian demonstrators as they protest at the Israel-Gaza fence, March 1, 2019. IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA/REUTERS

the chemicals used. Researchers have discovered that Israel is using Monsanto's Roundup herbicide, resulting in the wholesale destruction of crops along the armistice line.<sup>6</sup>

Fishers face a similar fate, as they ply waters with ever-changing limits decided by military fiat, announced from heavily armed warships. Though the military places buoys demarcating the acceptable fishing boundaries, fishers are often targeted by Israeli navy ships even within these limits. When the navy rams fishing boats and fires live ammunition at fishers they destroy lives and livelihoods and make fishing a labor of resistance, not sustenance.<sup>7</sup> Fishers and farmers that I have interviewed make the argument that their work is one based in *sumoud* (steadfastness) and resistance to dispossession. In interviews, they cast their continued efforts to farm and fish under impossible conditions as ideological—not driven by profit, but by an insistence on the independent provision of food not regulated or controlled by the occupation.

## Targeting Health

Beyond attacks on sustenance and self-sufficiency, Israel directly targets medical infrastructure by destroying facilities, vehicles and health practitioners themselves. It also denies the import of material needed for the maintenance and development of health systems that must serve 2 million incarcerated people. The health impacts of numerous Israeli invasions have remained untallied, largely due to a lack of epidemiological expertise in Gaza. Even so, there are a small number of studies that point

to the lasting effects of the types of weapons Israel uses in Gaza, including the prevalence of preterm and low birth weight babies and birth defects among children born since 2011.<sup>8</sup> The direct targeting of the civilian population causes immediate injury, but also creates a further burden for a health system stretched beyond the point of collapse. The system also suffers from the refusal of donors to cover the most basic costs. Donor shortfalls must be understood in the context of the fact that according to International Humanitarian Law, Israel is obligated to provide for the health of the population. The refusal of the international community to hold Israel to this basic standard is an indication of profound complicity with the siege.<sup>9</sup>

In 2014, Israeli forces bombed five hospitals across the Gaza Strip, some to oblivion. Further violence is committed by the siege when it prevents needed materials from being imported. Gaza maintains a highly vaccinated population, largely due to the efforts of UNRWA, but in 2015 medical staff I interviewed began to describe shortages of vaccines—in particular the PENTA vaccine (which addresses five illnesses in one vaccination: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B (rDNA) and *Haemophilus influenzae* type B conjugate). Pentavalent vaccines are an essential component of creating immunity to diseases that are fully preventable but can ravage youth and the elderly if the vaccine is not administered. In the intervening years, more and more drugs and medical materials have become unavailable in Gaza, from antibiotics (a long-standing problem) to cancer and blood pressure medication, to vaccines. These shortages are not solely due to Israeli reticence

to allow medications through Karam Abu Salem, they are also caused by infighting between Fatah and Hamas, and an unwillingness of the international community to maintain funding for UNRWA, most evident in the US government's defunding of UNRWA in 2018.

The United Nations report "Gaza in 2020: A livable place?"<sup>10</sup> projected a negative conclusion based largely on the fact that 95 percent of drinking water in Gaza is contaminated. Palestinians are forced to either drink water unfit for human consumption or spend precious funds on brackish water delivered by truck from desalination plants. More than a decade after its initial proposal, the Israeli military allowed the construction of a large-scale desalination plant that opened in 2017. This plant, however, falls far short of the needed capacity. Further, according to civil engineers I interviewed in Gaza, the desalinated water is combined with conventional contaminated water supplies as it is sent into the decrepit water distribution network, in order to stretch supplies over a larger number of consumers.

The water crisis is further exacerbated by the lack of reliable electricity. Water distribution relies on electric pumps, from large stations to small residential pumps. In order for an individual to receive water on a given day, the water network must be functioning at the same time as electrical service. This coordination is unlikely because of the unpredictable availability of power. During the most severe shortages, individual consumers receive two hours of electricity per day, with no set schedule from one day to the next. While many families augment the power utility with home generators, these are notoriously unreliable, highly polluting and extremely dangerous in dense living conditions where they have caused deaths from asphyxiation.

A final aspect of the siege's impact on the population's health revolves around the mental health of Gazans. Medical staff, social workers and case workers are frequently overwhelmed by the mental health needs of the population, particularly due to the toll military violence takes on Palestinians. Further, the lack of opportunities for travel, for work, for sustaining families also puts extreme stress on individuals, families and communities targeted by the siege. Domestic violence rates increase with the damage to the economy and societal structures brought about by the siege. The increasing sense of hopelessness finally added Gazans to the list of those trying to flee violence through dangerous boat voyages across the Mediterranean, a phenomenon deeply unusual in Gazan society.

Critics of Israeli policy have long expressed a concern that the occupation relies on collective punishment, which is prohibited by international law. De-development and the siege, however, represent a kind of collective torture, forcing Palestinians to cope and endure in conditions that, while met by resilience, no group should be forced to endure. This torture takes the form of a frontal attack on the physical and mental health of Palestinians, a denial of the basic requirements of medical care, sustenance, community and mental health through infrastructures of dispossession.

## Permanence and Resistance

Gaza is a segregated, debilitated and subjugated colony of Israel. The occupation writ large is reminiscent of apartheid South Africa, the medinas of French colonies, the indigenous reservations across North America and other colonial regimes. Gaza represents an extreme form of settler colonialism—the conversion of a Bantustan into an open-air prison. Israel manufactures humanitarian crisis through its siege to create permanent isolation and deprivation, which is supported by the international community through its political inaction and its supplying of humanitarian aid in spite of the Israeli government's legal obligations.

While the Israeli government refuses to acknowledge the siege, its goals can be identified. Gaza is a tiny territory inhabited by more than 2 million Palestinians, most with claims to return to their homes, supported by international law. In a settler-colonial state premised on ethnic purity, such as Israel, Gaza represents an intolerable demographic challenge. The political economy of siege means there is no need to end the siege, it can continue indefinitely, powered by Israeli and Egyptian hostility, the indifference and complicity of powerful international actors who themselves vilify the civilians living in the strip, and the pittance paid by international humanitarian actors that subsidize the costs of keeping an entire population incarcerated. Israel's siege of Gaza has become a permanent condition.

Many demonstrators are driven to participate in the Great March of Return by the totalizing and debilitating nature of the siege. Abandoned by the international community, political parties and purveyors of international law, protesters place their bodies in the line of fire, demanding attention from news media that prefer to cover spectacle and the drama of live ammunition, and that have often neglected to report the basic realities of unbearable life in Gaza. Much like hunger strikers from Israeli prisons to Guantanamo Bay, the protesters risk their own lives to make a statement that they hope will finally bring attention from the global media and long overdue action from the international community. ■

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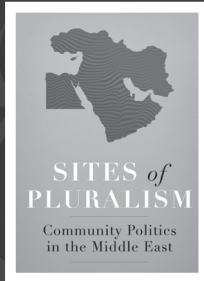


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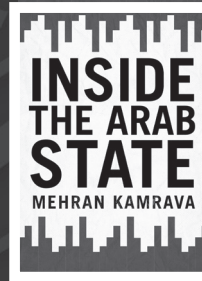
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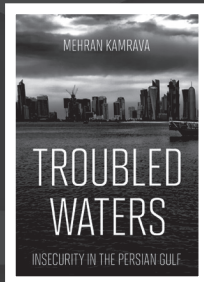
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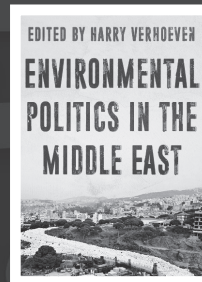
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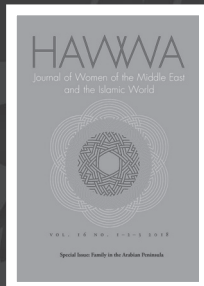
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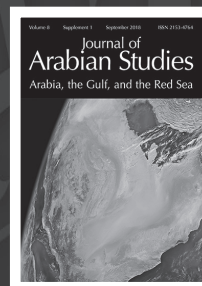
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Employees at Frontex headquarters receive data about EU border breaches, mostly boats crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

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# Border Regimes and the New Global Apartheid

Catherine Besteman

**A**longside the imperial interventions of the global War on Terror, a new form of intervention is taking shape in the militarized borders, interdictions at sea, detention centers, holding facilities and the criminalization of mobility around the world. The Global North—the United States, Canada, the European Union (EU), Israel, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, the Gulf states and East Asia—is massively investing in militarized border regimes that reach far beyond particular territorial borders to manage the movement of people from the Global South.<sup>1</sup>

This globalizing border regime now extends deeply into many places from which people are attempting to leave and pushes them back; it tracks them to interrupt their mobility; stops them at certain borders for detention and

deportation; pushes them into the most dangerous traveling routes; and creates new forms of criminality. It depends on an immense investment of capital and feeds a massive new global security-industrial complex. The most visible impact of this new form of intervention includes drownings in the ocean, deaths in the desert, detention centers, refugee camps and holding facilities. Meanwhile, the Global North invests in ever more militarized forms of engagement and control, redirects vast resources to fortify its borders and divests from most forms of engagement with the Global South other than exploitation and policing.

The new militarized regime of border and mobility control taking shape across the Global North mimics South Africa's system of racial apartheid that formally ended in 1994. Like that regime, the tools of the new global racialized containment policy aim to create an exploitable labor force

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and enclose those considered undesirable or expendable in territories, detention centers or refugee camps far from the borders of the Global North. Militarized global apartheid is emerging as a global norm. It is structured and implemented through a loosely integrated effort by countries in the Global North to protect themselves against the increasing mobility of people from the Global South.

Also mirroring South Africa, it is the very policies of these countries that contribute to insecurity and violence in the Global South—the Caribbean and Latin America, Africa, much of the Middle East and Central, Southwest and Southeast Asia—against whose people the Global North is emplacing barriers. Along with imperialist interventions, the expansion of systems of resource extraction and appropriation into the Global South renders its localities unsustainable or unpromising for ordinary life. These conditions force people to confront the apparently contradictory demand for their labor and the militarized borders of the Global North in their search for security, employment and a sustainable life. Because the new apartheid relies on and nurtures xenophobic and nativist ideologies, it also requires the few who benefit to collectively demonize and ostracize the many who are harmed.

This emergent form of global intervention that increasingly marginalizes and excludes the majority of the global population in favor of the wealthy few in the Global North is a product of neoliberal globalization, combined with resurgent racialized nationalisms. Like apartheid in South Africa, it is unsustainable over the long term and incredibly destructive in the short term. Analyzing its features allows the identification of its control points, and thus clarifies where to target initiatives of resistance and confrontation.

## The Contours of Global Apartheid

The Global North's increasingly militarized borders and regimes of mobility control are the latest iteration of a hierarchical and racialized world order. But it is one in which the enforcement of a hierarchical labor market depends upon differential access to mobility on the basis of origin and race, which closely replicates the structures and institutions of apartheid-era South Africa on a global scale.

Apartheid is a legal edifice that constructs and enforces the supremacy of one racial group over another. The term was used by South Africa's National Party after its political victory in 1948 to describe the systematic assertion of white supremacy through policies and laws designed to manage the supposed threat posed by Black people by incarcerating them in special areas where they were obligated to live, while enabling their controlled and policed exploitation as workers, upon whose labor South Africa was dependent.

As it unfolded in South Africa, apartheid contained five key elements. First, it relied on an essentialized cultural logic that tied people to place through racial and nativist

ideologies. Black people were removed from white space, denied citizenship in South Africa and sent to live in designated areas set aside for only Black people, which were called independent homelands and where they were told they “naturally” belonged. Second, racial groups and the homelands for Black people were made unequal because the homelands were impoverished by design. Third, the apartheid state created a bureaucratic system of identity documentation and mobility controls called pass laws that governed how Black people were allowed to cross borders and enter space designated for white citizens. Fourth, apartheid was also about the control and exploitation of Black labor. The pass laws let Black people into white space only for the purpose of working—they lacked political rights in white space. Fifth, because apartheid was exploitative and unjust, its maintenance required a massive and expensive militarized security apparatus to maintain its racial separations.

South Africa began dismantling its apartheid regime almost three decades ago, but the Global North is hastening its appropriation of apartheid's key features. From the thickening of borders to their militarization; from imperialist interventions that destabilize territories to the refugee camps that contain the displaced; from the ongoing criminalization of the mobile and those who assist them to the explosive growth of detention centers and deportations the Global North is replicating on a grand scale the fundamental components of a hierarchical social order based on regulating the lives and mobilities of people from the Global South. Through new forms of militarized border regimes and regulated labor cycles, the five elements that make up the South African apartheid system are taking shape systemically on a global scale.

## Exclusionary Citizenship

One of the key drivers of this new regulatory regime, mirroring apartheid South Africa, has been rising nationalist efforts to tie people to place, thus enabling an illusion that cultural identity roots people in particular geographical places where they are imagined naturally to belong (Mexico is for Mexicans, Germany is for Germans, and so forth). Tying people to place through linking cultural identity and nation-state membership (or citizenship) is the basis for the idea of immigration control. It makes mobility seem threatening to the consolidation of a nationalist identity.

Nationalism is not natural, in part because mobility has been ubiquitous throughout human history. It has to be created. Over the past century states in the Global North have been crafting nationalist identities for citizens while building mechanisms to police cross-border movements of non-citizens. Elites often promote particular ideologies and cultural understandings about who belongs by virtue of descent and birth, and governments have created passports

to clearly brand those who belong. In the white settler colonial states of the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, in the colonizing states of Europe, and in the new nation of Israel, the process of consolidating a nationalist identity connected to citizenship has historically been a lethally racialized project.

In the United States, for example, the very first legislation to define the qualifications for citizenship (the Naturalization Act of 1790) restricted citizenship only to free whites, whose mobility remained unfettered, a law that remained on the books until 1952. The importance of whiteness as central to citizenship has taken many forms over the years, including anti-Black racial segregation laws, influx control policies that prioritized certain immigrants and barred others and laws that barred Asians from citizenship until the middle of the twentieth century.

Canada, Australia, European countries, Israel and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE—enacted similar racial logics of exclusionary citizenship. In the cases of Canada and Australia this exclusion was accomplished through genocide and removals of indigenous colonized peoples and through ideologies of racial superiority. In Europe it was done through laws that racially restricted citizenship after the end of colonialism and in Israel and the GCC countries through restrictive heritage-based requirements for citizenship.

The end of European colonial rule led to the emergence of a global regime of mandatory citizenship: European states that had offered a limited extension of citizenship to some of the colonized began curtailing that policy, constructing instead a new regime of mobility controls. Thus, at the very moment that former colonies were transitioning to independence and gaining political freedom, former colonizers were working to ensure the hegemony of an international structure to control population movement, enforce the national conferral of citizenship as the only form of internationally recognized political belonging and make certain that they could retain whiteness as a key factor in determining who would be allowed to cross their borders.<sup>2</sup>

What is new today is the extensive militarization and global extension of this regime fueled by increasingly narrow notions of national and racial identity. Today, policing cross-border mobility has become a primary pre-occupation of governments in the Global North. It is not by chance that the EU visa system defines as “negative” countries—those countries whose citizens require visas to enter the EU—all the countries in Africa, most of those in the Caribbean, all the poorer Latin American and Asian countries, and most of the Muslim-majority countries. Similarly, the US visa waiver program applies only to European countries as well as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Brunei and Chile. The racialized hierarchies encouraged and maintained by these visa regimes are obvious.

## Producing Impoverishment and Disenfranchisement

Another element of the apartheid structure is the ongoing intervention by the state into areas designated for the racialized underclass in ways that render ordinary life unsustainable. In South Africa, the homelands created for Black people were kept poor and relatively powerless, although the South African government retained the ability to intervene economically and militarily at will. The new globalized regime of border and mobility control is also characterized by ongoing interventions and invasive policies that deeply impact the social conditions and lives of those being excluded by restrictive policies such as:

- Military interventions by the Global North into countries in the Global South.
- Austerity regimes imposed by multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank on countries across the Global South over the issue of debt.
- Corporate capitalist plunder of the Global South by economic and financial entities based in the Global North.
- Trade agreements that benefit the Global North and disadvantage the Global South.
- Large-scale land acquisition in the Global South by entities in the Global North for the production of biofuels, timber and food crops.<sup>3</sup>

The aggressive penetration of neoliberal capitalism in the Global South has created “excess populations” that are either captured for the market as cheap producers, exploitable workers or temporary guest workers, or made expendable through forced removals and displacements, incarceration into refugee camps or are allowed to sicken and die. The patterning of this transformation is driven by a racist logic of securitization that defines bodies in the Global South as either security threats to, or exploitable labor for, the Global North.

## Criminalizing Immigration

In response to heightened mobility and immigration panics, the Global North has consolidated what some have referred to as a “fortress” operation through expanding deportations and tightening the requirements for allowing entry that reflect a clear geographic and racial bias. People in the Global North who lack appropriate entry documents face a context that some analysts call “crimmigration”: immigration panics that conflate undocumented status with criminality or terrorism, drawing out racialized fears of immigrants and producing a surge of new laws, policing and surveillance to identify, incarcerate and remove the undocumented. The racial logics motivating and guiding these practices mirror the management of pass law violations in apartheid South Africa that filled jails with Black people. In the Global North of today, states have embarked on programs of mass refusal and mass incarceration to



discipline, punish and remove from society undocumented racialized foreigners.

One node in this system is the international refugee regime. Gaining official refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is made contingent upon a strict reading of political persecution that gives people the right to cross an international border to make a claim of persecution but then strips them of all meaningful political and civil rights in countries where they do not “belong” while their claims are reviewed by authorities. The formal process of refugee identity documentation and management relies on refugee camps as holding facilities to restrict refugee mobility. The refugee camp system is designed to protect state sovereignty, and specifically the sovereignty of wealthier countries in the Global North, from the movement of people in the Global South, where the majority of refugees originate and the majority of refugee camps are located. The international management of refugees thus enacts a fundamental inequality that grants power to the Global North over people in the Global South. Meanwhile, people who carry passports from the Global North can usually go wherever they want.

Furthermore, countries in the Global North are eager to keep refugees far away from their borders because persecuted people who make it across the border of the United States or the EU have a legal right to apply for asylum. A primary goal of Frontex, the EU agency responsible for border control, is to ensure that potential asylum seekers fail to reach EU borders because of the legal obligation to consider the asylum applications of those who do manage to cross. EU countries are funding Libya, Niger, Turkey, Morocco, Senegal, Sudan and the Ukraine to catch and hold migrants trying to make their way to Europe and to accept those deported at the border.

The same desire governs asylum policy in the United States and in Australia. The United States funds Mexico to try to stop Central Americans before they reach its border, and Australia deflects migrants to offshore islands in other countries. GCC countries and East Asian countries accept extremely few asylum seekers, and Israel, after building a wall at its border with Egypt in 2012, began a campaign of mass deportation of asylum seekers who arrived prior to its construction. Off-shoring borders and third country deportations generally operate outside of American, Canadian, European, Australian or Israeli regulatory control, are subject to little oversight or transparency and offer countries on whose behalf migrants are detained and deported deniability about human rights abuses that may be taking place.

In addition to blocking entry through interrupting people's mobility and placing them in camps, countries in the Global North are also making vast use of detention centers and holding facilities within their borders. Israel has the largest detention center in the world—the Saharonim Prison in the Negev desert—with a capacity of 8,000 inmates. Russia recently announced a plan to expand the number of detention centers from 88 to 104. In the United States, the number of

detainees has ballooned to over 400,000 per year since 2012, held across a shadowy and secretive network of public and private facilities, with a detention budget in the billions. Over 30,000 immigrants, the vast majority from Mexico and Central America, are imprisoned in detention centers in the United States on any given day, a quota set by Congress and fulfilled by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Consequently, the business of detention has become hugely profitable, with the two major private contractors in the United States posting profits of hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

The disregard for human life, dignity and basic rights evinced by refugee camps, detention centers, off-shore holding facilities and deportation is made even more brutally clear with the murderous effects of border management regimes. Mediterranean maritime patrols for Frontex push migrants into more dangerous sea routes, while the Prevention Through Deterrence strategy along the US-Mexican border funnels migrants into ever more hostile desert environments, and Australia's maritime patrols push boats overloaded with migrants back out to sea. Because of these strategies, about 13,000 people died between 2014 and mid-2018 trying to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe. Thousands have died in the Sonoran Desert, most disappeared by the desert's desiccating power before their remains can be discovered. An estimated 2,000 people have died, most by drowning, at the Australian frontier during 2000-2016.

The now-normalized practices of abandoning people in refugee camps, incarcerating people in secretive detention centers and interrupting migrant routes in order to push people into life threatening environments show the centrality of racism for creating categories of the disposable and even killable. These practices illustrate the lengths to which countries in the Global North will go to restrict the entry of Black and brown people from the Global South because they lack entry documents.<sup>4</sup>

## Labor Exploitation

Despite engineering highly elaborate border controls, the Global North still remains dependent on the labor of border crossers. Because the demand for cheap labor confronts the fortress mentality, many countries have created complex guest worker programs through policies that allow the entry of temporary migrants to perform certain jobs while denying them basic rights of self-determination and democratic participation. In fact, guest worker programs in the Global North are modeled on South Africa's pass system that regulated Black labor for the benefit of white employers.

Temporary migrants are allowed to cross borders into countries in the Global North through a dizzying array of work visas that apply to different sectors of the economy and carry different rights and protections. Nevertheless, work visas, which are intended to ensure control over imported workers, share a set of similar characteristics across the

Global North: Most are temporary, forbid migrant workers from bringing their families, prohibit union organizing or collective bargaining, exempt migrant workers from labor protections available to citizens, are controlled by employers and not workers and are often managed by labor brokers who charge high fees to prospective workers, making them deeply indebted. They are designed to create a flexible, replaceable, disempowered and disposable work force that cannot make demands on the host country and will not challenge the cultural integrity of the host culture.

In many countries in the Global North, the contained and controlled workforce of authorized guest workers is augmented by a much larger workforce of undocumented people who endure exploitation, racism, insecurity and the persistent threat of deportation in order to perform jobs that citizens refuse to do. Those in the Global North who hold guest worker and undocumented status confront the racialized hierarchies of belonging, rights and human value within a system of labor control that depends on importing people from regions that have been made unsustainable and criminalizes those who lack documents or by making their employment dependent upon their employer, who holds their labor contract. The labor structure simultaneously ensures that they submit to racialized hierarchies that put them on the bottom and denies them rights and recognition as members of the national body.<sup>5</sup>

## A Militarized Global Apartheid Apparatus

The final element of the emerging global border and mobility regime that resembles South African apartheid is the militarized security apparatus that maintains its exclusivist and hierarchical structure. In the past two decades, the EU and the United States, as well as Israel, have transformed border security into a spectacular militarized operation that absorbs ever-growing resources.<sup>6</sup>

The US border, most especially with Mexico, has become a militarized zone through the transfer of military technology and strategies, and the creation of the Constitution Free Zone that stretches inland 100 miles from the border, where civil rights can be suspended in the interests of security and immigration enforcement. The number of people employed to carry out this work is staggering. The US Customs and Border Protection Division is the single largest federal law enforcement agency in the United States with 60,000 employees and a 2017 budget of \$13.9 billion. ICE employs another 20,000 with a 2017 budget of \$3.2 billion.

Despite the militarization of the US border, a majority of immigrants who attempt to cross without documents are successful, leading some to suggest that the militarized performance of border security is intended to appease white racism and discipline brown migrants, while also ensuring a steady supply of exploitable labor. Perhaps the militarized border is like a spectacularly costly form of hazing that stops some and kills others while forcing those who successfully get across to

endure painful, humiliating journeys that demonstrate with utter clarity that the Global North sees them as replaceable, exploitable and forgettable.

## Contradictions of Global Apartheid

The security apparatus of global apartheid dehumanizes racialized others through blocking their routes of mobility, channeling them into the most dangerous regions of the sea and the desert, incarcerating them in refugee camps in remote and inhospitable regions for indeterminate periods and subjecting them to removals from white space over and over again. The United States, the EU, Australia, Israel and other countries in the Global North are claiming to maximize their own self-protection through gating, policing, removing and drowning people. Such practices are state-sanctioned investments in forms of structural violence that cause people to die.

Border controls, deportations and deaths in the desert and at sea reveal state sovereignty at its points of enactment and clarify how the state uses law, territorial boundaries and militarized security structures to promote and ensure a particular hegemonic racial identity. States shape populations by policing who gains entry and by removing the undesirables. Removals are acts of racism—they are racist projects of cultural consolidation, and they are often hidden within self-serving discourses of security.

Apartheid in South Africa collapsed because of its unsustainable internal contradictions, the debilitating financial cost of its security apparatus and its inherent evil. Maintaining a global apartheid structure will be vastly more costly, evil and ultimately impossible. Fighting the rise of racist nationalisms, the criminalization of mobility, hierarchical labor systems that give citizens more rights and protections than migrant workers, the use of incarceration as a tool of deterrence and punishment and the transformation of national borders into war zones must be a top priority for those who seek a more peaceful, just and equitable world. ■

## Endnotes

1 This article is a summary of Catherine Besteman, "Militarized Global Apartheid," *Current Anthropology*, 60/19 (2019).

2 See Rita Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017) and Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

3 See James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006); David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Saskia Sassan, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2014).

4 See Maurizio Albahari, *Crimes of Peace: Mediterranean Migrations at the World's Deadliest Border* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) and Jason De Léon, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

5 See Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Gregory Feldman, *The Migration Apparatus: Security, Labor, and Policy-Making in the European Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); and Pardis Mahdavi, *Crossing the Gulf: Love and Family in Migrant Lives* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

6 See Ruben Andersson, *Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

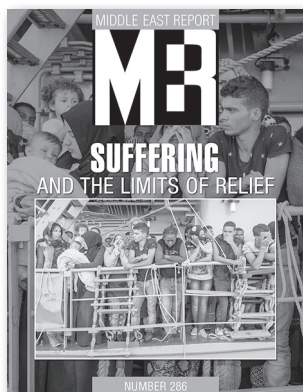


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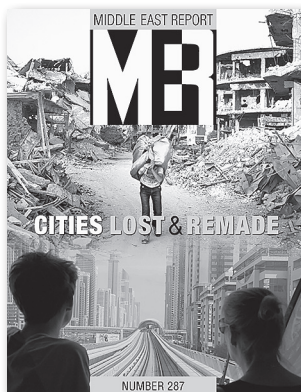
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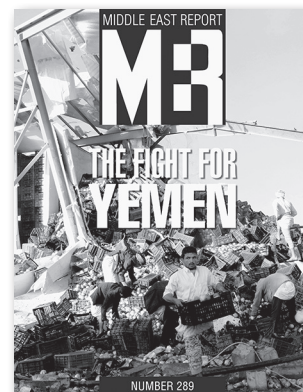
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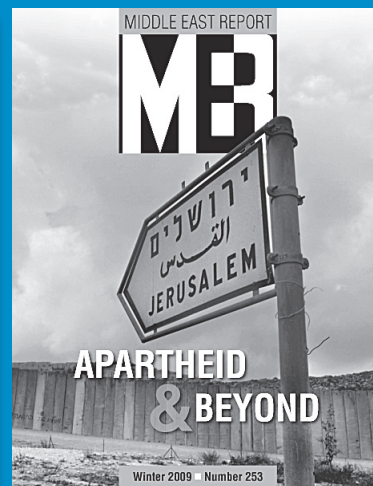
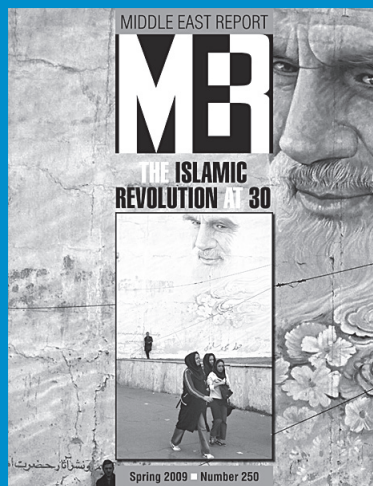
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