
Answering ‘The Question of Palestine’: Securitization and World (Dis)Order in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

This essay begins from the premise that the genocide in Gaza since 2023 cannot be adequately theorized as either a tragic aberration from an otherwise rules-based international order, or even as an exemplar of a statically enduring American/Western hypocrisy. Instead, it proposes a theorization of world-ordering rooted in historic Palestine as a physical and conceptual vantage point. First, it argues that the Israeli conquest of Palestinian land since the Nakba has been politically and materially facilitated by the rise of securitization as an increasingly dominant form of state power in the US and Israel. Second, it argues that current horrors in Gaza expose the existential stakes of securitization regimes in the present as genocide and ecocide. The paper thus makes a case for routing the future of world-ordering and global human security through the restoration of Palestinian liberation.

TAGS:

Palestinian Liberation, Gaza, Genocide, Palestine-Israel Conflict

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The current scope and scale of carnage in Gaza since the start of Israel's October 2023 military onslaught nearly defies comprehension. Despite an ostensible ceasefire and peace plan brokered by the Trump administration in October 2025, conditions on the ground in Gaza are still catastrophic (Ferragamo 2026). Israel continues to strike populated areas and severely restrict humanitarian aid, while public health crises, including communicable disease and rodent infestations, compound the devastation for the two million Palestinians trapped in the Strip (Dremly and Mahdi, 2026). The ongoing case of *South Africa v. Israel* before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has resulted in landmark provisional rulings affirming the plausibility of genocide— though even this “crime of crimes” framework arguably serves as the beginning rather than the end of the analysis.

Indeed, the very charge of genocide under international law requires both a historical and conceptual return to 1948: the year in which the newly established United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the wake of the Holocaust *and* the year in which the newly established State of Israel mass-expelled the native Arab Palestinian population from their land. The simultaneity of the Palestinian “Nakba”, and the institutional birth of modern international law and the US-dominated postwar international order, was not a temporal coincidence. Nor is it an abstract, niche, or purely academic matter in the broader contemporary geopolitical chaos in and beyond the Middle East.

What the British Empire then called the “question of Palestine” remains lodged at the structural heart of global governance. Edward Said (1979) characterized the “question of Palestine” in his titular book on the subject as “the contest between an affirmation and a denial” of Palestinian sovereignty. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights— which stipulates the universal right to freedom of movement and the right of return— was also adopted in December 1948 amid the active unfolding of the Nakba (UN Human Rights Committee 1999, para. 4). Yet, for the Israeli and the US governments in 2026, the only available answers for Palestine and Palestinians— if current Israeli land grabs in the West Bank and rumored plans to turn “postwar” Gaza into a Trumpian

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"riviera" are any indication— are promises of more violence, mass displacement, and ethnic cleansing (Akkad, 2025; Lidman, 2026).

That measurable public opinion in the United States and around the world has shifted demonstrably against the Israeli onslaught, and that the ICJ rulings in particular have brought the framework of genocide into the global mainstream, are both glimmers of hope amid the relentless daily bloodshed. But present horrors in Gaza demand a deeper, and intellectually sharper reckoning with the broader international systems that have made possible a nearly three-year stalemate of such horrors.

It is no longer sufficiently precise or useful to explain Gaza as a tragic aberration from an otherwise generally rules-based postwar order— or even as an exemplar of a cruel, statically enduring American/Western hypocrisy. Instead, this essay proposes a theorization of world-ordering rooted in historic Palestine as a physical as well as conceptual vantage point. It does so in two parts. It begins by arguing that the Israeli conquest and occupation of Palestinian land since the Nakba has been rationalized— made politically and materially plausible— by the rise of securitization as an increasingly dominant formation of state power. Securitization as a formation is neither exclusive nor reducible to the United States; but the evolution of the US security apparatus has been a decisive factor in setting the local, regional, and especially international conditions for intractable conflict in Palestine/Israel. Next, the essay argues that the current genocide in Palestine starkly exposes the existential stakes of securitization regimes in the present. Drawing on Indigenous and Palestine Studies literatures working at the intersections of genocide, colonialism, and the climate crisis, this essay concludes by making a case for routing the future of world-ordering in the 21st century through the restoration of Palestinian liberation as the foundation for both a Middle Eastern peace process, and a more robust vision for global human security.

Securitization as State Formation

In mainstream political science and security studies, securitization has most often been defined and theorized as a political-military process of existential threat management involving securitizing actors, referent objects, and audiences (Balzacq et al., 2015). For the purposes of this article, I depart from that more ontological understanding of securitization to take a historical materialist approach informed by the work of critical humanist scholars such as David Harvey, Inderpal Grewal, Paul Amar, and Tom Engelhardt. I thus posit securitization as a state formation with a distinct political economy, in which the funding and functions of the public sphere are simultaneously militarized and privatized— a radical reorientation of state power that justifies tremendous investments in defense industries (primarily related to weapons technology and surveillance) as a political *and* economic national benefit. I sketch out this framework in and through a historical analysis of the US national security apparatus, due to the outsized impact of the United States in shaping the course of international

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relations. Domestic American processes of militarization and privatization have played a crucial role in maintaining Israel's viability as a dominant regional actor, securitizing the Israeli state through military aid— and, ultimately, rendering the exceptionality of Palestinian conquest and occupation as a rational, even constitutive fact of modern global diplomacy.

The United States did not just emerge from the Second World War as a “superpower.” The US mobilization for war kicked off a rapid militarization of the federal government and national economy. By 1948, the US had already transformed into a security state and was set to remain in a semi-permanent war footing. This internal securitization process was characterized by three structural components in the 1940s that would have far-reaching import, and thus need to be explicated in some degree of detail.

First, the profitability of the US security apparatus was legislatively enshrined in the year before the 1941 Pearl Harbor attack spurred the United States formally into the war. The Roosevelt administration lacked the political capacity in 1940 to simply command the American industrial base to commit the required resources for an all-out war production effort; so it had to cajole US corporate leaders into war production through economic incentives, such as cost-plus-fixed-fee contracts and generous tax carry-backs. These economic devices ultimately “shifted the economic risks of war production from the contractors to the taxpayers in general” (Higgs, 2008). Though this aspect of the US military procurement system was a result of historically contingent politics, it became an enduring structural feature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Second, the US aircraft industry— developed and matured almost from scratch during World War II— rapidly became a profitable, hybrid public-private foundation for the US security apparatus due to a potent combination of immense federal investment at home *and* an immense demand for export in Europe. As one US historian observes, “Britain's war, and France's, resurrected America's aviation industry from the dead” (Herman, 2012). From 1938 to 1941, British and French purchases of American arms alone represented nearly half of the industry's total sales (Wilson, 2016). In addition, from 1940 to 1944, the US government put up roughly \$7 billion (well over \$100 billion in 2026) to finance the construction and expansion of industrial plants— and aircraft companies were among the biggest beneficiaries of these funds, with almost three-fourths of the sector's wartime expansion funded by the Defense Plant Corporation (White, 1980). These two trends richly rewarded and empowered American corporate firms, but were largely state-led, driven by the immediate needs of the Allied war machine. After the war's end, especially when the US Air Force was formally promoted to a co-equal branch of the military in 1947, the Air Force further empowered aerospace corporations by outsourcing the research, production, and development of military aircraft and missiles to private firms, rather than following traditional Army and Navy models of cultivating government owned- and -run plants “in house” (Markusen et al., 1991). Similar outsourcing practices in adjacent fields, such as military electronics and machine tools, turned federal defense contracts into engines for local and regional

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growth in the US West and South— as well as created a constituency of powerful defense corporations operating in both domestic and foreign contexts.

Third, the Second World War produced a key political and psychological pivot for how the term “national security” was understood and operationalized. During the New Deal era of the 1930s, the Roosevelt administration had transformed the US government into an instrument for social and economic security. But the US role in World War II re-oriented this more expansive vision of security toward a narrower focus on foreign policy. As sociologist Gregory Hooks put it: “Military agencies secured the authority to set war production goals consistent with an expansive understanding of national security. Goals for the civilian economy conformed to the military’s program, not vice versa” (Hooks, 1991). Especially in the immediate aftermath of the war under the Truman administration, a rising foreign policy establishment of academics, intellectuals, and policy advisors pushed to frame economic security programs like social security as “welfare”— shifting political attention and especially federal funding away from domestic social programs, and towards physical security programs as the real domain of “national security” (Roady, 2024). When the National Security Act of 1947 inaugurated the basic infrastructure of the modern US military establishment— uniting the armed services under the Department of Defense umbrella, codifying the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and National Security Council (NSC)— it marked the culmination of an internal process of bureaucratic consolidation, resulting in not just a militarized but a *securitized* US state.

These three midcentury developments— the financial incentive system built into US military procurement; the hybrid public-private, domestic-foreign character of the US defense industry; and the militarized re-definition of security— have served as the material foundation through which the United States operates as a global actor. They explain why and how it has been possible since the 1950s for the US to promote, and indeed heavily sponsor, modes of securitized governance through military aid and security partnerships around the world in the name of peace and prosperity, including in the Middle East.¹ Securitization can bridge the intellectually contradictory imperatives of war and peace, liberal democracy and crushing state violence, within the US and throughout the US-led international postwar order, because it incentivizes state resource investment into a profitable, self-justifying cycle of existential threat management.

No single polity exceeds Israel in not only the volume of US military aid received, but in the scale of securitized institutional enmeshment fused to that aid. Numerous existing studies dissect the political and cultural reasons for why Israel has received such

¹ For a small sample of the literature on US military aid in the Middle East, see: Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East* (Hachette Book Group, 2016); Jody A. Bishop, ed., *U.S. Policy in the Middle East: Security, Aid, and Strategic Interventions* (Nova Publishers, 2025); Hicham Alaoui and Robert Springborg, eds., *Security Assistance in the Middle East: Challenges ... and the Need for Change* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2023)

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unique treatment.² In this analysis, however, I draw attention to the critical role played by US-driven securitization in ensuring Israel's viability as a political, economic, and diplomatic actor on the world stage; as well as entrenching US-style, US-financed securitization as an endemic regional feature of international relations in the Middle East.

Though Israel received formative levels of US economic aid and political support in its early years, it was not until the 1967 War, and the subsequent formal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, that Israel began to actively develop its own local version of a "military-industrial complex" (Hever, 2017). Similarly, the US only began to seriously escalate its military investment in Israel as a result of the 1973 War, during which \$2.2 billion of US emergency security assistance prevented a catastrophic military loss for Israel against Syrian and Egyptian forces (Levey 2008). Post-1973 US aid had a profound *securitizing* impact on Israel's already militarized political economy. The packages were largely structured through Foreign Military Financing (FMF), which provides annual grant funding for the purchase of US-made weapons and military technologies— an arrangement that functionally subsidizes the promotion of US arms in allied countries. As political scientist Shir Hever argues, this kind of aid encourages Israeli institutions to imitate American modes privatization and military commercialization. "Israeli military companies were given an incentive to enter into joint research and development projects with US companies, in order to obtain a share of the aid money spent by the Israeli government," Hever (2017) explains. "The cooperation between Israeli and US companies has altered the Israeli companies' priorities, encouraging these companies to develop products usable and needed by the US military... When cooperation of the Israeli arms companies was not forthcoming, the aid became a coercion mechanism."

This process became more financialized, and more oriented towards the emerging international markets for high-tech surveillance and weapons systems, during the 1990s. With the end of the Cold War for the United States, and the initiation of the Oslo peace process for Israel, both the US and Israel further intensified efforts to transfer the burdens of national security funding, administration, product development and implementation— and, ultimately, responsibility and accountability— away from their respective state governments. The private sector in both countries was the most prominent and obvious beneficiary; though, Israel arguably structured the Palestinian Authority (PA) less as a proto-national governing body and much more as a subcontractor, delegating it limited authority in order to mitigate the economic and political costs of Israel's occupation, which deepened rather than receded as advertised (Hever, 2017). But especially in the 2000s, the September 11th attacks on New York and Washington put the American and Israeli defense sectors into hyperdrive, and tightly

² Amy Kaplan, for example, identifies shared and self-reinforcing nationalist myths about kinship, suffering, salvation, and moral uses of force. See: Amy Kaplan, *Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance* (Harvard University Press, 2018); Shaul Mitelpunkt, *Israel in the American Mind: The Cultural Politics of US-Israeli Relations, 1958-1988* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally* (State University of New York Press, 2006).

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entwined them institutionally. In a spectacle of what historian Amy Kaplan (2019) calls “homeland insecurities,” the US “war on terror merged with Israel’s war against the Palestinians in both rhetoric and practice, with each legitimating the other.” The very notion of post-Cold War cuts in US military spending dissolved overnight— flooding the domestic US economy with lucrative defense contracts, while turbocharging the global security economy on the US tax base’s dime. Meanwhile, the Israeli government moved assertively towards privatizing its mostly state-owned defense companies within Israel, but also transnationalizing foreign ownership and investment in the Israeli defense sector (Nitzan and Bichler, 2002). “Israel had products that the world wanted,” writes journalist Antony Loewenstein (2023). “Its arms industry fully embraced the homeland security sector, bringing in billions of dollars in revenue for missiles, drones, and surveillance equipment. The message was unambiguous: ‘We have been fighting a War on Terror since our birth. We’ll show you how it’s done.’”

These transformative US-sponsored investments in securitization have done more than underwrite the future of the Israeli state’s economic vitality. The securitization of Israel has played a pivotal role in entrenching securitization across the region since the 1970s. The CIA had already begun experimenting in the 1950s with subcontracting certain politically noxious operations to the Israeli Mossad in Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and Morocco (Nitzan and Bichler, 2002). But under the Nixon Doctrine in the wake of the 1973 War, the existing Cold War arms race in the Middle East hit new levels of commercialization. The US financed Israel’s ballooning military imports at the same time it aggressively courted business with regimes like the Shah’s Iran, in order to sustain both the domestic US arms industry and the regional “balance of power” in favor of US foreign policy goals (Nitzan and Bichler, 2002; U.S. Library of Congress, 2020; Klare, 1980). The proliferation of weaponry in the Middle East was significantly routed through and justified by US military investment in Israel, and has resulted in widespread corruption, state violence, and the perpetuation of chronic cycles of intra-national armed conflict.

Further, by the twenty-first century, the profitability of Israeli military technology has given Israel load-bearing diplomatic leverage to normalize relations with hostile neighboring Arab states, and to broadly legitimize its occupation of Palestine. As a former tech reporter for *Haaretz* once quipped, “When Israel is selling cyber-surveillance to some African country, they can assure their vote at the United Nations. Since there’s an occupation, we need the vote” (Loewenstein, 2023). The Israeli cyber-intelligence firm NSO Group is an instructive example: through sales of its proprietary spyware, Pegasus, the Israeli state has used NSO as an instrument for its national security agenda by securing support from diplomatically hostile Arab dictatorships such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Pegasus is classified as a military export, the deployment and sales of which are widely recognized to be under the heavy control of the Israeli government, despite the company’s public claims to the contrary (Loewenstein, 2023; Kirchgaessner, 2022). To borrow Loewenstein’s (2023) summation of this strand of Israeli diplomacy: “Israel has sold so much defense equipment to so many nations that it hopes to insulate itself from any political backlash to its endless occupation. Allies,

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whether real or transactional, have given Israel the protection it craves from international censure... It needs the world to legitimize its occupation and sells the technology used to maintain that occupation as a calling card."

The 2020 Abraham Accords were the diplomatic culmination of Israeli and regional Middle Eastern securitization. The Accords, a series of bilateral agreements brokered by the first Trump administration, formally normalized relations between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain through a multi-lateral framework of economic, political, and security cooperation. To facilitate the Israel-UAE agreement in particular, the US advanced a \$23 billion sale of F-35s to the UAE— once again exploiting the mutually profitable regional arms race to raise Israel's diplomatic standing (Middle East Institute, 2025). The Accords represented a major reversal of the post-1967 "land for peace" framework that had previously dominated regional and international diplomatic relations. "Land for peace," which had been affirmed by UN Security Council resolutions in 1967 and 1973 calling for Israel to cede control of occupied territories in exchange for recognized borders, at least nominally positioned Palestinian and Israeli sovereignty as equally legitimate. But the Abraham Accords gave Israel what it had long coveted— open diplomatic normalization with hostile Arab regimes, continued investment in both its civilian and military economies— if Netanyahu nominally agreed not to move ahead with plans for the formal annexation of land in the West Bank. The Abraham agreements modeled a way for Israel to answer the "question of Palestine" with only silence.

This form of "peace" is, at the most literal level, an exercise in corrupt hypocrisy. But its deeper political, economic, and material logics are consistent with what legal scholar Noura Erakat (2024) terms "Nakba peace": "the establishment of security achieved through the removal of native Palestinians." Put differently, securitization can achieve the Orwellian inversion of war and peace through its fundamental reorientation of incentives. Due to the historical evolution of the US and Israeli security states, "forever wars" and endless occupation have been rendered more artificially valuable to the current system of international relations, than the traditional normative ideals of a civil, de-militarized peace.

Genocide as Extinction Event

The valuation calculus underlying securitization's political and material logics has a traceable history, a mappable structure; but the depth of its scope and implications require another layer of analysis. I argue that capital accumulation in the advanced, securitized form outlined in this essay has for decades derived its profits from violence at an industrial scale of mass death, displacement, resource extraction, and environmental destruction. The genocide of Palestinians produced by American and Israeli securitization, therefore, must be situated in a more expansive analytic framework of settler-colonial genocide and ecocide.

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I want to refrain from an exhaustive recital of statistics or gruesome atrocities out of Gaza, which have already been documented on social media and in publicly accessible reports from a large variety of international organizations. Simultaneously, the cataclysmic conditions imposed by Israel on Palestinians in Gaza require unflinching witness. An October 2025 analysis published by the Costs of War Project estimated that two years into its brutal campaign, Israel had already killed at least 67,000 Gazans and injured at least 169,000 more. The number of indirect deaths could not be accurately counted (Crawford, 2025). In its most recent (at the time of this writing) May 2026 report, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs described present humanitarian conditions in Gaza as “dire”: “Most people across the Gaza Strip remain displaced, in poor shelter conditions and exposed to rising public health risks linked to pests and rodents, as well as ongoing strikes, shelling, and gunfire. They remain largely confined to less than half of Gaza, unable to access other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, namely the West Bank, or to travel abroad, except for the very small number of patients approved for medical evacuation and their companions.” Persistent delays in the entry of generator oil, spare parts, and humanitarian aid have rendered critical waste management and debris removal infrastructure non-functional. Further, “both food and non-food prices remain largely unaffordable, with the cost of living calculated at 282 per cent of pre-war levels, alongside daily price fluctuations of up to 10 to 15 per cent.”

References to “pre-war” conditions in these kinds of non-governmental organization reports, in order to offer yardsticks for the drastic deterioration of life in Gaza, are commonplace, and they make an intuitive logical sense. Yet, these post-2023 humanitarian conditions sprout from much more complicated systemic roots. Political scientist Sara Roy first introduced the paradigm of de-development in 1987 to explain the relationship between Israel and the Gaza Strip. In the 2016 edition of her landmark book on the subject, Roy characterizes de-development as “the deliberate, systematic deconstruction of an indigenous economy by a dominant power.” It is distinguished from underdevelopment by a policy design that “[ensures] there will be no economic base, even one that is malformed, to support an independent indigenous existence.” Moreover: “Israel’s ideological and political goals have proven more exploitative than those of other settler regimes, because they rob the native population of its most economic resources— land, water, and labor— as well as the internal capacity and potential for developing those resources. Thus, not only is the native population exploited economically, it is deprived of its means of livelihood and potential, its national identity, and its sovereignty.” De-development— like war, genocide, and occupation— is consistent with securitization’s inversion of peace incentives. A more economically productive, if still crushingly exploited Palestine would seem to make more sense than a pulverized strip of rubble under a normative international relations framework; but US and Israeli securitization have upended that more traditional and straightforward path to mutual economic growth in favor of systemic annihilation of Palestinians.

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The cost of Palestinian death— whether death comes through active war or through what scholar Rob Nixon (2011) calls the slow violence of gradual environmental destruction— is continually justified by sequestering it from the financial benefits reaped by the US and Israeli security regimes. These benefits are still considered justifiable, or at least tolerable, even when knock-on effects of both fast and slow violence poison Americans and Israelis as well.³ Despite the visible strain of dysfunctional economies and right-wing ascendancies in both countries, the mainstream US and Israeli publics, in whose name securitization regimes insist they operate, have remained relatively insulated from environmental devastation with which Palestinian publics are forced to grapple. But as climate change intensifies in the coming decades, threatening life-sustaining infrastructures and institutions, climate-induced mass deaths will become as impossible to ignore as the current genocide in Gaza.

Emerging scholarship at the intersections of genocide studies, political ecology, Indigenous Studies, and Palestine Studies offers a more expansive interpretation of genocide in modern international relations. Rather than relying on Lemkin's narrower legal definition of genocide as specific individual acts, scholars like Martin Crook (2024) call for defining genocide "not [as] an assault on the individuals per se, but rather an assault on the very structures, or essential foundations, of the group itself, weakening the integrity of the group and its capacity to successfully reproduce." Crook and Damien Short (2014) coined the term "ecocide-genocide nexus" in order to capture the large-scale global dispossession of Indigenous populations as a direct result of resource extraction and industrial development processes, including the knock-on environmental effects of climate change (rising seas, depleted soil, etc.). Similarly, the subfield of Indigenous climate change studies identifies climate change as a form of intensified colonialism, which must be redressed by renewing traditional forms of Indigenous ecological knowledge to adapt to disruptive environmental change (Whyte, 2017).

Palestinians as well as Palestine Studies scholars draw out the ecological dimensions of the Israeli occupation, and especially Israel's systematic denial of Palestinian futurity. Mazin Qumsiyeh and Mohammed Abusarhan (2020) theorize an "environmental Nakba" under Israeli colonization since 1948. They point to Israel's comprehensive uprooting of native trees and agricultural crops, the appropriation of water aquifers for Israeli settler use, the establishment of polluting industrial manufacturing plants in the occupied West Bank, and the building of hostile infrastructures (including settlements) that separated Palestinians from their land as practices that "irreversibly damages Palestine's cultural and natural heritage, threatens endangered species, and harms agriculture and environmental sustainability." The "ecologically induced genocide" in Palestine should be distinguished from "ecological harm that arises as a by-product of capitalist expansion or economic exploitation," argue Pinar Dinc and Necmettin Türk (2026),

³ See, as just one example of contemporary journalism on the environmental impact of the US military on Americans and the world: Abe Asher, "The US Military Is Destroying the Planet Beyond Imagination," *Jacobin*, October 28, 2025, <https://jacobin.com/2025/10/us-military-climate-crisis-documentary>.

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because the destruction deliberately targets “specific lifeworlds, such as olive groves, as a means of eroding the foundations of existence and resistance among stateless and marginalized groups.”

Israel's drive to comprehensively starve, bomb, and poison Palestinian people, land, and livelihoods out of existence will have multi-generational consequences that can scarcely be articulated from the vantage of the present. But scholars, policymakers, and ordinary observers all have a collective duty and responsibility to nevertheless attempt articulation. As Noura Erakat stated during an address to the United Nations during the 77th Commemoration of the Nakba in May 2025:

If you normalize genocide, you will have nothing left. If it is permissible to deny a people exist, to cage them, subject them to systemic warfare, then to use AI to bomb them at unprecedented rates in their homes, to burn them alive in tents... to allow premature babies to rot in NICU units... to starve them while their food decays in miles of aid trucks, all without consequence and worse, while insisting that their lives are secondary - if not altogether insignificant - relative to Zionist settler sovereignty, then I promise you that no one is safe.

Towards Palestinian and Collective Futurity

In tracing back the history and structural formation of securitization, it is crucial to insist that neither securitization, nor the genocide it enables and facilitates, are inevitable. When narrating stories of environmental collapse, mass extinction, and genocide, Indigenous scholar Audra Mitchell (2023) emphasizes the importance of resisting not only the violence of extractive capitalism and anthropocentrism; but also the zero-sum “white apocalyptic future narratives” that “leverage” fear to “entrench existing power structures and close down imaginaries of alternative futures.” Securitization flourishes in logics, structures, and imaginaries of sequestration, elimination, and permanent existential threat; and so visions of world order, international relation-management, and diplomacy in the twenty-first century must begin by resisting easy, mono-directional narratives of any kind of inevitability— of AI-assisted utopia as well as wholesale ruination and doom (even if prognosticators attempt to lay exclusive claims to “realism”). By way of conclusion, I argue that one essential roadmap for doing the urgent intellectual work of imagining more creative forms of world ordering is laid out by Edward Said's 1979 call for the US, the Middle East, and the entire international community of nations to “*really [ask]* the question of Palestine”: to go to “great lengths to seek answers, speaking, writing, acting together with others to make sure that the just and right answers are the ones settled upon. Avoidance, ignorance, fear, and ignorance will no longer serve.”

As I have endeavored to demonstrate in this essay, meaningfully answering the question of Palestine requires a systemic reckoning with securitization across national, regional,

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global, and generational scales. But especially for those in the Global North, it also requires reckoning with a deceptively straightforward fact: that Palestinians are already answering the question of Palestine with their physical presence, already embodying the way forward through their persistent refusal to be annihilated.

In 2012, a United Nations report made international headlines with a title that doubled as a provocative prediction: "Gaza in 2020: A Liveable Place?" Published three years after Operation Cast Lead, the report predicted that in the next eight years, "electricity provision will need to double to meet demand, damage to the coastal aquifer will be irreversible without immediate remedial action, and hundreds of new schools and expanded health services will be needed for an overwhelmingly young population... In the longer term, [Gaza's] economy is fundamentally unviable under present circumstances." Yet, despite the report's projections, and all of the political and military developments to come in Israel that the report could not have foreseen—Palestinians continued, somehow, to live in unlivable Gaza. Despite the unmitigated brutality and relentlessness of Israel's onslaught since October 2023, Palestinian babies are still being conceived, born, and raised in Gaza.

Indeed, as Said (1979) pointed out just twelve years after the 1967 War, "we must understand the struggle between Palestinians and Zionism as a struggle between a presence and an interpretation... What was this presence? No matter how backward, uncivilized, and silent they were, the Palestinian Arabs were on the land... For the most part, it is true, these Arabs were usually described as uninteresting and undeveloped, but at least they were there." The Nakba displaced nearly a million Arabs from their homes and villages in historic Palestine, and Israeli politicians now openly threaten to commit another Nakba in Gaza; but Palestinians' commitment to remaining, and eventually returning, to the land is a politics of futurity through presence and Indigenous rootedness, in fundamental defiance of Israeli control.

Scholars such as Tamara Taher (2024), and Mohammad Marie, Ben Hannigan, and Aled Jones (2017), theorize personal and collective Palestinian resilience through two related frameworks of *wujud* ("presence") and *sumud* ("steadfastness"). But, as with stories of inevitability and doom, a story of resilience against extinction is not and cannot be rendered simply or in one dimension. In their multi-authored essay, Gazan scholars Khalid Dader, Malaka Shwaikh, Hala Shoman, and Saga Hamdan (2025) caution against an uncritical romanticization of Palestinian resilience. In their own words:

When the extraordinary is rendered a spectacle, the ethical demand for representation is reduced to a feel-good narrative, a form of redemptive writing. ... Considerable attention has been given in academic spaces to a range of initiatives organized by Palestinians in Gaza since the genocide, including food drives, leisure or educational activities for children, and makeshift infrastructural innovations, among others. These stories are real and awe-inspiring, but they also represent survival mechanisms in a genocidal reality the world has failed to

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end. They do not represent a functional replacement of any of the totally collapsed systems of Gaza, be that education, infrastructure, healthcare, food provision, and so on. Instead, they should be interpreted as indications of the total disintegration of life in Gaza and the impossible labor required to simulate continuity in the face of systemic structural erasure. ... They should stand as calls to action.

Calls to action from Palestine are, in some ways, calls for a restoration of material meaning to long-established international norms, such as human rights, national sovereignty, and the right of return. Simultaneously, Palestinian liberation thought and praxis in the face of ongoing occupation and genocide demands re-tooled formations of collectivity, sovereignty, social welfare, and governance suited to a securitized and climate-changing twenty-first-century. Environmental justice, eco-sustainability, and disability justice in particular represent the cutting edge of multidisciplinary research in the academy.⁴ As scholar Lena Obermaier (2023) writes, for example, "Israel's disablement of Palestinians and debilitation of Palestinian health care infrastructures during the Great March of Return fall within the settler-colonial 'logic of elimination,' and are the "product of a dehumanisation of Palestinians, the rendering of Palestinians as dispensable." Indeed, "even the appropriation of land can be seen as an essential part of the process of maiming," of "deliberately [amputating] the Palestinian body to fragment the Palestinian land and nation."

The intertwinedness and interdependence of humans with each other, with the land and water and non-human life-systems of Earth's biome, is a basic foundational premise that should engender no meaningful conceptual dispute. Neither, I argue, should the conclusion of Noura Erakat's 2025 UN address: "May we transform this world into a place worthy of our children... Free Palestine and may Palestine free us all."

⁴ See, for example: Irus Braverman, "Environmental Justice, Settler Colonialism, and More-Than-Humans in the Occupied West Bank: An Introduction," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 4, no. 1 (2021): 3-27; Laura J. Jaffee and Lara Sheehi, "Disrupting Fixity: Palestine as Central to Decolonial Disability Justice," *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal* 20, no. 4 (2026).

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