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Al Aqsa Flood

Austria's politically-charged support for Israel following Operation Al-Aqsa Flood marks break from traditional Austrian 'neutrality'

- Following Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, [Austria's political class](#) showcased a seemingly unanimous but politically charged response in solidarity with the apartheid state of Israel.

All five parliamentary parties in Austria issued a joint condemnation of Al-Aqsa flood, accompanied by a striking display of the Israeli flag on the Chancellor's Office and the Foreign Ministry buildings.

- Several prominent [Austrian political figures](#), including President Alexander Van der Bellen, Chancellor Karl Nehammer, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg, and Vice Chancellor Werner Kogler, vociferously condemned the Hamas operation, echoing the narrative that legitimises Israel's genocide against the Palestinians as an unassailable 'right to self-defense'.
- [President Alexander Van der Bellen](#), while expressing his shock, went a step further, drawing a questionable parallel between the Al-Aqsa Flood and historical anti-Jewish pogrom. His remarks included derogatory comments about individuals expressing support and solidarity with Palestine, introducing an unsettling racial undertone to the discourse.
- However, the rhetoric around Austria's neutrality faced scrutiny when Chancellor Nehammer explicitly stated that when it comes to Israel, Austria is not neutral. This departure from Austria's traditionally neutral stance raises concerns about the country's involvement in a foreign conflict, potentially compromising its diplomatic equilibrium.
- [Chancellor Nehammer's solidarity visit to Israel](#), where he engaged in discussions with Israeli leaders, underscores Austria's commitment to expanding cooperation with

Israel.

Nehammer prioritised advocating for more support for Israel, positioning it as the "sole democracy in the region." This commitment, he asserted, gained increased significance after the events of October 7th, making it Austria's top priority. Nehammer explicitly rejected neutrality in the supposed 'fight against terrorism'.

- Austria's decision to [halt development aid to Palestinians, amounting to about 19 million euros](#), is a noteworthy shift in its foreign policy. Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg justified this move as a response to the recent escalation of violence in Israel. However, this decision has sparked criticism from Palestinian Ambassador Salah Abdel Shafi, who sees it as a [collective punishment against the Palestinian](#) population and an implicit endorsement of Israel's aggressive policies towards civilians.
- Moreover, [Austria joined Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Croatia in voting "No"](#) to a UN resolution for an "urgent, durable, and permanent humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza."

The resolution, aimed at ending hostilities, was brought forward by Jordan and had the support of nearly 50 countries. Austria's alignment with these nations in rejecting a ceasefire raises concerns about its stance on humanitarian issues in the conflict.

- In summary, Austria's recent diplomatic actions, including the solidarity visit, suspension of development aid, and voting against a ceasefire, suggest a clear political alignment with Israel.

Austrian Government crackdown on pro-Palestinian solidarity

- The Austrian government, under the leadership of Interior Minister Gerhard Karner, appears to be exploiting the situation in the Middle East to justify a crackdown on pro-Palestinian solidarity, raising concerns about civil liberties.

[During an emergency cabinet meeting](#), Karner suggested an inclination toward stronger law

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enforcement actions against anti-Israel demonstrations

- As a consequence, [according to the Ministry of Interior](#), there have been a total of 70 police reports during pro-Palestinian demonstrations. About 50 of these offences were related to the use of the slogan "From the river to the sea - Palestine will be free." Additionally, there were 400 administrative reports and ten arrests. 13 assemblies were prohibited.
- In an effort to recast pro-Palestinian solidarity as anti-Semitism, Karner emphasised a zero-tolerance policy for anti-Semitism, regardless of its origin. The Interior Minister highlighted consistent law enforcement action against offences, with ongoing coordination between the police, security agencies, and the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (IKG - the Orthodox Jewish representative body) for necessary security measures.

In an alarming move, the IKG, is using the security dialogue to advocate for the criminalisation of the phrase "From the river to the sea - Palestine will be free" - something being picked up by Chancellor Nehammer also (see below).

- While claiming there is [currently no specific threat](#), Karner calls for additional surveillance capabilities, citing the need for unspecified changes in certain areas.

The decision to raise the terrorism threat level and heighten police protection of Jewish institutions is being used as a pretext for pushing policy reforms allowing the [surveillance of encrypted chat services](#).

And in collaboration with national defense, an anti-terrorism centre has been opened, and both the visible and covert presence of security forces in public spaces has been increased.

- Vice Chancellor [Werner Kogler's call for intensified surveillance of mosques](#) and "friendly organisations" raises concerns about potential overreach and the targeting of

specific communities.

Chancellor [Nehammer's appeal to citizens to report individuals beginning to "radicalise"](#) is likely to be construed as encouraging surveillance, contributing to a broader trend of eroding privacy rights.

- The government's emphasis on the tense security situation in Austria due to developments in the Middle East appears to be a convenient justification for implementing more stringent measures.

Despite the heightened security apparatus, the lack of specific information about any concrete attack plans raises questions about the proportionality and necessity of these measures.

- In summary, the Austrian government's response to the situation in the Middle East raises concerns about the erosion of civil liberties, potential discrimination, and the opportunistic use of security concerns to justify expanded governmental powers. It is crucial to scrutinise these actions to ensure the protection of democratic values and individual rights.

Interior Minister Karner and Chancellor Nehammer propose legislative changes in order to criminalise Pro-Palestinian solidarity in Austria

- Interior Minister Gerhard Karner, a member of the ruling Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), is actively considering [legal amendments targeting the burning or misuse of symbols](#), particularly flags.

This initiative comes in response to recent incidents, including the [attempted removal of an Israeli flag from the Vienna City Temple's facade](#) by intoxicated individuals.

In an interview with ORF's "Morgenjournal", Karner mentioned ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Justice regarding potential legal changes to address such actions.

- [Neos MP Steffi Krisper](#) has criticised Karner's plans as mere show politics, arguing that the existing legislations already provide the necessary tools to "protect Israeli institutions.

Karner's effort merely seek to criminalise pro-Palestinian activism and the criticism of the Israeli occupation.

- Chancellor Karl Nehammer, [during his solidarity visit to Israel](#), has announced plans to ban the phrase "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

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This move indicates the Austrian government's intent to regulate certain expressions associated with pro-Palestinian sentiments. The Chancellor's statement aligns with broader efforts to address specific slogans or statements deemed sensitive in the context of the war on Gaza.

The proposed ban raises questions about freedom of expression and the government's approach to managing contentious political speech.

Third annual Vienna Forum contributes to securitisation of Palestinian activism

- On October 24, 2023, the [third annual Vienna Forum, hosted by Susanne Raab](#), convened representatives from 10 European states and 150 experts, featuring controversial figures like Lorenzo Vidino and Magnus Ranstorp.

This discreet conference ostensibly addresses "extremism" and "political Islam" while masking discussions related to the "Muslim question." The ministerial panel included notable figures such as Etienne Afaire, Secretary-General of France's SG CIPDR, Danish Minister for Integration Kaare Dybvad, and Greek Deputy Minister for Migration Sofia Voultepsi.

- This year's keynote speaker was Ahmad Mansour, a German-Israeli "extremism expert" who vocally supports hijab bans and promotes the oppressive fight against "political Islam."

He endorses the Austrian Documentation Center for Political Islam, a state-sponsored Muslim surveillance initiative.

- The choice of Ahmad Mansour as the keynote speaker reflects the forum's agenda: the criminalisation of pro-Palestine voices and activism. Mansour, a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship, plays the role of a native informant legitimising the racist and anti-

Muslim views of Western elites.

- Mansour has worked tirelessly to [silence pro-Palestine activism](#) by equating it with anti-Semitism and sympathy for terrorism. In his keynote, he aimed to criminalise all Palestinian voices and activism in Europe.
- Mansour's presence at the Vienna Forum can be seen as a measure to heighten the securitisation narrative, especially in light of unfolding events in Palestine. He argues that [solidarity with Israel is a pre-requisite in the fight against "extremism" and "terrorism."](#)

This insinuates that, for Muslim Europeans, demonstrating solidarity with Palestine warrants harsh counter terrorism and extremism measures, including surveillance, criminalization, and control.

Ahmad Mansour has consistently stigmatised Muslim youth in Germany throughout his career, using various mediums like books, articles, public debates, and projects to propagate a pervasive sense of suspicion.

His controversial stance, claiming the entire generation of young Muslims is under [the threat of Islamic radicalisation](#), has gained favour among German conservatives. [Mansour's criticism of Islam](#) has secured significant roles in debates about Islam and integration, accompanied by notable funding, including €792,000 from the Bavarian government for his anti-extremism consultancy.

- However, controversy surrounds Mansour, with allegations of [embellishing his biography](#) and credibility concerns about his 'radicalisation' claims. As part of a network of self-proclaimed "Islam experts," Mansour's reports contribute to the marginalisation and criminalisation of Muslims, potentially influencing large-scale police operations.

- The Vienna Forum, led by the Austrian government with backing from France, Denmark, and Belgium, poses a significant threat as a pan-European initiative.

This project seeks to form an alliance of establishment elites promoting Islamophobia on a state level throughout Europe, leveraging the endorsement of select experts and intellectuals.

This collaboration could embolden and radicalise Islamophobic states, intensifying their suppression of Palestinian voices and potentially impacting pro-Palestinian activism in Europe. It is crucial to confront the Vienna Forum, exposing its biased intellectual foundation and challenging its potential implications for Palestinian solidarity across the continent.

National Security & Counter-terrorism

Increase in the Austrian Security budget sees largest budget in its recent history

- Interior Minister Gerhard Karner emphasised the [need for increased investments in security](#), with a focus on combating extremism and terrorism, addressing human trafficking and illegal migration, and countering internet-related crimes.

The security budget for 2024 is one of the largest in Austria's Second Republic, amounting to 4.054 billion euros, marking an 11% increase from the previous year.

- Karner instrumentalised supposed concerns about Islamist and right-wing extremism, democracy-rejecting groups, and radical climate activists in order to justify such a spike in security budget.

Karner outlined future initiatives, such as the restructuring of the domestic intelligence service (Verfassungsschutz) and the creation of 700 additional positions in the field of criminal investigation, with a focus on areas like cybercrime, prevention, and crime scene analysis, particularly in the realm of internet-related offences.

The acquisition of specialised software and the enhancement of tools for human trafficking prevention were also mentioned.

- While Karner argued for the necessity of extending surveillance capabilities to messenger services like WhatsApp and Telegram, he faced criticism for potential privacy concerns.

The increasing size and power of the security apparatus is particularly worrisome under the pretext of discriminatory practices in particular, concerning the impact on Muslim communities and potential religious profiling.

- The context of international developments and instances of intolerance, such as the removal of the Israeli flag at the Stadttempel in Vienna, was

invoked to underscore the significance of maintaining a secure yet inclusive society.

This is an indicator that harsher targeting of pro-Palestinian activism might be allocated within the budgetary expansion. Furthermore, such expansions could lead to increased surveillance and potential infringements on privacy, with concerns about the impact on Muslim communities.

Vienna hosts International Parliamentary Coordination Meeting on Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism Prevention

- On October 4th and 5th, 2023, Vienna hosted the fourth coordinating meeting of Parliamentary Assemblies on Counter-Terrorism and the second Political Dialogue on the Prevention of Violent Extremism.

Wolfgang Sobotka, the National Council President, underscored the pivotal role of parliamentarians in combating terrorism in his opening address. Meanwhile, Member of Parliament Reinhold Lopatka (ÖVP) retained his position as the chairman of the coordination mechanism during the coordinating meeting.

- The coordination mechanism, initiated by the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) in 2021, strives to align the global endeavours of Parliamentary Assemblies in counter-terrorism.

This involves regular information exchange to bolster legislation and policy-making.

The participation of 16 Parliamentary Assemblies, including significant entities like the OSCE PA and IPU, raises concerns about the potential impact on global counter-terrorism laws.

The involvement of parliaments in crafting laws may lead to the worldwide expansion of repressive counter-terrorism measures.