



Photo: Forcibly displaced residents of the Gaza Strip. Photo by Jaber Jihad Badwan via Wikimedia Commons

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

How Long?

[Paul Scham](#)

NOTE: This was written before international authorities declared a condition of starvation in Gaza.

A friend recently wrote me with this query: “I am [sending an article](#) from today’s Washington Post that I would appreciate your helping me to put into some type of perspective. If this is a consequence of the existence of a Jewish State, then . . . well, I am sure you can finish the rest.”

[The article describes a teenage Gazan double amputee named Marah, one of many thousands. It is difficult reading. Her legs were blown off in an Israeli strike on Jan. 24, 2024. She was permitted to leave for the US about 6 months later and has been undergoing therapy and received a prosthesis. A few days ago she received news that her father, still in Gaza, was critically injured in an Israeli air strike. She hopes to return to Gaza.]

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My reply to my friend was: “I’d maintain this is a consequence of a) the unfinished business following the creation of the Jewish state and b) the growth of a wild and fanatic nationalism that, through a set of circumstances, came to control the Jewish state.” I’ll expand on those thoughts here.

As far as I’m concerned, the debate over the establishment of a Jewish state has long been concluded as a policy question. It belongs in the realm of history and of counterfactual fiction. Whether it “should have” taken place is irrelevant. It is no more likely to be rolled back than, for example, the British conquest and subjugation of Australia in the 18th and 19th centuries. Likewise the debates about whether it should be understood as settler colonialism or national return and revival are and should be the stuff of history books and classes forever.

I do have a caveat – and it is a serious one. I **don’t** believe the far messianic right will continue to effectively control the Israeli government past the next election. I see it as an aberration. If I’m wrong about that, [all bets are off](#).

Dealing with the unfinished business of 1948, when the majority of Palestinians were dispossessed – and failed to fade into the rest of the Arab world as Israeli leaders assumed they would – should have been number 1 on the Israeli national agenda, especially after 1967. Instead, a large portion of Jewish Israelis – perhaps between 1/3 and 2/3 of them – apparently believe that the results of the 1948 war and subsequent conflicts, especially the Six Day (June) War of 1967 are self-evident, and that Palestinians (whose national existence many of them deny) should just focus on taking care of their own families, preferably away from “historic Palestine,” comprising what is now Israel, all of Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.

Refusal by Israel to deal with unfinished business has led to the carnage of the last quarter century, including both the massacre of October 7, 2023 and the subsequent deliberate ongoing destruction of Gaza. However, none of this was predetermined, nor is it excusable. It could have been avoided by better choices by Israelis, Palestinians, and, yes, Americans. But most of all, in my view, by Israelis – though none of those involved are by any means blameless.

The state of Israel in 1993, under the leadership of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, reversed its 45-year policy and recognized the existence of the Palestinian people, represented by the Palestinian Liberation Organization. By implication, that meant that the Palestinian people had some degree of right to the “Land of Israel” (aka “Land of Palestine.”) What that right would consist of was the subject of the negotiations (and violence) of the next 7 years (including three with Bibi as prime minister), which blew up with the failure of the Camp David Summit of July 2000 and the outbreak of the Second Intifada two months later.

The violence that ensued should not have changed the 1993 recognition by the government of Israel that some significant degree of Palestinian self-determination and an end to the occupation were essential for peace in Israel/Palestine. This recognition was maintained – more or less – by subsequent Israeli governments, despite frequent violence, until March 31 2009, when Benjamin Netanyahu took office for his second term.

We can see in retrospect that Netanyahu never accepted the policy enunciated by Rabin 16 years earlier. Despite the facile formulations in his [Bar-Ilan speech](#), essentially forced on him by Barack Obama, [he never accepted](#) that there could and must be a territorial settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to end the conflict. Instead,

he opted for the status quo and turned it into an art form. He encouraged Hamas to remain in control of Gaza, belittling the Palestinian Authority at every opportunity. He sought no consensual final settlement since he never believed one was possible. Thus, Bibi did everything he could to ensure that the “temporary” occupation envisaged in UN Resolution 242 would last as long as possible, preferably forever.

Bibi was able to maintain this regime through three governments and two failed elections. He even managed to combine the growing far-right push for annexation of part of the West Bank into a “peace” deal by inaugurating Donald Trump’s Abraham Accords! Even when the “Government of Change” evicted him from Balfour Street in May of 2021, it changed nothing. The Change Government could not agree on how to deal with the Palestinians, so they didn’t even try. Essentially Bibi’s “temporary” policy was maintained. The massive Palestinian frustration was ignored.

When Bibi defeated the Change Government and inaugurated his own, heavily dependent on the far right, on December 29, 2022, he probably wasn’t worried. He must have assumed would easily buy off the far right by slipping through a quick judicial overhaul and continue the “temporary” occupation.

Instead, the judicial overhaul ignited a huge firestorm of protest throughout the country. Meanwhile, despite Bezael Smotrich’s machinations within the Ministry of Defense to increase settlement, all seemed *de facto* rather than *de jure*.

Until October 7, of course. The Palestinians had never bought into Bibi’s calculations. While the P.A. was willing to complain from the sidelines, Hamas was not. On Oct. 7, they put the Palestinian issue front and center on the international agenda and the Israeli response ensured it would remain there.

How Bibi would have handled things had he not been in thrall to the messianic far right in his government as well as to his interminable corruption trial, we shall never know. We do know that he, the lifelong temporizer, quickly became the agent of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich and the face of the ongoing, vicious destruction of Gaza in pursuit of a chimera called “the total destruction of Hamas.” The [consequences of that policy](#) will stain the reputation of both the Jewish state and the Jewish people for generations. The hopeful promise of Oslo is seemingly buried and the furies are in control. How long?

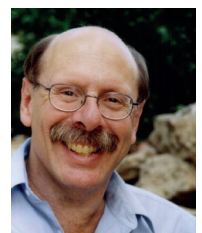
I continue to maintain that Israel’s current extreme messianists, the unholy scion of Ze’ev Jabotinsky, Zvi Yehudah Kook, and Meir Kahane, will have to end their chokehold on the government of Israel after the next election. Better choices can be made in the future, though the omens at present are indeed grim.

But that is why Mara and thousands of others lost their legs, or their arms, or their lives. The story is not comforting. They are the 21st century’s silver platter.

Paul

Paul

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is president of [Partners for Progressive
Israel](#). He recently retired as a
Professor of Israel Studies at the
University of Maryland.*



By Peter Eisenstadt



When I was a lad, around ten years old or so, my brothers and I went to Hebrew school in a Reform congregation. In due course we learned the words to the great Chanukah song, *Ma'oz Tzur*. Our favorite words were, in the rather infamous English translation, “children of the martyr race, whether free or fettered.” We liked it because we always sang “whether free or feathered” and we thought ourselves quite witty. We didn’t pay as much attention to the “martyr race” bit, but as a two-word expression of Jewish history as constituting little more than a continuous loop of persecutions, expulsions, and exterminations, it’s hard to beat. This is often called the “lachrymose conception of Jewish history.”

I’ve been thinking a lot about lachrymose Jews recently, primarily because in the spring I attended a conference at the Jewish Studies Department of the University of Pennsylvania on “The Scales of Suffering: Neo-Lachrymosity and the Writing of Jewish History.” It was an excellent, thought-provoking conference, covering the entire scope of Jewish history, and I learned much

from it. But about that word, lachrymose. It is not a familiar word. I must confess I have never heard it used outside of the context of Jewish history. The OED states it occurs between 0.01 and 0.1 per million words, a relatively rare word, defining it as “tending to provoke tears of sorrow; mournful, gloomy, sad, sometimes exaggeratedly or sentimentally so.” Generally it implies that one is being excessively, perhaps performatively weepy.

The phrase about lachrymose history was coined in the late 1920s by Salo W. Baron, a master of polyglot erudition, and unquestionably one of the greatest of Jewish historians. For Baron, many previous Jewish historians, particularly when writing about the medieval period, had reduced Jewish history to a casualty report of dead, wounded, and missing. Instead, he argued, historians needed to focus more on ordinary economic, social, and political realities, rather than only concentrating on Jewish tragedy. And through many, many, volumes, this is just what Baron did.

Baron undoubtedly opened a new vein of historical research. But outside of the circle of professional historians, I don't think it ever really caught on. For most Jews the view of Jewish history remained and remains unrelievedly lachrymose and catastrophizing. In his classic book, *Zakhor*, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (a Baron student) argued that for Jews seeking a connection to their past, Jewish memory has always been more important than Jewish history. This assertion has been challenged, but there is no doubt that Jewish memories of the past, what might be called popular Jewish history, largely remains a "four-hanky" history, a history of 70 CE, 1492, and 1933, and then 1948. It is a view of history that always anticipates the worst. After every so-called Golden Age; an Inquisition. In every haven, a potential holocaust. Don't trust good news. Only bad news counts.

But since the end of World War II there have been two powerful leavening counternarratives: the status of Jews in the United States, and the state of Israel. In this view, in the United States, Jews found a corner of the diaspora where they were truly safe, fully accepted, where, as Joshua Leifer has written, if never eradicated, antisemitism was reduced to a "low ambient hum." As for Israel, Jews finally had their own army. But there is a widespread sense that these so-called golden ages have gone sour. The US is perceived as a less safe place, where physical violence against Jews is becoming more common, as the incidents in the Tree of Life synagogue; Boulder, Colorado; and Washington, D.C. indicate. As for Israel, its army did not prevent the killing and hostage-taking of October 7th unavoidably bringing back thoughts of massacres of Jews past. And if Jews can't be safe in Israel, where can they be safe? With the perception of increased danger, the lachrymose view of Jewish history is making a comeback.

Our views of history are always profoundly shaped by our current situation. Illiberal times call for illiberal histories, histories that emphasize Jewish danger, anti-Jewish hostility, histories without happy endings. They are histories in which Jew hatred is pervasive

and protean, never dissipating, but always just taking on new and newly menacing guises. But the problem with viewing your history as simply one of perpetual victimhood, besides its one-sidedness, is that it tends to reduce actors to passive recipients of whatever is meted out to them. It breeds resignation and fatalism, and robs you of the ability to imagine a future different from the past or present. Louis Namier, a Polish Jew who became in the 1930s and 1940s a noted historian of Hanoverian England, was once asked why he didn't study Jewish history. Because, he said "there is no modern Jewish history. There is only a Jewish martyrology."

Namier was a passionate Zionist. Many Zionists thought that with the creation of a Jewish state, Jews would finally "enter into history." But the problem with Jewish history was not in our diasporas, but it was ourselves. If the belief was that Jewish sovereignty meant that Jews could live more or less independent of other peoples, it was a pernicious fantasy. It is a fantasy that is, alas, alive and well in Israel today.

I am primarily a scholar of African American history. If there is another people whose history is as tragic as that of the Jews, surely it is theirs. But for the most part, they have resisted writing lachrymose African American histories. Perhaps this is because their sense of oppression was too vivid and immediate to think of retelling their story as simply one of domination and subservience. Instead, in most Black histories, though oppression wrought its ravages, this was countered by a furious and creative resistance and resilience. The quest for emancipation, equality, and fair treatment was balanced by the need to preserve autonomy and cultural and social coherence. (This was similar to Baron's understanding of Jewish history as well.) "Can a people," asked novelist Ralph Ellison in 1944, complaining about a book that downplayed Black creativity, "live and develop for over three hundred years simply by *reacting*?" At the same time there was an understandable wariness about their acceptance by the broader society.

"Progress" as we are learning again in the America

of 2025, is never irreversible. Baseball great Jackie Robinson titled his 1972 autobiography *I Never Had it Made* as a warning against that sort of complacency. (In this regard let me recommend *Tears of History: The Rise of Political Antisemitism in the United States*, by the distinguished French sociologist and historian Pierre Birnbaum. Its title is an explicit reference to Baron and lachrymosity.) But let us also keep in mind the words of the great African American man of letters and activist, James Weldon Johnson, writing in the 1930s and challenging overly despairing views of the then-current situation of African Americans, labeling them “apostles of the obvious.” Calling on African Americans to “realize that prejudice is an actuality” was to place an “emphasis on what has never been questioned.” Similarly, hatred of Jews will always be with us. But to see this as the most important development for Jews over the past two years, is, I fear, to make many Jewish leaders into “apostles of the obvious.”

I would argue that the most dramatic change in the Jewish world since October 7 is not increased hatred of Jews but an unprecedented torrent of criticism directed at the current Israeli government and its would-be defenders. This can be unnerving and frightening. This withering condemnation is increasingly difficult for Israel’s defenders to corral or dismiss as emanating from either the right or left lunatic fringes or simply tag it as antisemitic. The Gaza War, with its staggering totals of Palestinian death and carnage, with credible accusations of war crimes, and much talk of genocide from sober and cautious students of the conflict, has rendered Israel’s defense of its actions as threadbare and empty.

Let me state clearly that not all of this criticism has been fair or nuanced, and some it crosses the line into Jew hatred. But the impulse to label all strong criticism of Israel as inherently antisemitic is failing because people can see the horrors of Gaza and the West Bank with their own eyes. And despite the effort of pro-Netanyahu organizations like AIPAC to hold the line, critics of Israel have never had more legitimacy in mainstream American politics. The most striking recent instance of Israel’s critics coming in from the cold has been the

victory of the pro-Palestinian Zohran Mamdani as the winner of the mayoral primary of the very Jewish Democratic Party in the very Jewish city of New York. Even given Mamdani’s evident political skills, I doubt, pre-Gaza War, he would have had much of a chance.

Let me propose another way of looking at Jewish history, as an alternative to de-lachrymose or re-lachrymose versions. It is an older, probably the oldest view of Jewish history, that of the Deuteronomist. To summarize it briefly, it holds that if something bad happens to the Jews, it was because the Jews screwed up. This was of course standard Jewish theology for many centuries. It has fallen from favor in part because of the Holocaust, when even many Orthodox rabbinic authorities concluded that the punishment grotesquely and horrifyingly, overwhelmed whatever the original crime might have been. (Shaul Magid has written very movingly about one such rabbi, Kalman Shapira, murdered in the Warsaw Ghetto.) A little of the Deuteronomist goes a long way, but maybe just a little is what we need. It is a time for self-reflection and self-judgment, perhaps spurred by criticism by others. Prosecution is not always persecution. Defend yourself against attacks you think unfair, but don’t be defensive. This is a time for a necessary rethinking of the meaning of Judaism, the future of Israel, and the destiny of the Jewish people.

The goal of Zionism was to empower the Jewish people. But some of Israel’s defenders have now developed a lachrymose view of Israeli history, or a lachrymose view of Jewish power, in which Israel is now very, very strong, but is still in a state of perpetual victimhood. Nothing it does can staunch the unappeasable hatred of Arabs and Palestinians – and others, such as Iran’s ayatollahs – for Jews. Israel has been trapped by the fantasy that power solves all problems. Israel strikes me as being in the same position as Michael Corleone at the end of that all-American fable, *The Godfather*, all-powerful, but after having rubbed out and eliminated everyone and everything in its path, is hated, unloved, and almost all alone. But this is seen as inevitable, because everyone always hates the Jews. But it’s not. Sometimes it is necessary to stand alone against the world. But

sometimes the world has a point. To paraphrase another postwar American ethnic fable, while “it’s not a shame to be a pariah, it’s no great honor either.”

Somebody mentioned to me after the conference in the spring that he hoped never to see the word lachrymose again. I am sure that readers of this essay agree, but let me call attention to it one more time, or at least to its close cousin, lacrimosa. The Lacrimosa is the name of a section of a famous medieval Catholic prayer, set memorably to music by such composers as Mozart, Berlioz, and Verdi. I’ll leave out the bits about Jesus:

Lacrimosa dies illa

Qua resurget ex favilla

Judicandus homo reus

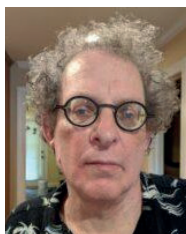
Full of tears will be that day

When from the ashes shall arise

The guilty man to be judged

This is a poem about the sadness of the Day of Judgment, the sadness and terror of being judged. If this is a Christian motif, the physical resurrection and judgment of the dead, it is also a very Jewish idea, one borrowed from the Pharisees. Since October 7, there has been what seems like a never-ending Day of Judgment, a perpetual Yom Kippur. And whether it is the Lacrimosa or the Unetaneh Tokef, the prayers are a call to judge yourself and don’t wait for God to do it. The sadness in much of the Jewish world is no longer just about what other peoples have done to us, but what we are doing to other peoples. It is indeed a time for lamentations over ruined cities and lost lives. But it is not the time, and it never is the time, for the disabling self-pity, the abdication of moral responsibility, that is Jewish lachrymosity.

Peter Eisenstadt is a member of the board of Partners for Progressive Israel and the author of Against the Hounds of Hell: A Biography of Howard Thurman (University of Virginia, 2021).



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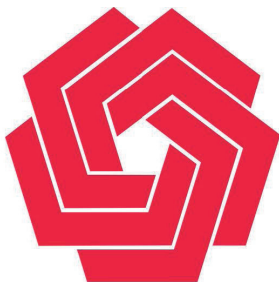
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By Arielle Gordon



صندوق المدافعين عن حقوق الإنسان הקרן למגיני זכויות אדם HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FUND

The Defenders

Last month, a Palestinian documentary filmmaker was viciously beaten, detained and tortured by the Israeli army while documenting a settler attack on his village of Susiya, in the South Hebron Hills. **His name is Hamdan Ballal.**

His offense? Hamdan Ballal's film 'No Other Land,' which portrays the ethnic cleansing of his home Masafer Yatta, won an Oscar in February at the Academy Awards. In retaliation, he was targeted by soldiers, who left him overnight blindfolded, bleeding, and shackled to a cement floor. Ballal is still recovering from his injuries.

A month before, in February 2025, a bookshop in East Jerusalem was raided by Israeli police, on the suspicion of "selling books that incite terrorism," and two of the booksellers were arrested and detained. **Their names are Ahmad and Mahmoud Muna, and they work at the Educational**

Bookshop, a renowned cultural institution that sells thousands of politically-conscious books by all kinds of authors (including Israeli Jews).

So why were they arrested? They unabashedly sold books on Palestinian thought, discourse, and history. Over 100 books containing references to Palestinian freedom were confiscated, including a children's coloring book.

A year earlier, in March 2024, a Palestinian social worker from the Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem was released from prison after being locked away in administrative detention for three months. He had been arrested in an army night raid on his home in December 2023, during which his family members were beaten unconscious and his sons' clothing torn off. At the time of his release from detention, he had lost 73 pounds from starvation, and he reported torture and sexual abuse during his time in prison. **His name is Munther Amira.**

What was he accused of? Nothing specifically. Munther Amira is a respected community leader who has been publicly committed to nonviolence for over two decades. In the past, Munther has organized peaceful protests against the occupation. Because he was an administrative detainee, the Israeli Security Agency ("Shin Bet") did not need to bring forward any official charge; in court, they conceded that they had arrested him because they wanted to preclude him from organizing any demonstrations in the future.

A month before Munther's arrest, in November 2023, a 62-year-old Jewish-Israeli schoolteacher was detained for five days on suspicion of "the intent to commit treason." **His name is Meir Baruchin.**

Why? He wrote on social media about the killing of two Palestinian teenagers in the West Bank, and the police found anti-occupation protest posters in his home.

A month earlier, in the north of Israel in a town called Umm al Fahm, an esteemed human rights lawyer was arrested, tortured and imprisoned for four months, and charged in Israeli courts with incitement to terrorism. **His name is Ahmad Khalefa.**

His crime? As a Palestinian citizen of Israel, he peacefully protested against Israel's bombardment of Gaza alongside other peacefully protesting Palestinian citizens of Israel. For this, he may face up to eight years in prison

We could list hundreds of other stories just like these. But you get the picture.

It takes a lot of courage – and, some might say, *chutzpah* – to stand up for human rights in Israel and Palestine. Every day, Israeli state authorities repress freedom of speech, arrest political organizers, and use every tactic in their playbook to quash all forms of public political dissent. In both the Israeli civilian courts and the IDF military courts, Israeli and Palestinian human rights defenders are targeted, arrested, and indicted every day.

If we want these brave women and men to continue to put themselves on the frontlines to protect fundamental human rights on both sides of the Green Line, we need them to know that they will be protected no matter what. **That's where we come in.**



Adv. Riham Nassra, one of HRDF's leading attorneys and specialist in military court cases. Credit: Oren Ziv

The Defense

The Human Rights Defenders Fund (HRDF) is the **legal safety net** for individuals, grassroots movements, civil society organizations, and marginalized communities advocating for their rights in Israel, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. We believe that no one should face prison for fighting to protect human rights.

Whether you are a Sheikh Jarrah resident organizing against unjust evictions in East Jerusalem, or an Ethiopian activist protesting racist police brutality, or a Bedouin in the Negev resisting land expropriation, or a Palestinian shepherd in Area C of the West Bank fighting expulsion by both the army and settlers, or an Israeli social justice advocate... it is our job to ensure that no one ever has to face trial alone.

As the sole organization in the region that is dedicated exclusively to protecting human rights defenders as a target group, the Human Rights Defenders Fund is the only place for human rights defenders to access **free and expert** legal services, capacity-building trainings, and advocacy & media support. We are also the only organization in the region working both in Israeli civil courts and IDF military courts, and our unique position working in both courts enables us to leverage Israeli civil law against the inequities of military law on behalf of the rights of Palestinians living under military occupation.

So, what does that look like on the ground?

If you are arrested at a protest, you will receive a legal consultation from our expert attorneys prior to interrogation. If you are prosecuted for your human rights activities, we will provide the highest quality legal representation, with a proven track record of 88% average success rate in our cases. If you are sued by litigious right-wing extremists in civil courts, we will do everything in our ability to prevent undue financial burden. If you are a victim of a settler attack, you will receive legal support every step of the way, from filing

a complaint at the police station to testifying in court during the trial. If you need us, anytime, anywhere, you can call our 24/7 Emergency Hotline, and you will receive rapid-response legal assistance immediately. All of our services are free of charge.

HRDF works to end the criminalization of human rights defenders at every level of the Israeli court system. We have sued the police in civil court for false arrests. We have petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court against the army's unjust policies: including illegal prolonged arbitrary detentions, and the inequitable use of "closed military zone orders" to deny Palestinians access to their private lands and arrest land defenders. We are currently taking on unjust "search and seizure" procedures to prevent police from routinely confiscating the electronic devices of activists.

In the aftermath of October 7th and the rise of the current right-wing settler-led government, **HRDF's legal caseload has doubled**. The demand for our capacity-building trainings has tripled. People are being targeted, arrested, sued, indicted, and imprisoned at unprecedented rates. But as long as there are people on the frontlines defending human rights, we will be right beside them.

Despite the tremendous difficulties of the last few years, we are very proud of what we've been able to achieve.

Here's a quick look at HRDF's impact "by the numbers" since 2022:

- 2,300+ participants in our specialized workshops and legal rights trainings.
- 1,300+ individuals rendered free expert legal services in 600+ cases.
- 1,100+ callers given rapid response assistance through our 24/7 Emergency Hotline.
- 200+ advocacy initiatives and media interventions.
- 110+ Palestinian human rights defenders free

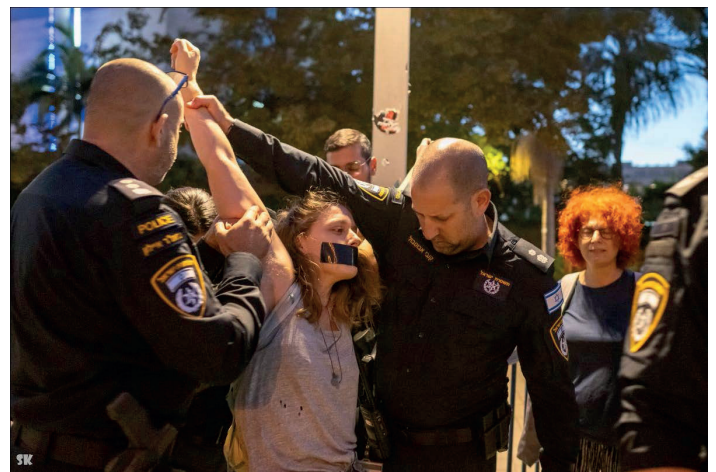
from prison after hearings and trials in Military Court.

- 88% average annual success rate in our legal cases.
- 75+ grassroots collectives and NGOs provided with tools, knowledge, and skills to continue their work toward a shared Arab-Jewish society.
- 60+ acquittals, cancelled indictments, overturned convictions, and positive verdicts in cases that reached trial.
- 8 petitions to the Israeli Supreme Court challenging unjust policies.
- 5 tort claims against police and settlers for damages and injury.
- 1 [Aachen Peace Prize](#) awarded to HRDF (September 2023).

* And more. See [HERE](#) for a full list of recent highlights and victories.

The demand for our services has skyrocketed since October 7th. We're doing everything we can to meet the needs on the ground, but we are stretched thin in terms of resources and capacity. Now more than ever, we need support from like-minded people so we can continue our urgent work.

Things are hard. We aren't stopping.



A mass arrest of 18 Israeli activists protesting the crackdown on freedom of speech in Tel Aviv, November 2023. All were released after receiving HRDF legal support. Credit: SK



Ahmad Khalefa (HRDF human rights attorney) reunites with his family on the day of his release from security prison, where he was held for four months on charges of “incitement to terrorism” for participating in an anti-war demonstration. February 2024. Courtesy of the Khalefa family.

The Wins

Remember Hamdan Ballal, the documentary filmmaker and Oscar-winning co-director of ‘No Other Land,’ who was targeted and detained for documenting a settler attack? Because of us, he was **released** within 24 hours.

Remember Ahmad and Mahmoud Muna, of the Educational Bookshop, who were arrested after police raided their bookstore on the grounds that they supported terrorism? Because of us, they were **released** within 48 hours.

Remember Munther Amira, the social worker from Bethlehem who was tortured in administrative detention and lost half his body weight? Because of us, he was freed before the end of his detention order and hasn’t been arrested since.

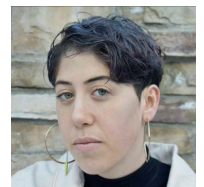
Remember Meir Baruchin, the schoolteacher who was arrested for treason because of a political social media post? Because of us, he was out within five days, and never indicted.

Remember Ahmad Khalefa, the human rights lawyer who was accused of terrorism because he protested against the war? Because of us, he is **back** home with his family and able to return to work.

Without us, thousands of human rights defenders would be sitting in jail. We make sure that doesn’t happen.

- To learn more about HRDF, visit our website at hrdf.org.il.
- To read our most recent publication, “Voices of Human Rights Defenders,” [click here](#).
- To subscribe to our mailing list, [click here](#).
- To find out how you can support HRDF in our critical work, contact arielle@hrdf.org.il.

Arielle Gordon is HRDF’s Head of Strategic Partnerships.



By Maya Garfinkel

PPI Bikel Peace and Justice Intern



The South Hebron Hills. Photo courtesy of the author.

On a cloudy morning a few weeks ago, I woke up early for a learning day in Hebron, in the Occupied West Bank, together with the crew of Achvat Amim-Solidarity of Nations, the Jerusalem-based community justice movement through which I did grassroots work this past spring. Our guides that day were members of Breaking the Silence, the anti-occupation group of IDF veterans.

I don't quite know how to explain Hebron to someone who hasn't seen it for themselves. Maybe that's because I couldn't really understand it before that day.

Upon our arrival, we sat in Kahane Park in the adjoining West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba, the park named after the notorious Meir Kahane, the supremacist rabbi whose "Kach" party was banned from the Knesset for its racism and whose movement was listed as a terrorist organization by Israel and the US until recently. Having to be present in a site dedicated to this extremist leader was an augur of things to come.

As we listened to our guide discuss the relationship between the military, police, and settlers in the city, I heard a loud crack. I didn't immediately notice what was happening, but then I heard another crack and saw another Breaking the Silence group seated across the park from us standing up and looking behind them. When the next crack sounded, I saw it: rocks were being hurled at us by settlers from behind the

bushes. We moved away and no one was hurt, but the rocks were big and scary and the incident was threatening. The police, who had urgently pressed the guide and checked his ID 15 minutes prior, took their sweet time meandering over from the station to "check out the situation". The vibe for the day was set.

Walking through Hebron felt like walking through a ghost town. In a way, it is one. The air felt thick, kind of humid, with layers of fear and violent intimidation spread by the soldiers, police, and settlers. We walked streets that used to house the biggest Palestinian marketplaces outside of East Jerusalem, but that are now shut down and so quiet, I could hear the soldiers talking from the checkpoint at the end of the block.

Something that stuck out to me was the way in which the young people of Hebron are impacted by the occupation for the sake of perceived Israeli "security." Palestinian children are not safe to play in the street and must navigate a labyrinth city of prohibited roads, checkpoints, and settler threats.

A Chabad complex is now being built as a type of new settlement in the middle of the city. For context, Hebron has been a place in which, starting in 1979, radical right-wing Jewish settlers have illegally taken over individual buildings that then become protected by the Israeli army and effectively expand aggressive military occupation. The Chabad complex will house a kindergarten. Kids will be raised in that kindergarten because their families and their country have endorsed the idea that their presence in that place is part of a courageous buffer creating Jewish "security". These choices happen in rural Masafer Yatta in the South Hebron Hills, too, where parents send their kids to harass and destroy Palestinian property regularly. But in Hebron, the physical manifestation of this strategy, which uses people as weapons, is etched into the urban infrastructure in a way that makes it feel permanent or real somehow, even though it's

not. Because it's actually fabricated and rather new. Leaving Hebron, it felt hard to remember that this is all a part of someone's fever dream, and that it can be taken down.

It was only when I went to the Jordan Valley a few days later that I grounded back into that reality. In the Jordan Valley, I accompanied shepherds and their animals through some of the most beautiful rolling hills and wildflower-covered valleys I've ever seen. The shepherds pointed to hilltops around us where they used to graze their cows, naming the settlers who had taken over those lands in the last year. Their cows were skinny; I could see their ribs. They explained that the cows had much less food available on the fraction of the grazing land they used to have. Later in the day, a 28-year-old told me that we should all be like the cows. They are happy today, he said; the cows eat, poop, walk, and sleep in the sun. They feed their babies. We make things so complicated. For what?

I agreed, wholeheartedly. Being in one of the most beautiful places I've been to made this place and this world feel so much more unreal. But the cows are real. The wildflowers are real. The springs are real. How could we have created the apartheid streets of Hebron from all this beauty? I could start to understand why the 23-year-old shepherd with the kind eyes and cobbled-together Hebrew has deeper wrinkles on his forehead than I.

A few days later, I got in the car to drive down to Masafer Yatta with the Storytellers project I'm participating in. We ended up singing nostalgic Disney and childhood favorites the whole way down south. We arrived at our destination and sat with Dalia's family. (All the names in this paragraph are pseudonyms.) Dalia has four beautiful children. She hosts a weekly Storytelling Project class in her home and participates as a student. Her interest that day wasn't discussing hardship. It was for youth and childhood and slowing down time, just a little bit. We played with the children and chatted away. The topic turned to Disney and singing and childhood

selves. As we chatted, my colleague Sara braided Dalia's hair into two beautiful French braids, just like Dalia's eldest daughter was wearing. When she was done braiding, Dalia scurried away to the bedroom mirror and we heard a squeal of delight from the other room. It was just one moment of innocent girlhood, but it felt light and important.

Who are the people I'm meeting and the people implicated in this system under the years of trauma and adult responsibilities and weight of the world? Were they all beforehand like the cows? Is there a "before" for people who are born into the middle of the violence and conflict? Who does this understanding extend to? Does it extend to the 19-year-old soldiers who violently arrest children in Hebron? The 50-year-old Bedouin grandmother with wrinkles who can't communicate with the foreigners there to support her village? The settler child who throws a rock over the bushes at the group he is told hates both him and themselves? Who is granted understanding of their inner child innocence, and who is made to be responsible as an adult?

These experiences have made me feel all the more grateful for my different sense of time and lifespan. It is a privilege to be exposed to hardship and violence during this chapter in such a largely contained and informed way. I feel grateful to have been able to ground in the nature around me and remember that the occupation and the violence in this place will end because it was designed/created by people. It is just a question of how and why and who and when. In the meantime, I'm dreaming of a world of fat, happy cows and humans who don't have to grow up too fast.

Maya Garfinkel served this spring as Partners' Theo Bikel Peace and Justice Intern. This year she completed a semester at Achvat Amim: Solidarity of Nations, where she served with Rabbis for Human Rights and the Storytelling Project in the South Hebron Hills.



Know Hope. Directed by Omer Shamir, Deux Beaux Garçons Films, 2025.

FILM REVIEW

By Ben Sharif



“WE OWN NOTHING.” A philosophical notion, a personal self-reckoning, a radically political stance, these thought-provoking words are handwritten before our eyes in black expo marker by a figure in a black cap onto a wide view of barren hillside – Masafer Yatta, Occupied Palestine, 2024. This intervention is one of many by the street artist known as “Know Hope” - a collector of fragments of countless stories who transposes them into exquisite, evocative invocations on rural, urban, corporeal landscapes. Touted by some as the “Israeli Banksy,” a label he personally finds to be a media-coined sensationalist oversimplification, Know Hope serves

as the eponymous protagonist of Omer Shamir’s richly pensive directorial debut, *Know Hope (The Abstract and the Very Real)*. Recent winner of the Best Israeli Documentary Award at Docaviv, the film offers an intimate glance at Addam Yekutieli, the thoughtful, unsuspecting, chronically-ill Israeli-American behind the pseudonym.

The son of a Japanese-American mother and Israeli father, both artists themselves, Yekutieli grew up in a white, Christian suburb in California before moving to Israel at the age of ten, not yet knowing how to speak Hebrew. In John Wilson-esque musings

written and narrated by Yekutieli, we learn how this outsider came to embrace his differences and express them through street art interventions. “The strongest metaphors are the moments happening around us,” Yekutieli tells us, a belief fully leaned into throughout the film.

An astute observer himself, Shamir (who directed, filmed, wrote, and edited the documentary) deftly utilizes numerous filmmaking techniques in this well-crafted character study. Having personally known Yekutieli for a decade, first as his assistant and eventually as a filmmaker, Shamir turns interviews and voiceover recording sessions into candid conversations. Spectacular moments unfold in real time – some during interactions with strangers engaging with his pieces and others in the background with those oblivious to them.

For an international project, he paints a line on a sidewalk or in a street. One side of the line says “OUR SIDE”, the other reads “THEIR SIDE,” leaving a crowd of random passersby to choose. Another painted line at a cobblestone spot overlooking the Western Wall: One side says “THE STORIES WE TELL;” the other, “THE STORIES THEY TELL.” Simple, yet thought-provoking, these interventions are not always welcomed, particularly by a more orthodox group of pedestrians in Jerusalem who go so far as to throw eggs at the words.

As awesome as it is to see Know Hope in process, it’s even more impressive when you learn he suffers from an autoimmune disorder that constantly causes inflammation all over his body, often resulting in debilitating pain. A tall, lanky, tattooed former skater, he chuckles when compared to the slender, hand-painted humans that appear throughout much of his [work](#). Gangly, lanky limbs often extended in various positions with relation to their carefully curated surface, a heart in their hand or on their

sleeve – Yekutieli wears his openly when we see him help repaint the wall of a home of a Palestinian friend in the Occupied West Bank.

Throughout the film, we follow as his work evolves and he inventively coalesces the personal with the collective with the political. As an attempt to bear witness to the atrocities in Gaza in the wake of October 7th, he meticulously puts together a project in which he meets with participants who pose for photographs showing their scars – his inspiration no doubt drawn from his own surgical wounds – and asks them to write him a letter sharing their stories and relationship with their body. The variety of magnificent [pieces](#) that emerge when combined with old maps featuring destroyed Palestinian villages, juxtaposed against living landscapes, is incredible.

Know Hope is a moving portrait of an impressive artist, who blends the abstract and the very real in ways that activate curiosity and inquisitiveness, reminding us of the vitalness of art as a means of resistance.

Ben Sharif is a Texas-based documentary filmmaker specializing in video editing and human storytelling, and a board member of Partners of Progressive Israel.



Mohammed Omar Almoghayer, On the Pleasures of Living in Gaza: Remembering a Way of Life Now Destroyed (New York: OR Books, 2025).

BOOK REVIEW

By Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson



"Not only about the immense suffering of Gaza's people but about their remarkable resilience and dignity." — SARA ROY

On the Pleasures of Living in Gaza

Remembering A Way of Life Now Destroyed



Mohammed Omer Almoghayer

A few hours before Shavuot, I found myself half-shouting into my laptop in a New York City park as I attempted, derailed by a subway interruption, to teach a class on literary works from Gaza. My extremely forgiving Shavuot *tikkun* students delved into classical Hebrew works by the rabbi-poet Yisrael Najara alongside Arabic poems in translation by the likes of Basman Aldirawi. In the middle of the session, I introduced an excerpt of journalist Mohammed Omer Almoghayer's just-published new work, *On the Pleasures of Living in Gaza*.

The group assembled online for this virtual class had ostensibly already long been involved in the international movement for a ceasefire in Gaza, so I was struck by the responses that even a few lines of the book generated.

One participant remarked that it was striking just to encounter even a few paragraphs reflecting on the lives of Palestinians in Gaza that did not focus on the impact of the ongoing bombings, shootings, and starvation that now characterize life in the enclave; to instead read a celebration of the warmly quotidian: particular homemade dishes, a group search for a lost cellphone, even just admiration for the Mediterranean sea and Gaza's beaches. In the waning hours before Shavuot, standing face to face with a living Palestinian culture felt like revelation.

Almoghayer was born and raised in Rafah, two years after the city was split in half between Egypt and Gaza as a result of late 1970s peace talks between the latter and Israel. In the introduction to *Pleasures*, he notes that

he signed the contract to write the book several months before Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7th, 2023 and the subsequent war that has reduced much of the enclave to rubble, but still chose to write his work "in the present tense to make Gaza feel alive once more – an illusion, a resurrection, a magic spell. A chance for [the reader] to feel, as so many of us have, to see it all before you... and then to wake up from the dream and see it laid to waste."¹

While some readers may be familiar with Almoghayer's work from his bylines in outlets including the New York Times and The Nation, or his academic career in the field of sustainability and interventional development, *On the Pleasures of Living in Gaza* is not a work of political analysis or a discussion of statecraft. Instead, *Pleasures* is a paean to a world that was destroyed as its author labored to record it, an homage to the resilience of a life made beautiful in defiance of successive wars and two decades of military blockade. Chapters that serve as snapshots of Gazan individuals and micro-communities in full bloom – teenagers whose parkour practice creates an opportunity for sport amidst ruined buildings, a growing counterculture of dog lovers who arrange in-person meetups via social media, a NASA scientist who returns home to Gaza from Virginia after the death of his son in a missile strike and uses his diplomatic relationships to arrange delivery of educational telescopes for young science students in the enclave – are interspersed with a running narrative of Almoghayer's attempt to locate a Palestinian man named Naji living in the periphery zone of Gaza's northern border with Israel.

Naji is the subject of a shocking photograph (in a thoughtful and sensitive gesture, the image is not included in the book, only described) where he is half-buried in the ground while an IDF soldier from the "buffer zone" in which Naji lives points a gun in his direction. The image, we learn, was seen by an American family in Houston who wishes to find Naji and his family and financially sponsor them; Almoghayer's efforts to identify a previously anonymous Naji from the photograph and connect him to his foreign benefactors, substantially changing

his family's circumstances, provide a running narrative woven amidst the short portraits of Gazan citizens portrayed in each chapter.

Since its publication only a few months ago, *On the Pleasures of Living in Gaza* has received considerable pushback from readers and reviewers: many have noted that its depictions of Almoghayer's neighbors can scan as overly "[rosy](#)," or even flat in their optimism. And *Pleasures* does bring a perspective that runs counter to much of the discussion with and about the Gazan experience that many readers of this publication – or more broadly, within a policy-focused worldview and conversational bubble – may find wanting if they greet the text with expectations of engaging with broad political history. Amidst the pages of *Pleasures*, history exists as it interrupts the personal: families separated by the wall splitting Rafah along the Egyptian and Gazan shared border, a local farmer's unique identity and pride in living on land that her family worked and owned prior to 1948. Almoghayer's book does not discuss governing structures or the reality of Hamas administration in Gaza, and Israel appears as a source of rockets, blockade, and soldiers along borders maintaining deadly buffer zones. The hope for a free Gaza and Palestine is frequently expressed, but the political shape of that freedom is not detailed. The larger political catastrophes that have shaped life in the region hold the same place in the book that they might in a conversation with one's neighbor at the local pharmacy: present, but as background information to the life happening *here and now*.

There is also extant criticism that may accompany any narrative that seeks to "humanize" Palestinians in Gaza. Almoghayer's colleague at the *Nation*, Mohammed El-Kurd, frames this argument in his own recently-published essay collection [Perfect Victims and the Politics of Appeal](#) (Haymarket, 2025). While my own commitment to nonviolent action necessitates a deep disagreement with the thrust of El-Kurd's book, his point that any work that pushes back on Israeli and international dehumanization of Palestinians does, in some way, accept the premise

¹ Pg. 6

and reify the discrimination baked into this kind of response does ring true. There is a brittle sadness that accompanies *Pleasures*, in that the dignity of the individuals and communities profiled underscores the level of degradation to which they have been subjected.

In its emotional resonance, *Pleasures* can bring to mind David Teitelbaum's films depicting his hometown of Wielopole, Poland. In the late 1930s, Jewish-American businessman Teitelbaum returned to the *shtetl* where he had been raised, creating [amateur color film recordings](#) of his remaining family and former neighbors, unaware of the destruction and mass murder that awaited the community only a few years later at the hands of the Nazis. With his Dutch passport, Almoghayer has both an ability to travel in and out of the enclave and even avoid kidnapping by ISIL affiliates – as depicted in one of the book's final chapters, as the author reflects on a jarring incident from 2015 where he was detained for two days by militants associated with the Islamic State, which Almoghayer refers to as “the dark side.” Like Teitelbaum, Almoghayer's experience of his home is at once intimate and removed: he curates the experience for his readers even as he invites them into intimacy with the neighborhoods and experiences that raised him.

A layer of cold horror pervades the work, made explicit in the book's epilogue. Often while reading *On the Pleasures of Living in Gaza*, I found myself pausing to research and read more online or elsewhere about the work of an artist or scientist profiled in the book, and then encountering their personal experiences of the catastrophic conditions in Gaza: Fashion designer Nermine Demyati's Instagram no longer showcases her designs but instead her attempts to continue to feed her small children in the face of repeated forced evacuations. Young artist and community educator Mohammed Qriaque was killed in the Al-Ahli Hospital explosion in mid-October 2023. We do not find out whether or not Naji's family has survived.

Ultimately, what Almoghayer asks his reader for is not understanding, but witness – a recognition that the people he writes about are not statistics: rather, they are whole universes unto themselves. The insistence here is upon recognizing Palestinians as people, not as numbers

or stereotypes of “terrorists” or even as perpetual, flat victims. Palestinian lives are not here for Western witnesses to somehow make meaning of, not unlike the grand tradition of Augustinian [flattening of Jewish civilization into an unwilling “witness”](#) to a Christian narrative of history. There is a kind of zombification of Palestinian experience across the political spectrum, where the lives lived in Gaza are not whole and complex but instead flattened into their “usefulness” for a political point. What *Pleasures* asks of its readers is an embrace not of complexity, but of human lives lived as they are. The loss in Gaza, he insists, is not only amongst the Palestinian people, but is part of a world that allows it to happen and is being scarred by that permission; “a system that allows tens of thousands of innocent children to be intentionally starved, maimed, killed, and orphaned while the world watches.”²

As he writes in the epilogue,

*“No one in this world understands what it's like to die so silently, this glaring identity loss, the fact that we are susceptible to erasure with such offhand ease and audacity. It's not possible to understand this rare kind of grief without experiencing it firsthand. We don't blame those who don't share this sorrow with us, only those who refuse to see it.”*³

Certainly, I could not recommend *On the Pleasures of Living in Gaza* as the *only* book that one should read right now about Palestinians and their perspectives and experiences. But even more so, I could not recommend that anyone read only a single book, or encounter only one angle or voice from amidst the Palestinian experience. *Pleasures* is an open door to the multivocality of everyday life in Gaza as it was, an invitation to a world we have all become complicit in destroying.

² Pg. 258 ³ Pg. 257

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Trump's Authoritarian Crackdown Weaponizes Antisemitism

INSIGHTS 3

By Avraham Spraragen



From the US capital to Colorado, Jewish blood is being spilled on American streets. Last month at the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C., a young couple was shot dead as they exited an event hosted by the American Jewish Committee. On June 1st, a Holocaust survivor was among the victims of a targeted flamethrower attack in Boulder, Colorado. And rather than focus on preventing this antisemitic violence, the Trump administration is cynically manipulating concerns about Jewish safety to advance an undemocratic and illiberal agenda.

Under the guise of combating antisemitism, President Trump is spearheading an authoritarian crackdown on campus free speech and academic freedom. His administration is investigating numerous institutions of higher education for alleged “antisemitic discrimination and harassment,” cancelling federal grants to universities, revoking student visas, and suppressing pro-Palestine activism on campuses nationwide. My alma mater, Cornell University, was recently stripped of over \$1 billion in government funding.

Title VI investigations of real antisemitism on campus are legitimate and should be conducted without violating civil liberties. However, the Trump administration is instead wrongfully conflating antisemitism with anti-Zionism, blurring the lines between true hatred of Jews and mere criticism of Israel. This illiberal assault has had the desired chilling effect for students and faculty across the country: silencing critics of Israel (and Trump), undermining constitutional rights, and compromising the quality and reputation of world-leading US universities.

On top of threatening universities with funding cuts, the Trump administration has adopted a “Catch and Revoke” policy of rescinding student visas, green cards, and social security numbers, as well as arresting, detaining, publicly shaming, and even deporting pro-Palestine student protesters at universities nationwide. In true Orwellian form, the US government is monitoring the social media of student protesters using artificial intelligence. More recently, the administration ordered consular officers to screen student and scholar visa applicants for social media posts “hostile” to the United States.

Ironically, Trump’s “Catch and Revoke” policy relies on the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, an antisemitic law from the McCarthy era that targeted Holocaust survivors by identifying them as “threats” to national security. The Jewish people know the experience of being victimized by a tyrannical government all too well. In our name, the Trump administration is exploiting genuine fears about growing antisemitism to victimize Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, and their allies. All the while, the Republican Party continues to embolden white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and Christian nationalist antisemites.

According to the latest polling, a majority of American Jews reject Trump's weaponization of the fight against antisemitism. In the words of Rep. Jerry Nadler, co-chair of the newly-formed Congressional Jewish Caucus: "Trump obviously doesn't give a damn about antisemitism, this is just an expression of his authoritarianism." By doing so in the name of protecting Jewish safety and the state of Israel, Trump is setting Jews up to be blamed for his unraveling of democracy. Amid rising antisemitism in the United States, he is placing yet another target on our backs, pitting us against our allies, and pushing the Jewish people over to the wrong side of history.

Shortly after returning to office, Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 14188, titled "Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism," which identifies "alien students and staff" for removal from the US "if warranted." The first student to be identified under the new order was Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian refugee from Syria and a graduate student at Columbia University. Despite his green card and zero evidence of criminal wrongdoing, Khaill was abducted from the New York City campus by federal agents, which, according to the latest court ruling, is likely "unconstitutional."

After the arrest, Trump mocked Khalil by posting "Shalom Mahmoud" on social media. Jewish Columbia alumni, Jewish lawmakers, and several Jewish groups swiftly condemned this gross injustice and shameful exploitation of the Hebrew language. Thousands of Jewish faculty, staff, and students at universities throughout the country have also signed a letter in support of Khalil, decrying Trump's "use [of] Jews as a shield to justify a naked attack on political dissent and university independence." Meanwhile, the judge who halted Khalil's deportation, himself an observant Jew, has come under attack by Trump supporters.

Leading up to Khalil's arrest, the Trump administration's

"Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism" canceled \$400 million in federal funding to Columbia and issued an ultimatum to the university. To avoid imperiling dozens of life-saving medical research projects, Columbia acceded to Trump's ransom demands by overhauling its admissions, curriculum, and disciplinary policies. Students were suspended, expelled, and stripped of their diplomas. Most egregiously, the university effectively surrendered its Middle Eastern Studies department to Trump, who is now seeking judicial enforcement of his departmental oversight.

Columbia faculty decried the decision with a stark warning about Trump's "clear authoritarian playbook meant to crush academic freedom and critical research in American higher education." Meanwhile, under EO 14188, about 600 student visas have been revoked across the country, a number that continues to grow. Among those targeted for deportation was Badar Khan Suri, a postdoctoral fellow at my graduate school, Georgetown University, whose 'crime' was marrying a Palestinian student. Another notable case is that of Rumeysa Ozturk, a Turkish Muslim graduate student at Tufts University. On her way to a Ramadan Iftar in March, Ozturk was snatched off the streets of Boston for the 'crime' of co-authoring an op-ed critical of Israel.

Scenes like these, involving masked officers and unmarked cars, are plainly un-American. The draconian measures taken by the Trump administration to silence pro-Palestine speech have instilled fear in student visa holders, especially those with Middle Eastern backgrounds. These students worry that each day could be their last in the country, given their public opposition to the ongoing Gaza war. Some foreign students worry they will be deported before receiving their diplomas. Trump even attempted to ban enrollment of foreign students at Harvard. Inside and outside the classroom, students are being advised to censor their speech, delete their

social media activity, reconsider visiting home, and avoid public protests. At Columbia, students were cautioned: “Nobody can protect you.”

Make no mistake: this assault has nothing to do with combating antisemitism and everything to do with the autocratic impulse to control what is taught at schools and other educational institutions. Donald Trump is weaponizing the fight against antisemitism by using it as a pretext for his larger authoritarian project against so-called “wokeness” on university campuses and beyond. Straight out of a dystopian novel, hundreds of words have been added by federal agencies to a list of discouraged “woke” terminology. The president is purging the “improper ideology” of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) from Smithsonian museums, library services, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, as well as national parks and zoos.

Further exerting control over US knowledge production, the Trump administration is targeting our most prestigious scholarships, coveted research institutions, and educational broadcasting programs. During his first term, Trump established the 1776 Commission to sanitize the history of systemic racism in America. His second-term executive order, “Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History,” promotes a revisionist history of the United States that whitewashes the genocide of Native Americans, enslavement of African Americans, and the legacy of Jim Crow segregation.

Many of these measures are outlined in Project 2025 – a 920-page playbook for the Trump administration published by the right-wing think tank Heritage Foundation – such as gutting the Department of Education. His targeting of universities is directly informed by Project Esther, Heritage’s corresponding “National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism.” Crucially, this National Strategy relies on support from evangelical Christian groups but not from a single major Jewish organization. Stealing its name

from the Jewish Purim story, Project Esther reinforces antisemitic tropes, ignores right-wing antisemitism, and stirs up a moral panic against critics of Israel, the broader left-wing, and higher education.

As the famous Holocaust confessional poem goes, “first they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out. Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me. And there was no one left to speak for me.” American Jewry must continue to speak out against these gross injustices being perpetrated in our name – not only to protect vulnerable communities and our fragile democracy but because the far-right, emboldened by Trump (whom 52% of American Jews believe is antisemitic), will invariably come for the Jews too.

Antisemitism is undeniably on the rise in America. That is, the deliberate targeting of Jews for their Judaism, antisemitic stereotyping, resurgent neo-Nazism, and overt anti-Jewish discrimination. President Trump’s first term witnessed the deadliest attack on American Jews in history. His second term has already seen two more. While feigning concern for Jewish safety, the Trump administration is fanning the flames of far-right antisemitism, hyperfixating on student protests, and upending liberal democratic norms. Indeed, the president is actively rewriting the American past and present and erasing our free speech rights, all while using the Jewish people as his metaphorical pencil.

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Israel *Horizons*

Published by Partners for Progressive Israel

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