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# Position Paper



# Seven Months of War on Gaza

Israel Is in International Distress

**Mtanes Shihadeh**

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## **Seven Months of War on Gaza... Israel Is in International Distress**

Mtanes Shihadeh

Coordinator of the Policy Unit at Mada al-Carmel

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Mada al-Carmel- Arab Center for Applied Social Research

90 Hamiginim st. Haifa

Tel: +972 4 8552035, Fax: +972 4 8525973

[www.mada-research.org](http://www.mada-research.org)

[mada@mada-research.org](mailto:mada@mada-research.org)

The Israeli government has described the war on Gaza since last October as an "existential war and a second war of independence." Israel's official and public goals were to eliminate Hamas's military and administrative-governing capabilities and to prevent the emergence of any threat from Gaza in the future. Later, Israel added liberating Israeli hostages held by Hamas. Declared unofficial goals of the war were revenge against Gaza and its residents and the restoration of Israel's image of deterrence and strategic position in the region. Yet, there is something no less important than this or that goal, and that is restoring Israeli society's confidence in the state and its security and political institutions.

After seven months of war on Gaza, Israel finds itself in a strategic crisis, as it has not achieved any of the war's declared goals, has not liberated the hostages, ended the war on its terms, and been able to impose its conditions for a ceasefire. This, despite the killing of nearly 40,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the destruction of approximately 70 percent of residential buildings, public facilities, and infrastructure.

The war on Gaza has many repercussions on Israel, some of which are military and strategic, others affect internal politics and the cracks within Israeli society, the Palestinian issue, and the international environment.

This position paper addresses some of the repercussions of the war of extermination in the Gaza Strip on Israel's international standing, especially the unofficial aspects—those not related to the positions and institutions of the state. Among them is the beginning of the emergence of a serious, unofficial, international boycott of Israeli academia, and a global boycott of artistic and cultural works, in addition to the escalation of student protest movements in American universities. The paper addresses these repercussions from the official and unofficial Israeli perspective which greatly fears them, on the one hand, and tries to distort their image, on the other.

The paper argues that transformations in these areas are disturbing Israeli institutions writ large, and are increasing Israel's crisis and international isolation, even if their results are slow, cumulative, and not direct and immediate. Instead of the war leading to a change in Israel's security, strategic, and international situation—as Israeli decision-makers wanted—it brought about opposite results because of the crimes of murder, destruction, and the denial of Palestinian rights. In fact, it added pressure on Israel's global standing and image, and compounded its predicament. This is reflected in speeches and analyses by Israeli politicians, academics, and intellectuals.

## **Israel's Academia Is Shunned Internationally**

The Israeli Council on Higher Education has many international agreements for cooperation on academic research.<sup>1</sup> Among the most important and prominent of these are the ones signed with the European Union and the United States, including:

*Horizon 2020*: It is a framework program of the European Union for research and development and is among the largest in the world in the field of scientific and industrial cooperation, with a budget of \$77 billion. The purpose of Israel's participation—as an Associated Country since 1996—in this program is the normalization and integration of Israeli academia into European projects and expanding the fields of Israeli scientific and industrial activity. It gives Israel equal rights and obligations like those enjoyed by EU countries. Israel is the only non-European country that is a member of the program (and has a status similar to that of Switzerland, Norway, and Turkey).

*Erasmus+*: Israel participates in this European Union program to support and develop international academic cooperation and to encourage innovation and excellence in teaching, such as capacity building projects and exchanges of students and faculty members. The Council on Higher Education website shows that in the period 2014-2020, higher education institutions in Israel won 22 project grants and more than 15,000 mobility grants for students and faculty members, to the tune of over €50 million.

In 1972, Israel and the United States also established the United States-Israel Research Fund (BSF) for research and academic cooperation. The fund worked to strengthen academic relations between the United States and Israel through supporting joint research and innovation for a wide range of scientific specializations.<sup>2</sup> To explain the importance of the work of the fund, its website indicates, for example, that six out of eight Nobel laureates of Science until 2004 received at least one grant from the fund.

Israel also established an academic scientific research program with Germany (GIF) in 1986, with the aim of providing joint funding opportunities and research grants, especially in the field of basic research, for research groups from universities and hospitals and other higher education institutions from Israel and Germany. In the last two decades, Israel also signed special research and academic cooperation agreements with China, India, and Singapore.<sup>3</sup>

For decades, these agreements provided billions of dollars for Israeli scientific and academic research and gave Israeli academic institutions the tools and resources for international exposure and cooperation, to the point that they are now among the largest international scientific institutions. Israel has exploited all of these areas for its political promotion and marketing internationally, gaining legitimacy, enhancing its status, and exploiting them diplomatically and in the field of security.

It is difficult to read and monitor all the changes that may affect international Israeli contracts in scientific research in the wake of the war on Gaza, but it is possible to

point out that the picture has changed, with many cases of unofficial boycotts of Israeli academic and research institutions that make it difficult for their work, although there has not been widespread cancellation of cooperation agreements. There is, however, a significant decline in the possibilities of cooperation between Israeli institutions and individuals and their counterparts around the world, and the cancellation of ongoing projects, which has become a matter of great concern for Israel.

Last April 11, journalist Or Kashti published an extensive report in Haaretz about the global boycott of Israeli academia, in which he said that "There are cases of termination of scientists from international research groups, cancellation of invitations to conferences, hiring freezes, ending academic cooperation, rejection of scientific articles for political reasons, sabotaging lectures, and refusing to participate in promotion procedures for Israeli faculty members." Following interviews he conducted with 60 researchers from Israeli universities, Kashti added: "There is no room for doubt: Israel is facing an unprecedented academic boycott. And it is getting worse."<sup>4</sup>

The boycott comes from individuals and institutions in the international academy who publicly refuse to cooperate with Israeli academics and send messages explaining that the reasons for the rejection stem from Israel's actions in the war on Gaza, and from war crimes and genocide. Israeli academics have unanimously agreed that the current situation is unprecedented, and that what is happening constitutes a serious threat to the research and academic capabilities of Israeli researchers, and may lead to the drying up of Israeli academic resources and tools.

In this context, Professor Milette Shamir, Vice President of Tel Aviv University responsible for international academic cooperation, believes that "a positive scenario is to return within a short period to the previous situation and a state of stability when we will regain our position in the world; although this is currently unlikely. The worst scenario is that we move in the direction of South Africa during the apartheid regime."<sup>5</sup>

In a poll of 1,015 permanent members of the educational staff in Israeli universities, conducted at the beginning of last January by the Israel Young Academy and the Afik in Academia nathaniel Foundation, 32 percent of the participants said that they are suffering from serious or very serious damage to their international relations, which was evident in the cancellation of invitations to visit research institutions abroad or to lecture or work there. Another 41 percent of researchers said that their ability to recruit students from outside the country was damaged; 15 percent reported that their ability to obtain funding from international bodies was severely or very severely damaged; half of the researchers said that they were afraid of this damage; and 26 percent responded that they felt that the possibilities of presenting research at international conferences has declined.<sup>6</sup>

Professor Rivka Carmi, head of the Learning Abroad organization, which helps Israeli scholars abroad, higher education institutions "feel an undeclared boycott that includes the rejection or review of articles by Israeli researchers, rejecting offers to participate

in conferences in Israel, or impeding the invitation of Israeli researchers to participate in international conferences. She added that "Harm to academic circles in Israel as a result of the non-public boycott is a great and not theoretical possibility, and this is a real source of concern."<sup>7</sup>

## **Art and Culture Are Part of the Occupation**

On April 18, Haaretz published an extensive report by a number of journalists addressing the international boycott of Israeli arts and culture around the world, and stated that the boycott of Israeli art production began last November at a film festival in Amsterdam, where a number of supporters of the Palestinian cause protested against the participation of an Israeli film.<sup>8</sup> The report adds that in the following months the situation got worse. Today, almost every major film festival has to deal with pro-Palestinian demonstrations, and every participation by an Israeli film or by Israeli creators is already classified as a potential scandal.

According to the report, it is not surprising that festival directors prefer to stay away from Israeli films at this stage.

International producers and distributors want nothing to do with Israeli projects, and filmmakers from Israel find themselves ostracized and rejected. Many international Israeli film festivals have been canceled in recent months, including those in Los Angeles, Canada, Spain, and London. Israel is now the new star of the global cancel culture. All experts in international festivals know that the probability of major festivals accepting Israeli films is zero. This situation also exists in the field of showing Israeli series on international series channels, as well as in book fairs, international publishing houses, and all cultural events.

In a prior report, published by Itamar Katzir and Ofir Hovav on November 29, 2024, the two journalists concluded that a fundamental change has occurred, such that "suddenly it seems that the natural choice is boycotting Israel and its people, or at least not touching this hot coal."<sup>9</sup>

## **Student Protests at American Universities...a Turning Point**

Since mid-April, students who reject the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip have begun carrying out sit-ins in a number of the most important and prominent American universities, demanding a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, an end to the supply of American military equipment to Israel, and the withdrawal of university investments in Israel and arms manufacturers and other companies benefiting from the war. They are also demanding pardoning students and faculty members who were subjected to disciplinary measures

or expulsion due to the protests.<sup>10</sup> Later, the student movement and demonstrations expanded to other countries, including France, Britain, Germany, Canada, and India.

The importance of these protests is multifaceted. They demand and press toward expanding the academic and economic boycott of Israel and companies that support the war, and they may constitute a snowball for the boycott of Israeli institutions. In addition, these protests represent a different image of Israel in institutions, cities, and countries that have been supportive of it for decades, and could contribute to changing global public opinion toward Israel. It is expected that these positions will be translated into the political and electoral behavior of students and the youth segment, especially in the United States in a year of elections for the presidency and the Congress. Hence, the pressure from these protests is double. On the one hand, they impact Israel and its position directly, and on the other, they exert pressure on the American administration and President Biden to change his policies because of his absolute support for the war on Gaza, as well as on members of the Senate and House of Representatives. They also will affect the political atmosphere in many Western capitals.<sup>11</sup>

## **Israel Tries to Distort Student Protests**

Israeli political, academic, and media institutions took the initiative to attack the student protests, accusing them of anti-Semitism and of being funded by parties hostile to Israel. Israel is also trying to downplay the importance of these protests, claiming that they do not represent American society, and that participation in them is limited to a small number of students, and is trying—as much as possible—to label the protests as violent in order to delegitimize them. Israel is also recruiting public opinion against the protests. Israel thus seeks to create awareness among the Israeli public that this movement has a limited impact, that its primary motives are hatred of Israel, and that there is no relation between the war crimes Israel is committing in Gaza and the launch of the protest movement.

The most prominent reaction to the protests came from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who described the protests via a tweet on X on April 24, 2024, as anti-Semitic. He also likened the student protest movement in American universities to what happened in German universities in the 1930s.<sup>12</sup> Netanyahu is an expert in American politics and is fully aware of the dangerous effect of these protests on American public opinion and decision makers—especially in an election year. He also knows that the student protest movement contributed in the past to ending the Vietnam War and overthrowing the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Journalist Nettanel Slyomovics described the protests in Haaretz as very disturbing, and likened them to the student protests in the United States at the end of the 1960s against the Vietnam War. He reminded readers that the matter led to US President Lyndon Johnson withdrawing from the presidential race and the loss of the Democratic Party of

the elections in 1969.<sup>13</sup> Israel is upset because it is afraid of losing American support if protests increase, and because it is aware that the spread of demonstrations in universities around the world may indicate a shift in the attitudes of the younger generation toward Israel and the Palestinian issue.

Despite his criticism of Netanyahu's handling of the protest movements, Haaretz Journalist Anshel Pfeffer tries to downplay their impact on Israel. He writes that "We must not exaggerate the extent of the activists' threat to Israel or the Jews. After all, this is a small minority that has privileges even in liberal America, and the more violent and anti-Jewish the riots become, the more the demonstrators lose popular support. This is not necessarily because of the widespread sympathy that still exists for Israel in America, but also because the real threat of these protests is to American democracy itself."<sup>14</sup>

Yaron Friedman, a lecturer at the University of Haifa, writes in Maariv that "The shameful success achieved by the anti-Israel and pro-Hamas protests in universities in the United States is the fact that they are not spontaneous at all, but rather are well organized and funded." Friedman claims that those behind this funding are the State of Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood. He explains that the transformations in American universities in the last decade are broader than what currently appears, adding that they reflect a change in the academic and theoretical concepts used to understand Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by using settler colonialism approaches, flattening the ongoing conflict between oppressor and oppressed, and staying away from the complexities of the situation.<sup>15</sup>

Danny Dayan—the current chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate (which specializes in perpetuating the memory of Jews who were killed in the Nazi Holocaust) and the former Consul General of Israel in New York—saw that Israel is losing American universities, and that the prevailing narrative is anti-Israel and sees it as an illegal settler colonial project. He added that this discourse is widespread among teachers and students, stressing the seriousness of the matter.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to this, the Israeli Research Committee of University Presidents condemned the protests at American universities, accusing them of being "violent and anti-Semitic demonstrations," and added that "this worrying development has created a climate in which Israeli and Jewish students and faculty (in American universities) say that they are forced to hide their identities or avoid campus for fear of physical harm."<sup>17</sup> This is how this committee seeks to label the protests as violent and delegitimize them. Israel is aware that the students' protest is a clear and immediate indicator of a change in Israel's status in the United States and in many Western countries. It is also aware that American universities have a major role in shaping the image of Israel, its narrative, and attitudes toward it, and that these students are an important segment in shaping political awareness in those countries, and that some of them will one day become decision makers—politically, culturally, economically, and artistically—and they are the leaders and decision-makers of the future.



## **Conclusion: The Loss of International Solidarity Is a Strategic Loss**

In addition to the strategic, military, and political impasse, we see that the implications of the war have become broader, and Israel may lose global solidarity and support, especially the popular solidarity that it benefited from in the past. Israel has become a pariah state in the academic, artistic, cultural, cinematic, and to some extent economic spheres. In addition, Israel is accused in the International Court of Justice of committing war crimes and genocide, and there is a possibility of issuing arrest warrants against Israeli political and military leaders by the International Criminal Court (which is also disturbing). Indeed, the Israeli establishment has suffered a tremendous impact. There also is the beginning of commercial and economic boycotts by some countries (including, but not limited to, Turkey). Recently, we witnessed large protests in American universities against the war of genocide in Gaza and for boycotting Israel, and these are not marginal issues. Israel used all these techniques to promote and market itself to improve its image internationally, and to gain the sympathy and solidarity of Western societies.

In fact, this was considered a resource of Israeli power, and a tool of informal Israeli diplomacy. The loss or decline of these resources harms Israel's image and its marketing and promotion capabilities, and is considered an Israeli loss in the long term.

These aspects are important and affect the image and status of Israel in global public opinion, influence the formation of Western societies' awareness toward Israel and the Palestinian issue, and redefine the conflict. The accumulation of these transformations in the international arena constitutes a pressure factor on western governments and affects decision-making and positions of countries, and decision-makers in Israel, especially the ongoing transformations among youth groups, students, and international academic and artistic institutions.

These aspects are not related to official positions taken by governments, are not linked to the official interests of countries, are not subject to blackmail by international Zionist institutions, and reflect the general, popular international mood formed regarding the war of extermination on Gaza. The continuation and strengthening of this situation may have an actual and serious impact on the Israeli government and decision makers for years to come.

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3. Israeli Council on Higher Education, op. cit.
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