

Gaza & the World, Ep. 1: Rami G. Khouri

[Helena Cobban]

Welcome, everyone. I'm Helena Cobban, the president of Just World Educational, and I want to welcome you to the first episode of our new video podcast, "Gaza and the World". With this podcast, we aim to explore the seminal part that the two-year genocide and horrendous ongoing crisis in Gaza, and also the resilience and resistance of the Palestinian people of Gaza, have been playing, and continue to play, in the deep world-changing shifts that the balance of power is seeing these days.

We are planning to present Gaza and the World in the form of a weekly conversation that I will pre-record with a guest who is someone who's thought deeply about these matters. Then, we'll release these conversations, hopefully each Wednesday, in both audio and video format, and we'll also present the multimedia records of all these conversations, along with other key materials, on a dedicated resource page on the Just World Educational website. If you visit our website, www.justworldeducational.org, you can learn how to sign up for our regular updates on this project and all our other projects.

Just World Educational is a small but fearless and feisty non-profit educational foundation, headquartered in, of all places, Washington, D.C. We're dedicated to the building of a just and peaceful world built on the basis of the sovereign equality of all the world's peoples. One of our key ongoing projects is the weekly Palcast podcast, co-hosted by our good friends, Dr. Yusuf El-Jamal and Tony Groves. You'll find its weekly episodes on Apple Podcasts and Spotify: look for "Palcast". Another of our key recent projects was the webinar series, "Understanding Hamas and Why That Matters," which we presented in 2024, and which resulted in the release of this crucial, information-packed book of the same name, which remains extremely relevant in an era in which Zionist discourse suppressors continue their campaign to demonize Hamas, the Islamic resistance movement in Palestine, as harshly as ever.

My co-pilot on that project was the accomplished Palestinian-American journalist and thought leader **Rami G. Khoury**, who's a valued board member of Just World Ed, and who happens to be my guest on this inaugural episode of Gaza and the World. Welcome, Rami.

[Rami G. Khouri]

Thank you, Helena. I'm happy and proud to be with you.

[Helena Cobban]

So, next week, my guest will be another of our great board members, the venerable expert in international law and human rights, Professor Richard Falk. In the interim, this Thursday, Richard will be chairing the crucial wrap-up session in Istanbul, Türkiye, of the Gaza People's Tribunal. So, of course, next week, it will be great to be able to discuss that whole important project with him.

But now, back to Rami G. Khoury. Rami and I are both at heart journalists who've spent a lot of years working to understand and report on developments in West Asia, sometimes known as the Middle East, and other parts of our world.

But we have also both delved deeply in recent years into the broad ongoing shifts in the global balance of power. So, today, we'll be looking at the international aspects of the Gaza crisis, including international aspects of the still precarious ceasefire plan, October 10th. The most evident international aspect of that is the composition of the mediation team that helped to mediate the deal and that continues to monitor compliance with it, or so we hope.

Rami, that team consists of Trump's American emissaries, including his political advisors and leading members of the US military's CENTCOM command, who are currently deployed in Israel. It also consists of officials and leaders from Egypt, Türkiye, and Qatar, but notably not the United Nations. So, how do you analyze the composition of that mediation monitoring team and the prospects for its success?

[Rami G. Khoury]

Well, thank you, Helena. I'm really happy to kick off the series with you. There are so many dimensions of the global linkages between what's happening in Gaza and all of Palestine, and the region around it in the Middle East, with global efforts.

And what's most striking is how this episode of the ceasefire agreement, the implementation of it, the mechanism for monitoring you mentioned, and other things, how this brings to light the quite extraordinary continuity between the Western colonial traditions that initiated the Palestine-Zionism or Palestine-Israel or Arab-Israeli conflict a century ago, 1917, 1920, 1922, those were the beginning, and the parallels between that period and the period today.

And the monitoring team of the ceasefire agreement that you mentioned is, you know, kind of like the gold standard of that process, both the continuity of colonial traditions and the continuity of gross inequities and serious, I would even call it criminal acts, by many of the parties. And this is something that is ongoing, we have to keep our eye on it, but we need to keep calling it out whenever it happens. But there are also differences today between now and then.

And there are some many, quite a few positive aspects which we can get into. But the team itself you asked about, there's no surprise that Jared Kushner, Steve Witkoff, and Marco Rubio, and others are now in Israel, and military people will be involved, have been there already. No surprise that this trio is the team that's doing this, because these three men all have a legacy of extremely pro-Israeli policies, no history of genuine evenhandedness that a mediator should have, a predilection for violence, which Trump epitomizes, and the clear desire to exploit the relationships of the American political elite with the Israeli political elite, and donors, and tech people, and all kinds of people, and Israelis to exploit those relationships for their political gains back home.

[Helena Cobban]

And also, I put into there, Rami, their financial, their personal financial gains, especially in the case of Witkoff and Jared Kushner, who have all kinds of deals across West Asia. But yes, sorry, what were you saying?

[Rami G. Khouri]

This all goes together. And you had the same thing happening in the 1920s, where British colonial permits for Zionists in Palestine gave them huge economic advantages. But this team today, that's actually, as we speak today, this week in Israel, this epitomizes the imbalances.

And these imbalances are structural. The United States, and Great Britain before it, and others, but mainly the US and the UK are the culprits, have been openly and vehemently supporting the Israeli side in the Israel-Palestine conflict. And they don't make any qualms about it.

They're proud of it. And it's mainly because it brings them huge political advantages at home, or at least has to date. And therefore, we have to keep our eye on what they're doing.

But the fascinating new dimension is that they are there trying to push for, apparently, a continuation and implementation of the first stage of the ceasefire agreement. This is new. This is really quite new, because the first stage of the ceasefire agreement, though imperfect, has more elements that benefit the Palestinians than any other part of this history of this diplomacy between Israel and Palestine that the US has mediated.

So you have elements like the initial Israeli withdrawal. It's only about maybe half of the territory. But still, they've pulled back.

They are still attacking and killing people, but at a much lower level. They've allowed humanitarian aid at a lower level than agreed. And they've exchanged prisoners and hostages and alive and dead.

So these are fascinating, because when you look at it, this indicates a couple of important new dimensions. The Israeli government, under Netanyahu, has agreed to elements that it said it would never agree to, to stop the attack, to keep Hamas operating as an entity of some sort. In other words, they haven't destroyed it, as they said they wanted to do.

They haven't been able to push the Palestinians out, as was one of the unspoken but clearly evident aims of the Israeli policy, which the policy of expulsion from Palestine of the Palestinians has been an aim of the Zionist movement since 1910, 1915, when they started talking about this. And it's in the diaries and letters and notes of these Zionist early leaders. But they couldn't achieve.

And two years of the most barbaric military attacks with the most powerful weapons from the US and Israel, the most sophisticated technology, nonstop two years killing, they haven't been able to achieve their main goals. They only achieved the goal of getting hostages back

through negotiations. So there's something intriguing going on here, which we'll have to just watch.

We can't analyze it. The important thing is that this team and the process itself remains deeply imbalanced in favor of Israel, but has, in many ways, has forced the Israeli government to come to terms with Palestinian realities that it never wanted to come to terms with, that has to negotiate with them and coexist with the Palestinian people. And the most intriguing thing to me in the whole agreement, not agreement, but the proposal that the Israelis and Americans came up with three, four weeks ago, that it actually has the phrase Palestinian statehood in it.

I mean, this is, it's very, you know, guarded, it's very indirect, it's very mentioned as a possibility, as an aspiration. But it's the first time I think that the US and Israel have used the phrase in a Palestinian state as the ultimate outcome of a negotiating process one day. Now that may be significant, maybe just they're playing games as usual.

We'll see. So we should take it step by step. And the critical point here is that we have on the Palestinian and the Arab side, and almost the whole world that's supporting Palestinian justice, we have a counterbalancing political movement, which never existed in the 1920s or 30s or 50s or 70s.

Now you've written books about this. We can talk about this soon. But so there are new elements.

And finally, the last point I would make is that Gaza historically, has been a kind of fulcrum of global trade, global geostrategic interests, global interactions, and you see it in the archaeological record. And it is now again, the center of gravity of global diplomatic and political trends in many dimensions, both positive and negative, which we can discuss, and the positive is that everybody is trying to recognize a Palestinian state, help the ceasefire work, etc, etc. But at the same time, the negative parts is that Israel's continued propaganda and political pressures in the West are leading to the same things that happened in the 20s, which is to keep the Palestinians as an invisible people who have no rights, no agency, no claims to the land.

And they not only should be silenced, but in the US now and in England, and a few other places, they're also criminalized, that it's a crime in England and the US in some areas, to say, advocate a peaceful boycott of Israeli goods from settlements, or technological cooperation with Israel, like it was people boycotted South Africa, and in this case, the American government and others are trying to make it a crime. So those are the main points I'd make to get us going.

[Helena Cobban]

Oh, those are great points. So I mean, I want to unpack a few dimensions of this. Just back to the historic role of Gaza as a side note here, you were quite right, I think, to focus on its role as a fulcrum of, you know, world trade and many developments, including current developments. I just want to note that back in the 1980s, when I was writing my book on the Palestinian Liberation Organization, I identified that Gaza was the crucible of the

Palestinian liberation movement in the modern era, because historically, it was always kind of Jerusalem and the West Bank.

But no, actually, when Yasser Arafat and his colleagues in Fatah started operating, they were Palestinian refugees in Gaza, and Gaza has played that role, continues to play that role. But I want to come back now really to the international aspects. You talked about the US-Israeli relationship, which is at the heart of what's been happening, of what enabled the genocide, there would have been no genocide for those two years.

And possibly continuing, that would never have happened without full American participation in Israel's effort. And I think that's worth underlining. But the balance within that seems to have shifted a little bit, that some of the Israelis are getting worried that, gee, you know, this Trump administration is forcing us to abide by the ceasefire, you know, how can that happen?

So that's one very interesting dimension. Another is the role of these co-mediators, which I think is not wholly trivial. You know, Egypt and Türkiye and Qatar are all close allies of the United States, but they are all also Muslim states that have a strong professed commitment to Palestinian rights. And in the case of Türkiye, certainly strong social movements that are pushing for Palestinian rights that are, you know, a real force, I think, on the government of Türkiye.

Egypt and Qatar, for various reasons, are a little bit different. Do you see the fact of having these mediation partners as being significant? And notably, as I said earlier, not the United Nations?

[Rami G. Khouri]

Well, those are really important points, Helena, that you mentioned. The co-mediators are there, they're actually the, it's the committee to monitor the enforcement of the agreement, the first stage of the agreement. And this committee, Türkiye, Qatar, Egypt, and the United States is part of it.

This is something unusual in this world of Arab-Israeli mediation and conflict resolution. You saw the Lebanon-Israel ceasefire for about a year ago, and it was supposed to be the French and the Americans who co-monitored the application and respect of the agreement by both sides.

[Helena Cobban]

And the United Nations there, I mean, you know, they're...

[Rami G. Khouri]

And the UN, which has the UNIFIL forces there. In fact, as far as I can tell, the French and the Americans were mostly watching sports events on television, and not doing any serious monitoring or enforcement. And there have been several thousand Israeli attacks on Lebanon, and they're continuing, and they're actually getting more violent.

The Israelis are now attacking entire sectors of the state construction industry in South Lebanon. They want to prevent the Lebanese from rebuilding any of the areas that the Israelis already have bombed and destroyed. So this monitoring, I think people learned from that experience.

So this monitoring system [in Gaza] with four parties, but without the UN, is something to watch, because it could be a hint of things to come. To me, the significance of it is that for the first time, it structurally takes the monitoring and implementation of an agreement between Israel and Palestine out of the unique hands of the Israelis and the Americans. The Israelis and the Americans historically, whether it was Camp David, or Oslo, or all of the different agreements they've had, or Syria, or Lebanon, the previous agreements always were monopolized by the Americans and the Israelis.

This is different. And I think the reason it's different is the whole world, especially the people in the region, especially the Palestinians, have realized that you can't just—the Americans cannot be the partners in the genocide against Palestine, and the enforcers of a ceasefire between Israel and Palestine. You can't be the jailer and the prisoner at the same time.

And the U.S. is trying to do that, trying to wage war with Israel against Palestine, and at the same time achieve some kind of ceasefire, and then maybe peaceful negotiations. So this is significant. And this is the first big test.

The last four or five days have been the first big test of the credibility and efficacy of this monitoring mechanism. Now, the fact that the UN is not there is not a surprise, because the Israelis and the Americans both have been waging a war to dilute the impact of the UN in global affairs and Palestine-Israel. So this is something that shouldn't surprise us.

But the fact that you have three or four countries, and the presence of Türkiye is especially important. It's a NATO partner, it's a Muslim-majority state, it's very close to the Palestinians and Arabs. And so there are fascinating dimensions to this.

And it's just like so many other parts of this situation, it's an ongoing dynamic. And we can't judge, maybe three days from now or a week from now, it'll be completely different. So we just have to keep watching it and keep pushing it.

But what's critical is that you have, this is a one dimension of what I call the counterbalancing historically in the last century. You're starting to get a counterbalancing by Arabs and their supporters and Palestinians and Muslim-majority countries and neutral countries and decent countries. They're coming together to try to counterbalance the Israeli-American dominance of this situation over the last century, especially the last 60 years of mediation.

And this is historic, and hopefully it'll bear fruit.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, to me, it's fascinating, Rami, that you have actually a sort of a whole global movement in support of Palestinian rights now, centered, I would say, on the Global South, the

countries of the Global South, if you look at the role that Colombia's President Gustavo Petro has played, the role that South Africa has played, and then this organization called the Hague Group, which was convened essentially by Colombia's President Gustavo Petro: governments that want to push at the formal international level for Palestinian rights, but are doing so, I think, thus far fairly cautiously, but arousing the ire of the U.S.-Israeli axis of evil, if you like. So, for people who are not in governments, for people who are like civil society activists, we've seen the role that the Global Sumoud Flotilla and the other flotillas have played, and the role, as you mentioned, that Palestine Action has played in the UK and civil society organizations worldwide. And for a long time, these movements were all centered around calling for a ceasefire.

What should be the central tasks, the central calls for these movements now that we have a ceasefire? I guess we want to protect the ceasefire, but then beyond that, what do we want to ask for?

[Rami G. Khouri]

Again, this raises the multidimensional nature of what's going on, which is complex but important to understand and to prioritize, as you're saying. What's the most important thing? What comes next?

What can civil society do? What can the media do? What can international agencies do?

What can the private sector do? Everybody has a role to play. But if we go back and historically look at situations, and you and I are old enough and experienced enough to remember the Vietnam War and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, and the Black Lives Matter and the gender equality movement, all of these big movements that gathered global attention and support, they happened mainly because of civil society activism that eventually pressured governments in the West mostly to change their policies. And the governments changed their policies only when they felt threatened in terms of their incumbency as politicians, they might get voted out of office, or they felt that their national interest was being hurt, that less people wanted to do business with the U.S., tourists didn't want to go there, whatever, people didn't want to invest there. The U.S. is still the dominant power of the world militarily and economically, so it's hard to completely detach from the U.S., but people are looking to balance their relationship with the U.S., with other groups and countries around the world. But this is a really decisive moment, because what you're seeing now is an effort to try to find a new center of gravity of diplomacy between the warring parties in the Middle East and between international engagement, which is predominantly the U.S., but also some of the Europeans and some Asian powers. And, of course, now we see a very fascinating role by South American countries, you mentioned South Africa and Indonesia, and so we're getting other countries, Pakistan was involved in some of this, so there's now a sense that this cannot be left to the United States and Israel. They've created a terrible mess, and it's expanded into war across the Middle East, where the U.S. was fighting directly against Iran. And I think this scared the daylights out of everybody.

The Israeli attack on Hamas and Qatar was, you know, the final straw, but I think this concern has been building up over the last two or three years, as Israel's runaway zombie

militarism all around the Middle East has gotten completely out of hand, both in terms of the number of countries it's attacking in Lebanon and Syria and Iraq and Iran and Yemen and Qatar and others probably to come, and the nature of its attack, the brutality, the cruelty, the barbarism, you know, shredding babies with advanced technological weapons as the babies were starving and trying to sleep at night, burning them alive and things like that. This is still going on, it's still happening.

So I think the world really got scared, everybody, including many in the U.S. Certainly the people of the U.S. got scared, but the bottom line of this is that people understand that civil action, citizen participation in protests and boycotts and petitions and you, whatever, has to be the driving force. And there's another link here, which is that people have started to understand in the U.S., especially that what the Israelis are trying to do by criminalizing Palestinianism and blocking Palestinian voices, Palestinian university courses, Palestinian book exhibitions in the U.S. or whatever, that that is now impacting American citizens' constitutional rights, free speech, equal rights before the law, due process.

All of these fundamental principles of American democracy are now being whittled away by the actions that were initiated by pro-Israeli Zionist groups in the U.S., including some Christian fundamentalist fanatics and others. And so there's a link now between what Israel is doing to Palestinians and to Arabs and what Israel is doing to the fundamental rights of American citizens. And in Europe, they might feel the same thing.

So the short answer to-- the long answer to your short question, what people have to do is keep coordinating globally on these issues, protests, voting systems, whatever, and then they have to prioritize. And I think that you asked what's the most important thing. I think the most important common denominator that brings together the global citizenry that wants justice in Palestine for both Israelis and Palestinians, by the way, we're not talking of destroying Israel as Zionist Netanyahu propaganda says every day that Hamas wants to destroy Israel.

It's not true. Hamas, if people read our book, they'll see Hamas has made about 15 different offers to coexist with an Israeli Jewish majority state, as it was before 1967, to be negotiated, of course. But so the critical priority is to reaffirm the validity of the rule of law and international norms on conflict resolution, human rights protections, and the rights of states as enshrined in the UN charter and UN resolutions, mainly the right to self-determination.

We've made huge progress in those areas on paper. And now these advances have to be pushed into the political, the domestic political spheres in the US. And we're seeing signs of this, the Mamdani primary victory in the mayor's contest in New York is fascinating.

He comes right out and says, you know, I'm for Palestinian rights and Israel's genocide is wrong. We have to stop it. And this is not hurting him.

So politicians are starting to understand that a righteous, moral, law based position will resonate with voters. And I think that's where we have to keep pushing to link the well-being of Western countries with the well-being of Palestinians and Arab countries.

[Helena Cobban]

Oh, such a lot to pick up on there. I want to say, just to add in that BDS remains really important because I've already seen reports, for example, that the Israelis have finally been able to secure the sale of some military, some of their military weaponry to Germany that was being held up, you know, so long as the genocide was actively ongoing. But now that the Israelis have won the ceasefire, you know, they've been rehabilitated.

So West European governments can now resume, you know, importing military tech from Israel, which is outrageous, you know, because number one, the genocide is still really essentially continuing until the Palestinians of Gaza are able to exercise their national rights. And secondly, there has been, you know, no attempt from the German government or any other Western government to actually hold Israel accountable for the genocide. So, you know, they just want to move back to let's, you know, make profits as usual in the military industrial complex.

I want to come back to the point that you mentioned about the cruelty of the Israeli genocide that we have all seen, you know, and it continues to manifest when you look at the tortured bodies of some of the Palestinian prisoners who were returned as part of the, you know, hostage and prisoner release, and the bodies of some of those Palestinian prisoners who were returned in plastic bags without names and with signs of the most horrendous torture on their bodies.

You know, that is another form of cruelty that, you know, okay, those tortures had happened. But the Israeli forensic authorities and whoever, you know, prepared the bodies for return made no attempt whatsoever to give them a decent, you know, coffins or names or, you know, to even clean up the signs of that torture. It was like, this is what you're going to get, you know, you're going to get this.

I mean, this torture, this cruelty is actually at the heart of what they are trying to present, what they are trying to convey. And that has been a through line in the history of Western colonialism in the global South since 1500 AD, you know, because the Westerners in many of those encounters, like when Vasco de Gama and his successors sailed around, you know, from Portugal around Africa and went to India, and into the Indian Ocean, they were a tiny minority of people, but they had superior weapons. And so they wanted to show people there that, you know, don't mess with us, we can wipe out entire cities with our weapons.

And that was the basis of it. And this is, you know, that's the through line from there to what the Israelis have been doing in Gaza. So I think most people in the global South see that.

But a lot of people not in the global South, you know, aren't aware of those kind of important threads of Western colonialism. I just wanted to make that point about cruelty, because I think it's really important to make. I did write a little thing about it a few weeks ago.

But okay, a couple of points to explore here. One is, you mentioned, Rami, the role of, you know, international civil society and all these governments in the global South. How about the Arab governments?

[Rami G. Khouri]

Well, the Arab governments are governments and states that have never self-validated themselves. Not a single Arab country as far as I can tell has been shaped, defined, created, and its policy is set through the self-determination of its citizens.

[Helena Cobban]

And therefore... Maybe Yemen, come on, I mean?

[Rami G. Khouri]

Even Yemen, but look at the British intervention in South Yemen, the constant interactions, people invading North Yemen. So what you have today, you have citizens who support some of their government's policies, but no citizenry in any Arab country, unfortunately, has played a central role in defining the country, holding its power structure accountable, and shaping its morality and its political policies. None, unfortunately.

Now, there's some really fine things that Arab governments have done, and many fine things that Arab people have done. But in the realm of statehood, the Arab world doesn't have a lot to be proud of. And of course, you have wealthy countries in the Gulf who earned their wealth through a generous divine act of geology, and have tons of money, but it wasn't earned, it wasn't created by their own hard work.

But they did good things with it, and they've helped many other Arab countries as well. So there's good and bad things about Arab statehood, but there is no serious authenticity and self-validated legitimacy and accountability and policy consistency in any Arab country, because the citizenry has never been part of that process. Therefore, you end up with situations as we have today with Arab governments that are unable to do much beyond voting at the UN, issuing press releases, sending some aid when they can, which these are good things to do, but they have zero impact.

And in many cases, some Arab governments are working behind the scenes trying to have better ties with Israel, whatever, and certainly with the United States. So I think the question of Arab statehood, Arab sovereignty, Arab citizenship, and Arab self-determination are still open questions. They've never been fully addressed.

And no Arab state has really passed the tests of citizenship, statehood, and sovereignty. And therefore, we have the situation that we have today. Despite that, you do have actions like the Qataris, like the Egyptians, like others, they try to play a role when they can.

And this may be an opening now with Türkiye involved, Pakistan, Indonesia are trying to get involved. This is an opening to link Arab powers with global powers who have maybe more credibility in these arenas and see what comes next. But I want to mention just a point, you talked about the colonial period, the work you did a few years ago, and several long articles you published.

That's really significant for people to go back and read them. I imagine you'll put it on the website, links to your articles. The central battle that is going on today, in my view, is the last anti-colonial struggle in the world.

There are many colonial issues or conditions, colonized people, colonized areas, but this is the most profound anti-colonial struggle in the entire world. And that's why the entire world virtually is supporting the Palestinians trying to find a peaceful resolution. And if we can resolve the Palestine-Israel conflict peacefully, we would probably have declared the end of Western colonialism.

That's an ambitious, hopeful view, but it's possible. In other words, we finally push back against this century of Zionist-Western colonial partnerships. And you talked about the cruelty.

The most cruel thing you can do to a people is to not see them, make believe they're invisible. They don't exist. They don't have any links to the land.

They don't have any rights. They don't have any agency. They don't have any voice.

They don't have any meaning. They don't even have any humanity. And this is exactly what many of the right-wing Israeli leaders have been saying in the last two years, that the Palestinians are animals.

We have to treat them like animals. We have to starve them, kill them, get them all out. It's quite extraordinary that this is happening in the open air, on television, in the media, and people can see it now.

This is one of the new things that is different today. And one of the reasons why there is so much global support for Palestine is because social media, the alternative media, all kinds of new mechanisms, digital information sharing, are available so that if somebody wants to know what's going on, they have access to it. From 1910 to 2020, there was very little serious, global, easy access to information about what's going on in Israel and Palestine.

The Israelis were remarkably successful in their propaganda, in dominating the global media, in terms of how the Palestinians were mentioned and treated, etc. That started to break down about three, four years ago, and it's moving much more quickly now. But it's important to keep in mind that the cruelty, the aggression, the predatory barbarism that the Israelis are doing, and Netanyahu's attempts even today as we speak, he would like to keep attacking, killing Palestinians and herding them into little areas and bombing them and burning their kids alive.

And he's still trying to do that because the Israeli Zionist program from the beginning was based on this kind of colonial criminality, that these people in Palestine don't exist. They were 93% of the inhabitants of the land of Palestine, including my family in Nazareth in 1917, when the Balfour Declaration was first issued. They were 93% of the population, they owned like 95% of the land.

But from the first days of this program, the Zionist idea, when it linked with British colonialism in 1917, it then led to what we've experienced for the past century. And this

cruelty, this violence, this expansion, this threat across the region, this predatory sense that anybody around the whole Middle East, and even in Ohio, and in Birmingham, and in anywhere in the world, anybody who speaks out for Palestine is a criminal. They have to be silenced, or shot, or put in prison.

This is not new, except the scale of it now. In the last two years, what we've witnessed is new. We haven't seen this kind of scale of cruelty and militarism and barbarism.

It was limited. We've had, you know, ethnic cleansing, you know, Deir Yassin, and many other 400 or 500 Palestinian villages were evacuated, were emptied by the Zionist forces in 1947-48. And this is something that is not new, but it's reached a level of openness now that the world sees it, and that's why much of the world is responding.

And the problem I see, the biggest problem, is that while the Israelis and the Americans jointly have been able to conduct this genocide in Palestine, they've also been working to whittle down the relevance of existing international law. This is really the most dangerous thing, and most of the world hasn't figured out what to do about this. Conventions, UN resolutions, all kinds of agreements over the last 100 years, the Israelis and Americans just ignore them, and that's one of the reasons they're trying to destroy the whole UN system, the mechanism by which the world agrees on these issues, because these laws constrain what Zionism wants to do, and what Western British and then American colonialism and imperialism, what they want to do. Hopefully, this is now reaching a point where there's enough counter-pressure from the world and the Palestinians and friendly countries that this will not be able to continue.

And that's why I say if we can get a negotiated, reasonably decent, equitable peace where Israelis and Palestinians both have self-determined rights to nationhood and statehood and security and sovereignty, that would really mark for me the beginning of the final end of Western colonialism after 500 years. It would take away some of the great topics you write about, but I think it's worth sacrificing those for the rights of people all over the world.

[Helena Cobban]

Wow. So yeah, Rami, thanks for all of that. I just want to pick up on a couple of points.

One is, you know, you were talking about the kind of the propensity, the internal nature of Zionism to be cruel and expansionist and aggressive, and we saw that in the way, as you mentioned, like there's been this big escalation that they've launched against Lebanon, a country that you and I both have a lot of experience in and a lot of, you know, friends and colleagues there. But they did that after they got constrained from hitting and attacking Gaza by the ceasefire. They were like, oh, Lebanon, you know, let's go blow up a few, you know, towns and construction campuses and so on in Lebanon.

So it's very evident for everybody who follows this that they have this kind of will to be aggressive.

I also just want to go back to 1947, which I think is a really important point to make, that the United Nations gave this little Zionist settler state in Palestine the right-- well, gave this Zionist settler project in Palestine the right to have a state in 1947, at a time the same year

that India and Pakistan, which had been, you know, subjugated parts of the British Empire for 150, 200 years at that point, they were getting their independence. You know, national independence of indigenous peoples and indigenous nations was kind of a watchword of what was happening in the late 1940s and continued in the 1950s, 1960s. But, you know, two months after the Indians and Pakistanis got their independence in August of 1947, the UN decides to establish a settler colonial state in Palestine.

Like, it was so dysfunctional, weird, if you look at it in that sense. So we need to go back sometimes to 1947 and figure out what was happening then. As you mentioned, you know, the global balance of power definitely is shifting a lot.

And right now, under the impact of what's happening in Gaza, what the Israelis and the Americans have been doing in Gaza. There are of course, a lot of other factors, including, you know, the crazy tariffs policy of President Trump, and including the assault on United Nations values and norms that he and the Israelis are, you know, jointly engaging in. I have to say Biden wasn't any better on the UN values and norms. I mean, we can recall those numbers of times that Biden's ambassador in the UN Security Council put her hand up, you know, to veto a ceasefire resolution for Gaza.

So that was Biden, you know, and now with Trump, we see more of the same. But the world is changing. And, you know, that's one of the things we want to explore in this podcast series, Gaza and the World.

Before we sign off here, Rami, any last thoughts?

[Rami G. Khouri]

Yeah, there's many that will take about two hours. But in the last, yeah, I would say what you just mentioned is important. The Zionist project, let's call it, to create a Jewish majority state in Palestine.

And that was Arab-Palestinian majority. That project was born and grew in the early 20th century, as the colonial period, as you said, was declining, as global colonialism was receding, because people were fighting back to be free, and self-determined. But the Zionist movement was going the other way.

And when they linked with the British imperial movement, that's when they were able to succeed. So we need to keep our eye on this historical trajectory. The whole world, including all the Arab states, including Hamas, recognize that they have accepted to live in peace with the Jewish-majority Israeli state.

So that debate is over. It ended 20 years ago. But the Israelis have never, or the Americans have never responded to the Arab peace plan of 2002, or the many, many other overtures that have been made to coexist.

They've never responded. So there's a sense, by many analysts who look at this question historically, that the Israelis simply, in their current mindset, and current meaning the last hundred years, cannot, do not want to live at peace with the Palestinian state of equal rights, or live in one state if they want. But they don't want either of those things.

So this is why this conflict has gone on for so long, and has created so much suffering for so many people. And the Israelis, the Zionist movement now, in cahoots with British and American puppets and parrots, as I call them, who just echo what the Zionist propaganda says, they're trying to find new ways to maintain Israel as a vulnerable, really defenseless, endangered place that needs massive military and political support. And they've chosen to do this through the promotion of anti-Semitism as the great new threat, and Hamas is the great new anti-Semitic engine of the world.

They do this every few years. It was Qaeda before, it was Gamal Abdel Nasser before that; it was Saddam Hussein, it's Iran. They keep-- the Israelis, with their Western puppets and parrots-- keep finding sources of evil in the Arab and West Asian region, and rallying public opinion and political elites in the West to support Israel and oppose the rights of these other people in the region.

That historical trajectory, I think, reached its limit about five years ago and has been slowly, slowly decreasing. And if you look, there's one measure that we should keep our eye on, it's the votes in the American Congress. The American Congress, you know, historically, throughout my 60 years of being involved in this process, you would normally get, you know, 1% of 2% of the American Congress voting against Israel.

Now you're getting somewhere around 20%, 25%, in some cases even more, supporting resolutions to stop arms sales or whatever. Resolutions critical of Israel's behavior, but supporting Israel's security. So this trajectory is so clear, and the Zionist movement and the Israeli government don't quite know what to do.

So they're rallying around the theme that has always worked for them, which is to present Israel as the epicenter of endangered Jewish people around the world, subjected to anti-Semitism and terrorism, and therefore they must be given anything they need to protect themselves, even if they do a genocide, and even if the Western countries like the UK and Germany and the US have to be partners in the genocide. So this extraordinary historical process that's been going on, we have to see the whole thing, as you pointed out, and keep pushing back against it to bring it back to a rational process of how people can live with equal rights in adjacent states or whatever arrangement they would like to negotiate.

[Helena Cobban]

Thank you so much. Wow. I think we should give a shout out right now to our, like, the many heroic Jewish people around the world who have challenged this, you know, anti-Semitism claim, the claim that to criticize Israel is to be an anti-Semite.

You know, here in the States, we have Jewish Voice for Peace, we have If Not Now, we have some really heroic Jewish organizations, congregations, individuals, and just on your point about the US Congress, there have been members of Congress who have turned down donations from AIPAC, which is the main pro-Israel lobby. So yes, there is some change, but the change, I think, is much bigger outside the United States in the other 95% of humanity that is not like, as you and I are, you know, citizens of the United States. So there's a lot going on, obviously a lot for us to discuss in this podcast series, Gaza and the World, that we have been launching today.

We'll be releasing new episodes with new guests weekly, every Wednesday. That's the plan anyway, and next week our guest will probably be Professor Richard Falk, so remember to check in to find that one.

Visit our website, www.justworldeducational.org, where you can find out a lot more about all of our projects, and you can click on the donate button to support our projects.

Rami Khouri, thank you so much for being with me today, and I want everybody to join us in the struggle to build a just and peaceful world. Thank you.

[Rami G. Khouri]

Thank you, Helena.