

From the Editors



THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION has been the worst in U.S. history for the Palestinians. Given the United States' record of unconditional support for the State of Israel, this is a singular achievement. The three years of Donald Trump's presidency have included the closure of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) mission in Washington,¹ the withholding of \$364 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA),² the suspension of \$25 million in aid to Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem,³ the relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem,⁴ recognition of Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights,⁵ and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's double negative formulation of occupied West Bank settlements as "not inconsistent with international law."⁶ As the *Journal* went to print, the elected leader of the United States, alongside his Israeli counterpart, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—both facing trial in their respective countries—unveiled the ostensible "Deal of the Century," which promises to strip Palestinians of yet more of their land and rights.

On 11 December 2019, the Trump administration moved the dispossession of the Palestinians to new terrain, taking its cumulative record of unconditional support to even higher levels: the U.S. president signed an executive order misleadingly promoted as a way to combat anti-Semitism on university campuses. However, the executive order does nothing to protect against xenophobic and white supremacist attacks on U.S. synagogues, Jewish community centers, or individuals in the rising tide of anti-Semitism that has swept the United States since 2016.⁷ A "Dear Colleague" letter on bullying and harassment in educational institutions released by the Department of Education in 2010⁸ made clear that anti-Semitic acts such as the use of swastikas, stereotyping Jewish people, and other mobilizations of hate speech triggered school administrators' responsibilities under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Jews, Sikhs, and Muslims are all groups protected from intimidation, harassment, and discrimination under Title VI, and the 2019 executive order adds no new protections to defend Jewish students against anti-Semitic attack.

The real targets of the executive order are students and faculty who work on, speak on behalf of, and/or are from Palestine. The last decade has seen a systematic and carefully orchestrated assault on the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, which the executive order legitimizes and amplifies in what is now a century-long issuance of documents that repress, contain, and erase Palestinians. From the Balfour Declaration of 1917 to United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 in 1967, the Palestinians have been the unnamed objects of the very policy documents that undermine their destinies. By expanding the definition of anti-Semitism to include protests against Israeli state practices, Trump's executive order seeks to stigmatize and punish anyone who criticizes Israeli state violence or advocates for Palestinian rights.

The executive order relies on the definition of anti-Semitism developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Adopted in May 2016, this definition includes two key "contemporary examples" that allegedly threaten academic freedom and freedom of speech: "claiming that the existence of the State of Israel is a racist endeavor" and "applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation."⁹

This cynical weaponization of anti-Semitism renders virtually any critique of Israel racist. In recent months, the Department of Education has waged relentless attacks on academic freedom and free speech, targeting faculty, students, and programs, from the joint University of North Carolina-Duke Middle East center to New York University, and from the University of California, Los Angeles to Columbia University. In Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner's Orwellian framing, "anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism."¹⁰ Trump's executive fiat is so sweeping that the author of the IHRA definition himself, Kenneth Stern, has called Trump's adoption of it a suppression of political speech.¹¹ The executive order, which authorizes the use of federal monies to suppress the BDS movement, is, in the words of the U.S. Campaign for the Academic Boycott of Israel, "first and foremost a response to the success of the BDS movement in the U.S., and the broadening embrace among young students and progressive advocates of Palestinian human rights."¹² Digging deeper, what emerges is an attempt to control and contain what is said in the classroom and in university squares. The charge that calling out racism is itself a racist act will be familiar to many colleagues across temporal and disciplinary divides. More chilling still is the government's attempt to determine what teachers and students can or cannot say.

It is perhaps a tragic irony that at the very moment when Palestine's future appears most bleak, a nonviolent resistance movement like BDS is considered a serious threat to a state whose triumph in terms of territorial and military power has reached unprecedented heights. If nothing else, this executive order should serve as an invitation to reckon with the courtship between Zionism and white supremacy. It is in this context that the *Journal of Palestine Studies* is proud to continue carving out space for scholarship and analysis on Palestine and the Palestinians.

On the topic of quashing anti-Zionist speech and criminalizing Palestine solidarity activism, Ben White offers readers a historicized account of the Israeli government's well-resourced global campaign to undermine and suppress such activism. In his essay, "Delegitimizing Solidarity: Israel Smears Palestine Advocacy as Anti-Semitic," White shows how the concerted effort to equate Palestine advocacy and the BDS movement with anti-Semitism is taking place just as actual anti-Semitism is once again on the rise in Europe and North America. Harnessing such tropes to shield itself from scrutiny, Israel is mobilizing them internationally in concert with close allies like the Trump administration.

In her article "Palestine at the UN: The PLO and UNRWA in the 1970s," Anne Irfan provides a timely examination of the PLO's shifting relationship with the UN agency during a crucial historical period. Tracing a web of tension, competition, and cooperation, Irfan uncovers the PLO's complex struggle for international legitimacy and the centrality of the refugee condition to the question of Palestine.

An article by Laila Parsons is the second of her two-part investigation into the recently declassified secret testimony to the 1937 Peel Commission by exclusively non-Palestinian witnesses. In this installment, Parsons reveals yet more about the degree of collusion between British and Zionist officials, including their shared disregard for the interests and concerns of the Palestinians. The article focuses on the way that the secret testimonies contributed to the Peel Commission's endorsement of the idea of partitioning Palestine.

Two other contributions to this issue, one a report by Aseil Abu-Baker and Marya Farah, titled "Established Practice: Palestinian Exclusion at the Dead Sea," and the other a review essay by

Adam Hanieh of Andrew Ross's *Stone Men: The Palestinians Who Built Israel*. The Book examines aspects of Israel's exploitation of Palestinian resources and labor in the extension of its colonial project.

Finally, this issue includes a remembrance by Bashir Makhoul of the recently deceased Palestinian artist and critic Kamal Boullata which traces this renowned figure's trajectory and his outsized influence on our understanding of the history and practice of Palestinian art.

Rashid I. Khalidi
 Sherene Seikaly

The *Journal of Palestine Studies* is happy to announce that Sherene Seikaly and Rashid Khalidi will, as of this issue, be coeditors of the *Journal* and jointly responsible for its content.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Heather Nauert, "Closure of the PLO Office in Washington," U.S. Department of State, press statement, 10 September 2018, <https://www.state.gov/closure-of-the-plo-office-in-washington/>.
- 2 Hady Amr, "In One Move, Trump Eliminated US Funding for UNRWA and the US Role as Mideast Peacemaker," *Brookings* (blog), 7 September 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/09/07/in-one-move-trump-eliminated-us-funding-for-unrwa-and-the-us-role-as-mideast-peacemaker/>.
- 3 David Brunnstrom, "Trump Cuts \$25 Million in Aid for Palestinians in East Jerusalem Hospitals," Reuters, 8 September 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-palestinians-hospitals/trump-cuts-25-million-in-aid-for-palestinians-in-east-jerusalem-hospitals-idUSKCN1LO000>.
- 4 Barbara Plett Usher, "Jerusalem Embassy: Why Trump's Move Was Not about Peace," BBC, 15 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44120428>.
- 5 Vanessa Romo, "Trump Formally Recognizes Israeli Sovereignty over Golan Heights," National Public Radio, 25 March 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/25/706588932/trump-formally-recognizes-israeli-sovereignty-over-golan-heights>.
- 6 Audrey Wilson, "United States Reverses Stance on Israeli Settlements," *ForeignPolicy.com*, 19 November 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/19/united-states-reverses-stance-on-israeli-settlements/>.
- 7 Shayna Jacobs, "Acts of Anti-Semitism Are on the Rise in New York and Elsewhere, Leaving Jewish Community Rattled," *Washington Post*, 29 December 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/acts-of-anti-semitism-are-on-the-rise-in-new-york-and-elsewhere-leaving-jewish-community-rattled/2019/12/29/f8c20578-2a7e-11ea-bcb3-ac6482c4a92f_story.html.
- 8 Russlynn Ali, "Dear Colleague Letter: Harassment and Bullying," U.S. Department of Education, 26 October 2010, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.pdf>.
- 9 Jared Kushner, "Jared Kushner: President Trump Is Defending Jewish Students," *New York Times*, 11 December 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/11/opinion/jared-kushner-trump-anti-semitism.html?auth=-google1tap>.
- 10 Kushner, "President Trump Is Defending Jewish Students."
- 11 Kenneth Stern, "I Drafted the Definition of Anti-Semitism. Rightwing Jews Are Weaponizing It," *The Guardian*, 13 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/13/antisemitism-executive-order-trump-chilling-effect>.
- 12 U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI), "USACBI Response to Trump Executive Order Targeting Campus Criticism of Israel," *USACBI* (blog), December 2019, <https://usacbi.org/2019/12/usacbi-response-to-trump-executive-order-targeting-campus-criticism-of-israel/>.