

## ARAB STUDIES INSTITUTE RELEASES PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT RE THE GAZA STRIP, *GAZA IN CONTEXT*

**July 2016 – Washington, DC** - Israel does not have a Hamas problem, it does not have a Gaza problem, it has a Palestine problem. It has been two years since one of Israel's most brutal attacks on the Palestinian people of Gaza in its history. Despite overwhelming evidence of the disparity of power between Israel and all Palestinians and the aggressiveness of Israel's exercise of its power, including excessive and brutal violence and collective punishment in Gaza in the form of occupation, siege, and frequent military assaults against dense and captive civilian populations, mainstream media and educational materials continue to frame Israel as the victim. This pedagogical project aims to correct the propagandistic character of mainstream media and educational coverage. *Gaza in Context* provides historical context, explaining Palestinian resistance, for what has been an Israeli narrative that exceptionalizes Gaza and removes it from the larger Palestinian struggle. This is an opportunity to understand the violence and Israel's settler-colonial project.

In practice, Israel has adopted intermittent, counterinsurgency campaigns aimed at diminishing the capacity of the captive Palestinian population to militarily resist Israel's structural violence. Conceptually, it has set Gaza apart from the rest of the Palestinian-Israel conflict so that there is no continuity between Israel's wars waged upon it and its treatment of Palestinians throughout Israel as well as the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Together, the practice of systematic war and the framework of unique distinction have set the Gaza Strip apart from the question of Palestine and transformed it into a national security question. By emphasizing the role of Hamas and diminishing the question of Palestine, Israel has collapsed conditions in Gaza with asymmetric conflicts, or what has come to be known as the "global war on terror," thus eliding the consequential distinctions between Palestinians and other non-state actors. This pedagogical project is an attempt to re-frame the issue in order to place greater emphasis on the broader question of Palestine and to explain Israel's policy towards the Gaza Strip in that context.

A 20-minute multi-media film that combines lecture, animation, typography, and footage from Palestine is the centerpiece of the project. Its other components include a teaching guide for instructional purposes, a bibliography for research purposes, and a compendium of Jadaliyya articles featured in what we call a *JadMag*. All of these elements are housed on the project's own website, which is part of a larger [research project on Palestine](#) headed by the Forum on Arab and Muslim Affairs at the *Arab Studies Institute*.

This interdisciplinary pedagogical project aims to resituate the question of Gaza within a broader Israeli settler-colonial framework, and it uses Israel's most recent military onslaught, Operation Protective Edge, to do so. The release of this project coincides with the two-year anniversary of the brutal operation and aims to use the war as a teaching moment to counter Israel's ahistorical claims that saturated the media. *Gaza In Context* seeks to provide an assertive framework for understanding Israel's systemic attacks as part of the larger question of Palestine.

Operation Protective Edge, and any past or future Israeli onslaughts, should be read within this framework in order to highlight the abnormality of the Palestinian condition and to realize a viable and just alternative.

## **Who We Are**

We are a group of academics, activists, and artists seeking to shift the narrative around the Gaza Strip and Palestine, in general. This is an Arab Studies Institute project and is one component of its **Palestine Project** housed by the Forum on Muslim and Arab Affairs.

## **Who We Want to Reach**

As a pedagogical project we hope that educators, in high school and college classrooms, as well as organizers and activists use these resources to interrogate the conditions in Gaza and use them as a point of departure for understanding the question of Palestine.

## **The History of the Project**

The idea for *Gaza in Context* emerged during the summer of 2014 when Israel launched its most devastating offensive on the besieged Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip to date. Despite the immense destruction wrought upon a captive population Israel successfully claimed victimhood in western media as it launched 6,000 airstrikes and 50,000 artillery shells in an air and ground offensive that lasted for 51-days. The course of the media cycle made evident the need for an assertive framework to explain Israel's systematic wars. Specifically, to counter its defensive claims and situate its aggression within a broader settler-colonial project in Palestine.

## **See what people are saying about *Gaza in Context*:**

"*Gaza in Context* is a superb film accompanied by an excellent teaching guide with seminal articles on the various aspects of the subject, discussion questions, reading list and bibliography. Not only does the 20- minute- film provide the essential facts necessary for an understanding of the problem it helps the viewer understand the context, history and nature of the Israeli policy that brought the Gaza Strip to where it is today. It does this without committing the common error of treating Gaza in isolation from the rest of Palestine but helps explain the consistency in the Israeli policy over the years and throughout Palestine while focusing on its implications and manifestations for Gaza. The film ends with a *cri de Coeur* to all of us to do what we can to bring an end to what the film convincingly argues is not a natural but a human-made disaster, and save Gaza from continuing to be a zone of death."-- **Raja Shehadeh**, Palestinian lawyer, novelist, political activist, affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists, and a founder of the human rights organization Al-Haq.

"*Gaza in Context* is a fantastic educational instrument, conveying in 20 minutes what it would take most people a lifetime to learn. It gives an accurate and visually brilliant portrayal of the tragedy that has befallen not only Gaza, but the entire Palestinian people."--**Dr. Richard Falk**, Professor Emeritus of International law, Princeton University, former United Nations Special

Rapporteur to the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

"I did not think it was possible to examine in 20 minutes what *Gaza in Context* does with such compelling clarity: Israeli policies toward Gaza and Palestine, which are inseparable; the core problems affecting Gaza and the deliberateness of the policies that have led to Gaza's disablement; Gaza's centrality in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and some common myths surrounding Gaza and the history of the conflict overall, which are straightforwardly debunked. An immensely valuable teaching tool, the film's power also lies in its fundamental humanity, a heartfelt entreaty to end the oppression and violence so that all people in this tortured part of the world may aspire to a future in which their children can flourish."--**Dr. Sara Roy**, senior research scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, co-chair of the Middle East Seminar, and co-chair of the Middle East Forum at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University.

"Israel's deliberate fragmentation of the Palestinian people and their land for the past 70 years has also fragmented the Palestinian narrative and struggle for rights. This is just one reason why it is vital that efforts to stop and reverse Israel's colonization project adopt a holistic framework of analysis. *Gaza in Context* does just that: It zeroes in on Israel's repeated assaults against the besieged strip but then broadens out to show how Israel's attacks on Gaza are part of a consistent plan against the entire Palestinian people, a plan that from day one has sought to minimize the number of Palestinians in historic Palestine and maximize the number of Israeli Jews. The 20-minute film and accompanying educational materials succinctly provide the missing context in so many accounts of the conflict. It is an excellent entry point for the many thousands who are beginning to support Palestinian rights and an important refresher for others that have been involved in the movement for longer. Spread the word!" --**Nadia Hijab**, Executive Director, Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network

"Gaza in Context is an excellent educational resource that places Israel's ongoing attacks on Palestinians in Gaza in their proper political context, that of settler colonialism, resistance to such colonialism and the Palestinian struggle to stay alive. In 20 minutes, this film debunks many of the Israeli-perpetuated myths — myths that have been conveniently adopted by others — by focusing on facts. The various articles and discussion questions accompanying the film serve as essential tools for those wishing to learn more."-- **Diana Buttu**, Palestinian lawyer, analyst and former advisor to the PLO.

"*Gaza in Context* should be required viewing for everyone, including those familiar with the situation in Palestine. Powerful, informative, and persuasive, Noura Erakat delivers a fusillade of facts with concision and passion, obliterating in twenty minutes some three decades of media misinformation about Israel's occupation of Palestine. An effective teaching tool, irrespective of one's political position."-- **Robin D. G. Kelley**, Professor of History and African American Studies, UCLA.

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