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EDITORIAL

The Return of the Palestinian Question in the Arab World and Beyond

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Abstract: The article introduces the main themes that the special issue tackles and provides several insights on the impact of the October 7 attacks and Israeli retaliation. There are three broad themes emerging from the findings. First is the religious rhetoric to a place of considerable prominence in the conflict. This is true for both sides and although there is of course a significant power asymmetry in the relationship, the centrality of God's will in speeches and declarations give the participants a maximalist position which it becomes difficult to de-escalate. The second aspect is changing patterns of mobilization both inside and outside Israel/Palestine. In this context, the prominent role of individual mobilization stands out. Finally, the article examines the way in which political and social movements rationalise their strategies and behaviours.

KEYWORDS: religious rhetoric, rationality, mobilization, Israel, Palestine

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1. Introduction

“The Question of Palestine,” to use the expression of the French historian Henry Laurens (2024), as well as the successive Arab–Israeli wars, most notably those of 1948, 1967, and 1973, and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict more specifically, have long generated an abundant literature, whether academic or intended for a broader readership, and this in several languages. The interest in the Palestinian question, beyond its tragic topicality, is closely connected to our long-term research on the Arab world and on Islamist movements, which have consistently and resolutely addressed and engaged with it (Seniguer, 2018; Cavatorta and Elgie, 2010).

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive survey in a vain attempt at exhaustiveness: first, because the bibliography is virtually innumerable; second, because the ambition of this special issue is more modest, focusing primarily on the aftermath of October 7 and the attacks carried out in southern Israel by commando units of the military wing of Hamas, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, together with elements of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and factions of the Palestinian far left—not to mention Gaza civilians who seized the opportunity of the temporary collapse of the security barrier separating Gaza from Israeli territory to pour through the breach and act alongside more seasoned militants and fighters. The Israeli response to the war crime committed by Hamas has been absurdly disproportional and it has led to a genocidal war against Palestinians (OHCHR, 2024). Despite both sides committing war crimes, the conflict currently underway is profoundly asymmetric and can hardly be qualified as a war. Israel exercises effective, albeit uneven and contested, control over land, sea, and air between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea: direct control in the West Bank, military and security control over Gaza and East Jerusalem, all underpinned by international recognition and the constant political, security, and military support of the world's foremost power. By contrast, the Palestinian Territories are fragmented (lacking territorial continuity), Gaza has been completely isolated since the unilateral blockade imposed by Israel in 2007, and the West Bank is under constant assault from increasingly numerous and violent settlers, accompanied by the ongoing construction of further settlements deemed illegal under international law—bringing the number of Jewish Israelis present there to over 730,000, according to official figures from August 2025 (European Union, 2025).

The attacks of October 7, as sudden as they were bloody, produced two immediate consequences, some of which continue to reverberate in both time and space with acute and lethal effects. The first, chronologically, was the death, sometimes in extremely violent circumstances, of more than 1,200 people, and the taking of 251 hostages, some of whom died in captivity, while others were released during truces concluded between Israel and Hamas (November 1, 2023, lasting about ten days; November 24–30, 2023; January 19–March 18, 2025), in exchange for temporary pauses in hostilities, humanitarian aid entering Gaza, and the release of Palestinian prisoners, some of whom had been held without trial and in extremely harsh conditions in Israeli prisons for years. The other, far more dramatic, consequence has been the death—as of the time of writing, with numbers still evolving—of 70,000 Palestinians, according to figures established [between October 7, 2023, and June 30, 2025] in the scientific journal *The Lancet* (Jamaluddine et al., 2025). In a publication dated August 21, 2025, the British daily *The Guardian* reported that more than 50,000 Palestinians had died since the beginning of the Israeli military and ground offensive, of whom 83% were civilians, that is, noncombatants.¹

So-called asymmetric wars—whose primary definition can be the war of the weak against the strong—prove to be particularly lethal, all the more so in the case of the war waged by the State of Israel, equipped with a professional army and reserves, armed with heavy and ultra-sophisticated weaponry against a sub-state or para-state organization, Hamas's armed wing, which lacks such equipment but benefits from intimate knowledge of the terrain and experience in urban warfare, within one of the most densely populated territories on earth. The lethal nature of the Israeli military's repeated bombardments lies precisely in the fact that the Gaza Strip, with its 6,000 inhabitants per km², measures only 365 km²—roughly equivalent to Detroit, Michigan (370 km²; ~1,778 inhabitants/km²), New Orleans, Louisiana (350 km²; ~1,000 inhabitants/km²), the Isle of Wight in southern England (380 km²; 371 inhabitants/km²), or the French territory of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon (242

¹ The article is available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2025/aug/21/revealed-israeli-militarys-own-data-indicates-civilian-death-rate-of-83-in-gaza-war?utm_

km²; 24 inhabitants/km²). These comparisons illustrate the immense vulnerability of Gaza's population, which nonetheless continues to be held co-responsible by Israel's governing elites and by several political actors in Western Europe and North America for the horrific actions of Hamas's armed wing.

Without denying the gravity and scope of the devastation in Gaza—both material and human—nor the warrants issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on November 21, 2024 against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his then Minister of Defense, Yoav Gallant, for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the war in Gaza in violation of international and humanitarian law, but also against Palestinian leaders of the Islamist organization—Mohammed Deif, Yahya Sinwar, and Ismail Haniyeh, all assassinated or executed by Israel for their role in the October 7 attacks—this special issue seeks to address the Palestinian question in the aftermath of those events. We are fully aware of the considerable difficulty involved in addressing the events of October 7 and their ongoing repercussions at the time of finalizing this special issue, given the epistemological risks they entail and the partisan scrutiny the language employed faces. The political disputes around the word genocide are a case in point despite the clear pronouncements of international legal bodies. On the one hand, the very notion of “event” (Farge, 2002) is complex to grasp within the historical and social sciences, as it is imbued with a multiplicity of actors' perceptions and sensibilities, themselves situated differently within the social space and often in antagonistic relation to one another. On the other hand, from this perspective, the major risk would be to lapse into presentism—that is, the “omnipresence” or “tyranny of the present” (Hartog, 2003). We believe that we have managed to circumvent, or at least to sidestep, this pitfall through the approaches we have adopted. The articles combine quantitative and qualitative approaches, while taking into account the *longue durée*, from both sides of the stage, as it were—Palestinian and Israeli—through contributions drawing upon the resources of the social sciences in their diversity: history, information sociology, Islamic studies, and political science. It is also does so mindful that the dynamics of the conflict are unfortunately far from unique both historically and in contemporary times. What is unique though are the public interest and mobilization the conflict generates with all its attendant polarization. Several themes emerge from the contribution to this special issue, and they illustrate changes and continuities in the ways in which political and social actors – from individuals to non-state organizations to states – structure, perceive and hope to shape the conflict.

2. Religious rhetoric

There is a rather broad consensus that the conflict, much like other conflicts that have plagued the region (Lai, 2006), is about the control of the land in what amounts to colonial dynamics and is therefore driven by material interests with a nationalist tinge (Khalidi, 2021; Guyer, 2023; Frisch and Sandler, 2004) or by conflicting identities not necessarily linked to religion (Wagemakers et al., 2024), although some recognise that religion is a factor because it can be instrumentalized in the service of the nationalist cause (Webman, 2019). Some research though points to religion playing an autonomous important part, if only to ensure a degree of in-group cohesion and out-group exclusion (Inbari, 2017), preventing therefore an already difficult compromise (Reiter, 2010). This is in part because what were thought of as fundamental characteristics of the two societies have not proved as lasting or rooted, allowing therefore political actors to affirm the centrality of a religious identity increasingly linked to a civilizational discourse.

For one, the democratic nature of the state of Israel never really reflected the reality on the ground for Palestinians with Israeli citizenship (Ghanem, 2016). The importance of full political rights accorded to them since the establishment of the state and their ability to use them in some circumstances to influence the political

trajectory of the country – the election of Ehud Barak to the post of prime minister in 1999 – should not be underestimated, but it should not serve either to argue that they enjoy full citizenship, particularly when Arab parties are always virtually excluded from government through a “*conventio ad excludendum*” (Barreñada, 2020). In fact, well before the harsh turn to the right of the Israeli political system and the decision to pass a basic law referring to the country as the state of the Jewish people in 2018, Uri Davis had already labelled Israel an apartheid state for its treatment of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship (1987), never mind the ones in the Occupied Territories, whose second-class status was condemned even by former US President Jimmy Carter (2007). Even though Jewishness does not equate with Judaism as a religion, it is increasingly difficult to see how such Jewishness can be reconciled with the liberal-democratic rights of all citizens within the state when Palestinians with Israeli citizenship are marginalised because of religion – whether Islam or Christianity. The sharp turn to the right in the Israeli political system (Shindler, 2015) and the rise of settler religious movements over the last few decades (Newman, 2005; Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde, 2020) have shifted fundamentally the mainstream Israeli discourse about Palestinian citizens of Israel and the ones in the occupied territories on a terrain once the preserve of a small ultrareligious nationalist minority (Fleischmann, 2025).

For its part, in the Palestinian camp, the nationalist struggle always had a religious dimension to it but was hardly dominant given the traditional influence of leftist politics (Leopardi, 2020) and the leadership position of several prominent Christian Palestinians in the liberation movement (Abu Eid, 2022). However, since the rise of Hamas throughout the 1990s, the arrival of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (Alhaj et al, 2014), the strong links with other Islamist movements across the region as well as with Iran, and the decline of the left, the Palestinian struggle has acquired a much greater religious flavour with acts of violence routinely justified through religious lenses.

The relevance and centrality of the religious rhetoric have nothing but increased over the recent past in both camps and it has fully re-entered the picture following the October 7 attacks and the Israeli retaliation. Thus, there is a case for religious symbolism and rhetoric to be taken more seriously and given a much more central place as a framing device in strategies driving actors on both sides (Seniguer, 2025). In harking back to Huntington’s work (1996), the clash is, for the two sides, civilizational and within each ‘civilization’ religion is a fundamental aspect insofar as God has given the land to only one ‘civilization’. The rhetoric of the clash of civilizations is moreover widely embraced by Benjamin Netanyahu and his messianic far-right allies, arguably in terms even stronger, if possible, than those employed by Hamas. This emerges quite clearly in El Sakka’s contribution, in which the author analyses the rhetoric Israeli politicians and officials employ to frame the enemy and the conflict. What stands out is of course a colonialist approach that is unfortunately not unique to Israel – it has characterised the colonial speech since inception. This rhetoric is also replete with grand declarations about moral superiority, divine rights and civilizational mission. Far from being contested and challenged from within, the Israeli press, as Perelman’s article discusses, contributes to spread it and solidify it, again unsurprisingly. The Israeli press has done precisely what always occurs in most wars and even more so in wars when the very survival of the state and society is said to be at risk: rallying around the flag and contributing to dehumanization of the enemy irrespective of its status of combatant or non-combatant (Steuter and Wills, 2010). As Ridge’s contribution also confirms, the growing illiberalism of Jewish Israeli public opinion does nothing but deepen the religious undertones of the conflict, particularly because such illiberal tendencies precede the events of October 7 (Gidron, 2023).

When it comes to the Palestinians, Belhaj, in his article analysing the speeches of the Hamas military spokesperson, finds that the anti-colonial stance is nourished entirely by religious rhetoric. In fact, the very structure of the speeches and declarations to explain the Palestinian struggle, the operations being carried out

and the broader strategy of the movement follow the Friday's sermons. This goes beyond what most analysts of Hamas, albeit not all (Litvak, 2010), detected before October 7, when religion was indeed central to its discourse, but not necessarily all-encompassing (Klein, 2007; Gunning, 2007; Baracksky, 2014; Dunning, 2015) and far from being the only driving force of the movement's actions, as it appears to be currently. When looking at anti-colonial resistance more broadly, this is also unsurprising (Sour, 2016; Krause, 2021), although the use of religion in the Palestinian case might be more problematic or paradoxical insofar as not all Palestinians are Muslim, as mentioned earlier. The outcome of this return though is a further hardening, if possible, of already entrenched positions, and the continuation of violence, which, at least in the short-term, is favourable to Israel given the power asymmetry in place. In his contribution, Lucas employs the term 'maximalism' to illustrate the post-October 7 fundamental incompatible stances between the two nationalist projects where absolute victory over the other – and therefore the disappearance of the other – is what God commands. It can be convincingly argued that the return of the religious rhetoric and symbolism (Seniguer & Zouaoui, 2020) is simply an instrument of mobilization and a framing device destined to arise passions in communities where religious language still carries a considerable degree of value and that therefore those 'offering' religion are moved by other interests and simply instrumentalize it. It is also often underscored that nationalism and religion are not necessarily in a binary opposition (Baldi, 2022). This might indeed be all true, but the findings in this special issue as well as in other recent analyses (Nicolle-Hasid and Bulle, 2025) suggest that there is genuine belief on the part of several social and political actors in the divine struggle they are conducting, and this might represent a further obstacle to the end of the conflict, unless one believed that the wiping out of one side is an objective worth striving for.

3. Patterns of mobilization

Public opinion, in Israel and Palestine as well as abroad, has always been a significant factor in the way in which the conflict was framed, understood, perceived and conducted, as political actors employed several strategies to ensure support for their own cause or undermine the opponent's (Shamir and Shikaki, 2005; Harsgor, 2024). The relevance of public opinion has only grown in importance since October 7, as narratives surrounding the conflict have invested all media spaces and the public discourse in the region and beyond (Pew Research Center, 2025). Some of the contributions in this special issue have thus paid attention to how individuals have positioned themselves and mobilised. Three aspects emerge from their findings.

First, when reading Ridge's article on Israeli democratic backsliding, it appears quite clearly that the terrain for the genocidal actions the Israeli government undertook in Gaza had been prepared for quite some time before October 7. The figures in Ridge's article provide a rather convincing explanation as to why, at least thus far, Israeli public opinion has backed the military assault on Palestinians. In fact, this is taking place at a time when the view of the Israeli Jewish population vis à vis the Palestinians and their rights, no matter if they are Israeli citizens or not, has turned to illiberalism (Laruelle, 2022; Nyssönen and Metsälä, 2020). Like several other societies across the globe, Israeli citizens are more than ready to sacrifice individual rights – the rights of others naturally – if some sort of higher goal justifies it (Svolik, 2019). The debate surrounding immigration and the dehumanization of immigrants is one example of this (Esses et al., 2023) across several countries and continents, as the Examples of Tunisia and Japan illustrate. In this respect, the dehumanization of Palestinians is not necessary the product of the war crimes Hamas committed on October 7, but it is a process that has been building for some time. For El Sakka, this process is inherent in the Zionist project. Indeed, the creation of the state of Israel and Zionism always carried an element that disregarded the rights of Palestinians;

it is an inevitability in any such political project whether in Israel/Palestine (Dana, 2024) or elsewhere (Wolfe, 2006), although, the framework of settler colonialism has been heavily criticized when applied to the Israeli case (Kirsch, 2024). Irrespective of the validity of the framework, the fact remains that the complete disregard for Palestinians was at times forcefully and widely contested within Israel out of genuine preoccupation for what Israel and Israelis actually stood or should stand for (Burg, 2018; Beinart, 2020), or out of strategic interests (Beilin, 1999). This preoccupation was not limited to intellectuals or elites, but among large sectors of society as well, who propelled to power politicians and parties sharing, at least rhetorically, such sensibility. Although the overall outcome might have been disappointing and certainly criticisable, it still demonstrated a heated debate within Israel itself where profound divisions did indeed exist about how Palestinians should be viewed, dealt with and ‘engaged’ (Aronoff, 1989; Gordon, 2008). Such divisions might still superficially exist, as the debate over the conduct of the assault in Gaza shows, but they do not seem to be as deep or clear when it comes to the broader issue of Palestinians and the occupation. As Ridge convincingly sums up: “democratic support is decoupled from support for liberal values. Jewish Israelis are more divided on their support for civil liberties and individual rights. Ethnic and religious minorities’ rights are the least supported in these samples. That is most evident when it comes to whether Arab Israelis may participate in politics. Despite Arab Israelis’ Israeli citizenship, many Jewish Israelis would see them excluded from government. This flies in the face of those respondents’ other, more inclusive, attitudes and their thinking of themselves as supporting democracy. As such, these respondents could be thought of as *democrats with adjectives*.” Admittedly this refers to Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, but the polls that appear regularly in Israeli media confirms that such hostile views, if not even more so, apply to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories as well, as El Sakka notes in his article.

A second aspect of mobilization focusing on Palestinians has seen the return to prominence of the freedom fighter, a figure which had begun to forcefully emerge in Lebanese refugee camps in Lebanon in the early to mid 2000s as a jihadi warrior in opposition to the soft stance by the Palestinian Authority and, in some ways, of Hamas too (Rougier, 2007). Such figure has been fully reprised by Hamas, although through a more nationalistic frame rather than one linked to international jihadism. In his article Sbeih examines the Palestinian camp as being divided by two rationalities. One is the rationality of defeat and its ideal-type figurehead is the technocrat who has accepted and internalised the colonial condition. This figure simply attempts to ‘make life a bit better’ for Palestinians knowing full well that armed resistance is futile and detrimental to Palestinians who have to accommodate Israeli control. His individual contribution resides in the attempt to promote the economic and social development of Palestine in collaboration with the international community in a context where Israel dictates the rules because that it is the best one can do given the circumstances. The literature underlining the problematic relationship between international aid and the de-politization of the Palestinian issue is nearly two-decade long (LeMore, 2008; Challend, 2008), but Sbeih goes beyond such criticism to argue that the figure of the technocrat has been more recently challenged successfully by the return to prominence of the freedom fighter, who is the product of the rationality of liberation. Such figure embodies the anti-colonial struggle because he refuses to bow to Israeli constraints and through his personal example spurs others to do the same, although that might not be his immediate goal, which is instead to live a life that is unbowed. In Sbeih’s article this individual dimension of sacrifice explains why mobilization and activism can and should take place outside of established organised movements, particularly outside the structures of the Palestinian Authority, which, like in Martin Kear’s contribution, is increasingly perceived by Palestinians as inefficient, corrupt and irrelevant. In Kear’s article the centrality of the criticism the PA on the part of ordinary Palestinians does not represent a novelty as such criticism has existed for quite some time (Khalidi,

2009; Cavatorta and Elgie, 2010), but Kear discusses it as a pre-condition to the rationality of liberation within which Hamas has been operating strategically for nearly four decades.

A third aspect that illustrates how patterns of mobilization have shifted has to do with the way in which citizens outside of Palestine have mobilised or attempted to mobilise and how they have framed/understood the conflict. As mentioned earlier, global public opinion has always been a significant aspect, with scholarship paying particular attention to US public opinion and its views on Israel, Palestine and the conflict (Krosnick and Telhami, 1995; Gilboa, 2023). There is still a considerable focus on this today, but in a more multipolar world, what the ‘others’ think has also become relevant (Dong et al., 2025) and this is what the articles by Turlione, Magued and Fiore/Mancosu/Pessina in this special issue speak to. In his article, Turlione focuses on the attitudes and beliefs of Arab citizens before and after October 7. His findings suggest that the Palestinian question had not disappeared from public view following the 2011 Arab uprisings or, more precisely, that this was true at the popular level, where Palestine was always considered an Arab issue that needed to be solved. The profoundly negative attitudes that Arab citizens across regimes have of Israel following October 7 are not surprising, but in isolation do not tell us the full story. When examining such figures longitudinally, it emerges that opposition to Israel is not as widespread or intense when Arab leaders can justify a more conciliatory attitude towards Israel with progress on the Palestinian issue. When that happens, attitudes towards Israel soften. When, on the contrary, such progress does not materialise then citizens harden their stance towards Israel, suggesting therefore that hostility towards Israel is not necessarily always dictated by anti-Semitism. A further surprising finding though in Turlione’s article is that Arab citizens see the United States as the most significant threat to peace and stability in the region rather than Israel. In this respect October 7 and its aftermath seem to show that Arabs ‘expect’ Israel to be a threat, but believe that the US has betrayed its role of honest broker one too many times, propelling the country to the status of threat number one.

Magued’s article for its part addresses the chasm between authoritarian ruling elites and public opinion in the region, focusing on the case of Egypt. As a country with a peace deal with Israel, Egypt embodies the contradictions that affect most Arab countries, particularly after the Abraham Accords. Such regimes are forced to repress open and ‘independent’ support for Palestinians among their people to avoid spillover effects that might endanger their survival, but such repression further distances them from ordinary citizens and therefore they must ensure that they ‘direct’ the protests to contain them.

How the conflict is perceived outside of the region, notably in Europe, has also acquired greater significance. In a rather strange twist that has been examined elsewhere well before October 7 (Hawley, 2015; Filc and Pardo, 2021) and often by Israeli scholars (Pardo and Touval, 2024), the Israeli government under Netanyahu has found support for its military campaign and for its political vision in the European right and far-right, which historically displayed profound anti-Semitic tendencies. It is therefore leftist parties and movements that have been accused of anti-Semitism for their defense of Palestinian rights and their criticism of Israel. In their examination of the Italian case however, Fiore, Mancosu and Pessina find that those on the left who are highly critical of Israel clearly differentiate between Israelis and Jews and therefore do not display anti-Semitic tendencies. They also find that those on the right who are critical of Israeli policies towards the Palestinians display rather strong antisemitic tendencies. This should not be surprising, but it counters the current arguments about mobilization on Palestine on the left as being about anti-Semitism. This puts to bed that notion that at the extremes of the political spectrum is where antisemitism can be found. One wonders though how long this situation will hold, as the Israeli assault on Gaza is generating considerable unease within the left and might indeed give way to increased anti-Semitism.

4. Movements and strategies

There are two distinct prominent questions that analysts have tried to answer following the October 7 attacks. The first one is about the motivations that pushed Hamas to attack Israel in such fashion (Byman and Holtz, 2023), knowing full well that the Israeli retaliation would have been swift and incredibly hard for the people of the Strip and for the West Bank too. The second question had to do with the impact this new phase of the conflict would have had.

Martin Kear's contribution and, in part, Sbeih's article address the first question, and they offer a powerful analysis of the rationale that drove Hamas to carry out the October 7 attacks. Although from different theoretical perspectives, both authors insist on the ability of the movement to change rationally and strategically. They both argue that the deficiencies and supine stance of the Palestinian Authority have contributed greatly to ensure the return of the figure of the freedom fighter, which has left the field open to Hamas to 'capture' the imagination of Palestinians through the elevation of such a figure, which responds to the movement's reading of their environment and reality. Kear and Sbeih offer instead a very different explanation, based on the rationality and strategy, to the ones focusing on mindless, ancestral and antisemitic hatred. Kear highlights specifically how "a series of critical junctures between 2017 – 2023 narrowed the range of viable alternate paths for Hamas to resist the increasing political, military, and societal asymmetry between Palestinians and Israelis. This asymmetry caused Palestinians to fear that the growing permanence and normalisation of Israel's occupation made the prospects of a state chimerical." What clearly emerges therefore is a process of rational decision-making dictated by the movement's interpretation of the current political reality. The Israeli retaliation has also been the product of rational decision-making dictated by the long-term goals members of the government always had and by the opportunity to achieve them, by taking the "gloves off" in dealing with Palestinians;² a stance that public opinion supported. In her article Pereleman examines how such public support is intimately related to how the Israeli press contributes to the country's war effort in adhering to the belief that there is something inherently animalistic and out of the bounds of civilization in the way in which the attacks were conceived and carried out, leading therefore to the conclusion that not only the actual perpetrators, but all Gazans – when not all Palestinians – should be dealt with once and for all, justifying all actions undertaken by the Israeli Defence Forces.

In his contribution Samir Amghar addresses the second question, focusing on the impact that the latest phase of the conflict has had on Salafi movements across the region. While others have examined how movements linked to the Muslim Brothers reacted (Gunning and Valbjorn, 2025), Amghar concentrates on the declarations and (in)actions of the most important Salafi scholars across the Arab world. What emerges appears superficially as a glaring paradox. Despite the return of the religious rhetoric and the use of Islam on the part of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to both justify their actions and mobilise support, Salafis have overwhelmingly and clearly condemned what Hamas did and, if anything, they intensified their criticism of the Palestinian movements responsible for October 7 accusing them of believing in and implementing the idea of liberation through armed struggle. In tracing the history of Salafi attitudes to the Palestinian question, Amghar shows that the Palestinian cause is indeed nearly universally supported in the Arab world, but that the means through which liberation should be achieved and at what cost create significant divisions. Thus, important religious scholars and intellectuals did not and not see it as a cause worth promoting and defending

² Interview with the Israeli retired general Retired general Herzi Halevi, available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/12/israeli-ex-commander-confirms-palestinian-casualties-are-more-than-200000>

on current terms. Although Salafi scholars express sympathy for ordinary Palestinians and argue in favour of humanitarian solidarity, no political support is offered. Whether beholden to Gulf monarchs who have to balance support for the Palestinians and geostrategic interests (the alliance with the US, the thawing of relations with Israel to counter Iran) or attached to the idea that Palestinians must become more genuine Muslims before undertaking a national liberation struggle, Salafi preachers and scholars' positions run counter to what one might have expected. This illustrates two points. First, the hold that Gulf monarchs have on the Salafi intellectual sphere and how the latter is still committed to support them is a significant factor in the current conflict. Second, the return to religious rhetoric and symbolism that Palestinian actors have increasingly relied on is subject to religious contestation and does not ensure unanimous support across the region, particularly when, as Salafis believe, supposedly secular objectives – the liberation of Palestine – are not subsumed to religious imperatives.

5. Conclusion

It is always difficult to write about ongoing phenomena that have not yet found some sort of resolution, and it is even more complicated in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is one of the thorniest and most politicised issues in global politics. It is however imperative for researchers to engage precisely with this sort of questions to ensure that explanations, no matter how partial, are put forth and trends and tendencies identified. This special issue has attempted modestly to shed light on some of the consequences that the attacks of October 7, 2023, have had on Israel, Palestine, the Middle East and North Africa and beyond. Far from us the intention to identify October 7 as the beginning of the conflict, which needs to be placed in a much longer historical context and whose broad contours most certainly precede that date, as all contributors acknowledge. However, October 7 does represent a significant qualitative jump in the conflict and although its consequences cannot be measured now, there are already some insights on what some of them might be in the near future. From the return of religious rhetoric and symbolism to the actual scale of destruction and death and from the new patterns of mobilization emerging across world to the tactical and strategic choices political and social actors have made, there are theoretical and empirical contributions in this special issue, which enrich our knowledge of the conflict, whose dynamics, is worth repeating, are unfortunately not unique either historically or in contemporary times.

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