The Strength of a Network at Times of Crisis

Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network
Spring 2019 - Spring 2020
# Contents

I. The Strength of a Network: Al-Shabaka Turns Ten 3  
II. Original Analysis 4  
III. Impact of a Policy Brief 5  
IV. Policy Reach 6  
V. Outreach 9  
VI. The Al-Shabaka Network 10  
VII. Our Valued Supporters 11  
VIII. Financials 13
The Strength of a Network: 

Al-Shabaka Turns Ten

Nadia Hijab
President of the Board of Directors

During the period covered by this report (Spring 2019 to Spring 2020) we have witnessed the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating impact on the life, health, and the very survival of millions of people who, even if they have escaped the virus so far, have seen their livelihoods melt away. Amongst the hardest hit are the poor and vulnerable, the refugees and migrants. And, as we put the finishing touches on this report, our hearts are with our dear Beirut, which is only just recovering from the devastating explosion at the port in August.

The pandemic is not the only once-in-a-century event witnessed in 2019 and 2020. We have also seen Israel’s attempt to definitively crush the Palestinians’ century-old struggle for self-determination, land, and rights, with the full support of the United States administration. The US has taken its violations of international law to a new level by recognizing the annexation of occupied territory and pushing other nations to do the same. In the absence of effective leadership, Palestinian civil society and their allies around the world are mounting a strong response, beginning to turn the tide in Europe and registering increasing success in the US by influencing the public, media and progressive policymakers.

The Spring 2019 to Spring 2020 time frame also marks the 10th anniversary of Al-Shabaka’s founding. It was in 2009 that a small group of us came together with a vision for a virtual Palestinian network that we incorporated on 11 August 2009 and launched on 10 April 2010. We pulled in Palestinian analysts and thinkers from around the world to diagnose the severe political, social, and economic problems facing the Palestinian people, and to propose realistic policy alternatives. It is a source of pride that so many of our members are now young, upcoming voices.

Thanks to those early steps and continuous, determined institution building, Al-Shabaka is in a position to help respond to both crisis and opportunity. We have streamlined our operations to the maximum extent possible. We have identified expertise and published analysis directly related to health, including COVID-19, to rights, and to leadership, among other critical areas. And we have disseminated our recommendations through new mediums such as our online “policy labs” as well as by ramping up our social media presence and expanding our email lists.

The growth of Al-Shabaka’s impact and reach befits an organization marking the 10th anniversary of its launch. To take just a few examples from this report our 2019 US Policy Fellow’s research on climate change and Palestine broke new ground and was widely discussed and emulated. At the regional level, our policy analysts posed the question “Who Lost the Arabs” well before Israeli-Gulf relations went public. Moreover, our staff and network members are now in high demand by policymakers, think tanks, and civil society. Our Senior Palestine Policy Fellow, in particular, has become a first port of call for diplomats and journalists visiting Palestine.

Al-Shabaka owes its ability to stay the course to so many: Its hard-working and creative staff team; the dedicated co-founders and past and present board members; our prolific and supportive member network; and – last but by no means least – the many generous donors and supporters without whom none of this would have been possible. Thank you all.
Over the past year, we released 26 publications, addressing timely topics such as climate change and natural resources, healthcare and social security, international law, indigeneity, collective punishment, systematic torture and more.
Impact of a Policy Brief

The one-year impact of Zena Agha’s policy brief, “Climate Change, the Occupation, and a Vulnerable Palestine”
Senior Palestine Policy Fellow Yara Hawari was invited to Jerusalem to address the Women in International Security Network, a group of women diplomats and policy influencers. She presented on women’s rights, NGOs, and normalization. Yara also gave numerous briefings to diplomats, including a private briefing for the incoming Spanish Consul General in Jerusalem. She also briefed the head of the Carter Center’s Conflict Resolution Program and a visiting delegation from The Elders in Ramallah.

Throughout the year, Program Advisor Alaa Tartir spoke at high-level seminars and meetings at the NATO Defense College in Rome, addressing issues related to Palestine-Israel within the broader conflict dynamics of the Middle East. He also participated in a workshop on challenges, opportunities, and ways forward for Palestinians organized by the Brookings Doha Center and LSE Middle East Center in London. Alaa chaired a session at the 18th Geneva International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights on environmental injustice in Palestine.

US Policy Fellow Zena Agha gave a briefing to the Middle East cataloguers at the British Library in London, presenting her research on mapping Palestine. She was also a panelist at the Palestine Center in Washington, DC, for a discussion on art and resistance, and delivered a guest lecture to undergraduate students on Palestine and climate change at Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania.

Zena’s successor, US Policy Fellow Halah Ahmad, spoke in an Al-Shabaka Policy Lab, discussing the evolution of electoral and especially Democratic party politics on Palestine. Halah also gave a talk to members of the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) and National Students for Justice in Palestine (NSJP) on the linkages between racial justice organizing in the US and Palestine advocacy, and the evolution of effective messaging.
Al-Shabaka Fellows Yara Hawari and Zena Agha organized a two-week itinerary of advocacy meetings and talks in Brussels and Berlin with various policymakers and civil society actors, including members of the European Parliament, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NGOs working on Palestinian rights, members of the German Green Party, and Al-Shabaka Germany-based members. The purpose of the meetings was to share the work of Al Shabaka, to highlight the pressure points for accountability for violations of international law within the EU system and the German government, and to strategize on furthering Palestinian rights. Where appropriate, Yara and Zena focused on key policy asks and messages for policymakers to take forward. Overall, the advocacy trip was successful, including in presenting young Palestinian voices in spaces where they are not often heard.

US Policy Fellow Zena Agha also presented her research on the Kyl-Bingaman Amendment to the US Congress twice in 2019.

The amendment, passed in 1997, limits the quality and availability of satellite imagery of Palestine-Israel, hindering the work of archaeologists, environmentalists, geographers, and humanitarians. Arguing that the amendment poses obstacles not only for the preservation of cultural heritage, but also for holding Israel to account for land grabs, home demolitions, and settlement activity, Zena called on policymakers to re-evaluate the legislation.

US Policy Fellow Halah Ahmad joined a group of Palestinian organizations to meet with 12 US Congressional offices to discuss ending US military aid to Israel, including shoring up H.R. 2407, a bill sponsored by Minnesota Democratic Representative Betty McCollum that prohibits US taxpayer funding for the military detention of children by any country, including Israel.
Policy Reach

Expanding Our Policy Reach and Impact

Senior Palestine Policy Fellow Yara Hawari published an op-ed in Foreign Policy on Israeli politics and the maneuverings of the Joint List, and wrote for The Guardian on how US President Donald Trump’s “Deal of the Century” tramples on Palestinian rights. Yara was also a go-to source for the media on COVID-19 in Palestine. Program Advisor Alaa Tartir penned a piece on the detrimental effects of Oslo on Palestinian rights for Opinio Juris and an article on the pitfalls of the Palestinian leadership’s focus on statehood rather than decolonization for the Arab Reform Initiative and Chatham House.

US Policy Fellow Zena Agha published an op-ed in the New York Times on the lamentable state of the Palestinian Authority. Her March 2019 policy brief for Al-Shabaka on Palestine and climate change was particularly well read, with impact seen in the media and among civil society actors and policymakers throughout the year following its publication (please see the illustration on Page 5 for more details). US Policy Fellow Halah Ahmad published an op-ed in Open Democracy on the callousness of US policy in the Gaza Strip and Iran during COVID-19, and wrote for Common Dreams on the Democratic presidential candidates’ stances on racial justice.
Outreach

55 op-eds published in global media outlets

Al-Shabaka analysis cited in over 100 media articles and 24 scholarly publications

5 policy labs engaged nearly 400 viewers

#35 in the world’s “Best Think Tank Networks” category in the 2019 Global Go To Think Tank Index report

4.3 million people reached through our content on Facebook and Twitter
The Al-Shabaka Network

Al-Shabaka welcomed 8 new members this year, bringing our network to 188 members, based in 20 countries across 6 continents.
Our Valued Supporters (2019)

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Financials 2019

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