SHAPING THE DISCOURSE: A YEAR OF VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT & IMPACT

Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network
Spring 2020 - Spring 2021
This is the last letter I write in my capacity as president of Al-Shabaka, which gives me the opportunity to reflect not just on the organization’s work, which is well laid out in the following pages, but also on this moment.¹

For me, this moment is - as are all others - captured in a passage in Emile Habibi’s brilliant novel, The Pessoptimist, with its hangman’s humor and picaresque style. Early in the novel, when Israel is “cleaning up” in the days after the Nakba, the anti-hero Saeed is standing next to the military governor, watching him chase a mother and child out of ’48 Palestine. Saeed says:

At this point, I observed the first example of that amazing phenomenon that was to occur again and again… For the further the woman and child went from where we were…the taller they grew. By the time they merged with their own shadows in the sinking sun they had become bigger than the plain of Acre itself. 'The governor still stood there awaiting their final disappearance… Finally he asked in amazement, “Will they never disappear?”

No, we will never disappear.

Palestinians have been crushed countless times and still our people rise, despite Israel’s overweening strength and most of our own leaders’ near-terminal errors. The Palestinian people have shown remarkable resilience, sheer stubbornness, and boundless creativity in identifying new forms of struggle. In my view, the Palestinian cause is also helped by the fact that the Zionist movement embarked on its settler colonial enterprise when this was beginning to go out of fashion. They might still have succeeded, but Israel developed a fatal addiction to colonization that spotlights its original sin in ever-brighter beams.

Powerful Palestinian resistance has surged to the fore twice in just this past decade, much of it using the tactics of peaceful struggle. The first was the Great March of Return, which arose in besieged Gaza -
one of the most devastated places on earth - on 30 March 2018. The youth organizers called attention to the siege of Gaza and the Palestinian right of return. They also underscored the unity of the Palestinian people by selecting that date: 30 March 1976 was Land Day, the general strike by the Palestinian citizens of Israel against the government’s plans to confiscate thousands of dunams of their land.

Yet Israel and the Trump administration were convinced the Palestinians had become so disempowered that they could deal a death blow to the national movement. The US moved its embassy to Jerusalem, pulled its financial support of UNRWA, the Palestinian refugee agency, shuttered the PLO office in Washington D.C., and formally recognized Israeli sovereignty over Syria’s Golan Heights. For its part, Israel signed the so-called Abraham Accords with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain under US auspices, further undermining official Arab support for Palestinians.

But no, we will never disappear. Just months ago came the second uprising of this decade, sparked during Ramadan in May 2021 by Palestinian Jerusalemites and others determined to protect the Al-Aqsa compound as well as to prevent evictions from the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. Fears over Israeli threats to Al-Aqsa led to fierce fighting between Hamas and Israel. Despite massive destruction in Gaza, Hamas held its ground, gaining in popularity amongst Palestinians. The Palestinian citizens of Israel also rose up, drawing attention to the history of their dispossession and the reality of state violence and institutional discrimination in Israel, as did Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Across historic Palestine, they reaffirmed their peoplehood and their rights, willingly paying the very high price for doing so. And this time, too, many of the activists are youth.

One of the stunning shifts of this moment has been the breakthrough in the barriers to the Palestinian voice and narrative, which is key to our struggle. Palestinians, many of them young analysts and activists, were suddenly in great demand by the mainstream media worldwide. They rose to the occasion, writing powerful pieces, their voices respected and no longer twisted to fit into the false narrative of “both sides.” And, a wonder to behold, the Palestinian people became “bigger than the plain of Acre.”

We – the past and present board and staff, as well as members and supporters of Al-Shabaka – can take pride that our organization and many of our policy analysts have been at the front lines of this discourse shift. Indeed, from day one Al-Shabaka’s analysis has contributed to the dramatic change we see today, and many of its pieces are as valid now as the day they were first published.

This is an organization that punches above its weight. We launched Al-Shabaka in 2010, and by 2015 our budget was still below $200,000. Yet throughout these years we managed to publish regularly in both English and Arabic, and our policy analysts gave talks throughout the US, Europe, and the Arab world. Our Op-Eds were featured in multiple languages and often in the mainstream media. Our analysis was translated by interested partners into French and Spanish and occasionally other languages. We gave many young analysts a foothold through Al-Shabaka, and they in turn enriched the organization with their insights. We’ve come a long way.

One last memory for this letter. In 1982 there was a demonstration in London, where I was then based, to protest the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and siege of Beirut. We marched through the streets chanting: “Generation after generation until Palestine Liberation.”

A new Palestinian generation is now taking up the struggle alongside the rest of us. I have faith it will do so with humility, courage, and creativity. I hope we will see liberation soon but I am not worried, for we will never disappear.

Nadia Hijab
Honorary President
Responding to a Crisis: Al-Shabaka’s COVID-19 Coverage

Since the global spread of COVID-19, Al-Shabaka members have been at the forefront of analysis, drawing critical insights about the pandemic and its multi-level impact on the Palestinian people across the globe.

Al-Shabaka Publications

Palestine and COVID-19: Lessons for Leadership During Times of Crisis
by Fadi Quran, Tahani Mustafa

Gaza Between Occupation, Division, and COVID-19: Confronting Total Collapse
by Ali Abdel-Wahab

In Palestine, COVID-19 Meets the Israeli Occupation
by Yara Hawari

Occupation in the Time of COVID-19: Holding Israel Accountable for Palestinian Health
by Yara Asi
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Online Events

- **Coronavirus in Palestine: Confronting the Vulnerability of Indigenous Bodies**
  
  Al-Shabaka Policy Lab with Yara Asi, Osama Tanous, and Nur Arafeh

- **COVID 19 Under Apartheid**
  
  Yara Hawari and Diana Buttu with Yousef Munayyer for the Arab Center - Washington DC

- **Surveillance and the Fight Against COVID-19 in Israel and Around the World**
  
  Marwa Fatafta and Nadim Nashif alongside Sharon Abraham-Weiss and Peter Beinart for Foundation for Middle East Peace
Al-Shabaka released 21 original publications throughout the past year. In addition to our COVID-19 coverage, analysts confronted such diverse topics as Israel’s crackdown on Palestinian cultural institutions in Jerusalem, YouTube’s violation of Palestinian digital rights, the impact of Lebanon’s multi-layered crisis on Palestinian refugees, and Netanyahu’s political survival.
We also published *Reclaiming the PLO, Re-Engaging Youth*, our first long-form report, with contributions from five authors collectively tackling the question of how to reclaim the PLO as well as models of leadership and accountability that may reinvigorate the Palestinian political sphere.
A Year of Online Engagement

“In some ways Al-Shabaka is the most impressive of these online efforts. [Co-]founder Nadia Hijab and her colleagues designed it from the get-go as a global, all-virtual policy think tank for Palestinians. Unsurprisingly, during a year in which nearly all the world’s think tanks have had to go online, Al-Shabaka has really shone.”

— Helena Cobban, Boston Review

Launched Rethinking Palestine, Al-Shabaka’s new podcast series

12 policy labs hosted throughout the year

30 Participations in webinars with civil society organizations

20 diplomatic missions briefed in Palestine

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

46 citations in academic journals and scholarly texts

34 op-eds published and nearly 50 appearances in global media outlets

10.2 million people reached through Al-Shabaka’s social media channels
Institutional Achievements

In the past year, we added 8 new members to our policy network, with expertise in culture, international law, the environment, public health, and security, among other fields.

Rania Muhareb
Tahani Mustafa
Ziad Al-Qattan

Asmaa AbuMezied
Dana Farraj
Tahani Mustafa
Ziad Al-Qattan

Weeam Hammoudah

Mariam Barghouti
Amal Nazzal
Institutional Achievements

Internship & Mentorship Programs

We launched two new programs to nurture current students and junior analysts: A summer internship and Gaza mentorship. Summer interns are current students or recent graduates from around the world who support Al-Shabaka’s research and writing efforts on a range of topics related to Palestinian policy. Our Gaza mentorship program focuses specifically on nurturing emerging analysts in Gaza under the guidance of Al-Shabaka staff, fellows, and advisors. Both programs provide participants with the opportunity to strengthen their policy analysis skills and gain insight into the workings of a Palestinian think tank.

Aya Alghazzawi: Al-Shabaka’s 2021 Gaza Mentee

Aya works as an English language teacher for the Palestinian Ministry of Education based in Gaza and is a contributor to We Are Not Numbers. Her articles have been published by Mondoweiss, the Palestinian Project on Medium and Salaamedia. She earned a bachelor’s degree in English language and literature and a diploma in general education from Al-Aqsa University.
Expanding Our Team

Our staff team is based across four continents. Together, we continue to prioritize building-up the institution and streamlining our operations to ensure efficacy, wellbeing, and impact.

Institutional Achievements

Nadim Bawalsa
Commissioning Editor

Megan Driscoll
Managing Director

Mohammed Hamarsha
Communications Specialist

Yara Hawari
Senior Analyst

Sainatee Suarez
Finance & Administration

Alaa Tartir
Program Advisor

Laura Thomas
Development Manager
Financials

FY2020 Revenue

Foundations, 70%

Individuals, 29%

Membership, 1%

Foundations, 70%
Financials
FY2020 Expenses

Program, 75%
Administrative, 19%
Fundraising, 6%
## Our Valued Supporters (2020)

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- Muwaffak and Rana Bbib
- William Driscoll
- Tareq Emaitrah
- Manal Fakhoury
- Fares Ghandour
- John and Henrietta Goelet
- Frederick Hadeed
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- Aline Batarseh
- Sarona Bedwan
- Fred Behringer
- Mary Bennett
- Susan Blain
- Ellen Brorsky
- Zeina Chahid
- Christopher Clarke

### Foundations
- Foundation for Middle East Peace
- Heinrich Böll Stiftung
- Open Society Foundations
- Rockefeller Brothers Fund
- Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
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(2020)

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Lorraine Guay
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Harry Gunkel
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Dyala Hamzah
Zaha Hassan
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