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Inaction over the treatment of Palestine impacts the entire world

Two recent books highlight the wide-reaching effects of Israel's occupation, writes **Borzou Daragahi**



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(Reuters)



As Morocco surged through World Cup rounds, beating team after team before falling to France in the semi-finals, it celebrated each victory not only by flying the distinctive red flag of the north African nation, but by raising the banner of Palestine – a **cause that many had considered forgotten**, or at least fading, in the Arab world.

But as both the 2022 World Cup and recent events in Israel and across historic Palestine have shown, the Palestinian issue is very much alive, potent, and capturing the imaginations of people across the world.

A pair of forthcoming books also show that both the historical and the present-day consequences of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict remain highly relevant.

Since the signing of the Abraham Accords under US president Donald Trump, Israelis and their advocates have assumed that they could achieve their dream of regional integration with the wider Arab world without addressing the Palestinian question. This despite the fact of Israel's brutal 55-year occupation of land recognised by the world as Palestinian; that history haunts Israel itself, where Palestinians and Arabs make up one-fifth of the population.

Palestinian aspirations, and the horrors and tragedies suffered by both sides in the conflict, have come to the fore again in a fresh and disturbing resurgence of violence. As usual, the bloodshed pits Israeli troops and settlers against Palestinians, some of whom are increasingly responding to the indignities and abuses of occupation by turning to aggression.

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The cycle is familiar and depressing. Deadly Israeli raids on Palestinians prompt attacks on Israeli civilians, which in turn spark pogrom-like violence by settlers against Palestinian civilians, who become angrier and **more prone to extreme actions** themselves.

Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government – the most extreme in Israel's history – threatens to further **exacerbate the violence** and plunge both sides into more despair. Both Palestinians and Israelis fear new rounds of displacement at the hands of settlers and soldiers in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Right-wing ministers such as **Itamar Ben-Gvir** and Bezalel Smotrich openly call for an Israel without Arabs, and are far more interested in building houses on the West Bank than building on the Abraham Accords to expand business and diplomatic ties with the United Arab Emirates and Morocco.

Israel was founded in 1948, amid a war celebrated by Israelis as a triumph and lamented by Palestinians as a disaster for their people. But a forthcoming book by scholar Oren Kessler traces the cycle of violence that defines Israeli-Palestinian relations back to a 1930s uprising that he argues shaped the current dynamic of violence, suffering and mistrust.

Palestine 1936, due to be released on 15 February, describes how an uprising that unified Palestinians against both Jews and the British empire ultimately led to the destruction of the Palestinian social life and the first wave of displacement from the country. “The revolt to end Zionism had instead crushed the Arabs themselves, leaving them crippled in facing the Jews' own drive for statehood a decade on,” writes Kessler, who describes himself more as a writer and journalist assembling a general-interest account than a scholar attempting to produce a definitive work.

The three-year uprising had another impact. Even before the trauma of the Holocaust, it shook Jews living in historic Palestine and convinced them that they would never be able to obtain the acquiescence of the Arab people to their national project.

For Kessler, the uprising cast a shadow that continues to linger eight decades later. For readers, it is a reminder that even as the conflict has been studied, written about, and discussed to the point of exasperation by scholars, journalists, activists and politicians, it continues to surprise us

with new dimensions. At least two other books have also come out in recent years about the 1930s revolt.

Another new book to be published later this year shows how the occupation has affected, and continues to affect, the world beyond the strip of land between the Mediterranean and the River Jordan.

The Palestine Laboratory, by investigative journalist Antony Loewenstein, draws on documents and interviews to show how the weapons, technology and tactics developed by Israel to subjugate the Arabs living under occupation are being exported across the world – meaning, in effect, that Israel is profiting financially from the pain and suffering of Palestinians.

“This book goes into detail about how the occupation is the ideal marketing tool,” writes Loewenstein in the introduction.

Israel’s exports include technology used in mass surveillance and electronic espionage, such as the Pegasus software sold to Saudi Arabia and used to spy on slain journalist Jamal Khashoggi, which was developed by former Israeli spies who sharpened their technical knowhow by keeping tabs on Palestinians.

Israeli firms profit from selling border-surveillance technology that is used globally to block migrants and refugees, shaping the discourse and the strategies used by the West to address these hot-button issues.

“The similarities between the US-Mexico border and Israel’s wall through the occupied territories are growing by the year,” Loewenstein writes. “One informs and inspires the other, with tech companies always looking for new ways to target and capture perceived enemies.”

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In addition to the spying tools, Loewenstein documents how Israel trains law enforcement officers across the world to use its aggressive policing tactics against minority populations – including in American cities. The same knee-on-neck hold **used by Minnesota cop Derek Chauvin to suffocate George Floyd** is commonly employed against Palestinians, Loewenstein notes.

Successive world leaders have tried to launch initiatives to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When that fails, they often opt to downplay or ignore it. But the events of recent weeks show the infeasibility of that stance. The political and human costs of inaction over the occupation increase by the day; and not just for Israelis and Palestinians, but for people across the world.



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