

Current Concerns

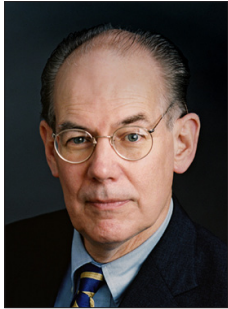
The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility,
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English Edition of Zeit-Fragen

Death and destruction in Gaza

What Israel is doing in Gaza to the Palestinian civilian population –
with the support of the Biden administration – is a crime against humanity

by John J. Mearsheimer



John J. Mearsheimer
(picture Wikipedia)

some Americans were on the right side of history.

I do not believe that anything I say about what is happening in Gaza will affect Israeli or American policy in that conflict. But I want to be on record so that when historians look back on this moral calamity, they will see that

whom are children and women. The claim that Israel is going to great lengths to minimize civilian casualties is belied by statements from high level Israeli officials. For example, the IDF spokesman said on 10 October 2023 that “the emphasis is on damage and not on accuracy.” That same day, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant announced: “I have lowered all the restraints – we will kill everyone we fight against; we will use every means.”²

Moreover, it is clear from the results of the bombing campaign that Israel is indiscriminately killing civilians. Two detailed studies of the IDF’s bombing campaign – both published in Israeli outlets – explain in detail how Israel is murdering huge numbers of civilians. It is worth quoting the titles of the two pieces, which succinctly capture what each has to say:

“‘A Mass Assassination Factory’: Inside Israel’s Calculated Bombing of Gaza.”³

“The Israeli Army Has Dropped the Restraint in Gaza, and the Data Shows Unprecedented Killing.”⁴

Similarly, the “New York Times” published an article in late November 2023 titled: “Gaza Civilians, Under Israeli Barrage, Are Being Killed at Historic Pace.”⁵

Thus, it is hardly surprising that the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, said that “We are witnessing a killing of civilians that is unparalleled and unprecedented in any conflict since” his appointment in January 2017.⁶

Deliberate starvation

Second, Israel is purposely starving the desperate Palestinian population by greatly limiting the amount of food, fuel, cooking gas, medicine, and water that can be brought into Gaza. Moreover, medical care is extremely hard to come by for a population that now includes approximately 50,000 wounded civilians. Not only has Israel greatly limited the supply of fuel into Gaza, which hospitals need to function, but it has targeted hospitals, ambulances, and first aid stations.

Defense Minister Gallant’s comment on 9 October captures Israeli policy: “I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly.”⁷ Israel has been forced to allow minimal supplies into Gaza, but the amounts are so small that a senior UN of-

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What Israel is doing in Gaza to the Palestinian civilian population – with the support of the Biden administration – is a crime against humanity that serves no meaningful military purpose. As *J-Street*, an important organization in the Israel lobby, puts it, “The scope of the unfolding humanitarian disaster and civilian casualties is nearly unfathomable.”¹

Let me elaborate.

Unprecedented killings of civilians

First, Israel is purposely massacring huge number of civilians, roughly 70 percent of

Bethlehem, Christmas 2023

“While the world is celebrating, our children are under the rubble”

This year, the Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem were cancelled for obvious reasons.

It is impossible to celebrate while genocide is being committed against our people in Gaza when children are being massacred in such a brutal way. All heads of churches in Jerusalem have decided that the Christmas celebrations should consist mainly of prayers, without a festive character. We thought about what Christmas means to us as Palestinians and what message we want to send to the world today.

That’s how we came up with the idea of a nativity scene in the middle of rubble that resembles a destroyed house in Gaza, with the baby Jesus lying in the rubble. We have seen so many pictures of children being rescued from the rubble.



Jesus lying in the rubble. (picture ma)

And for us, this is the message that Jesus identifies with our suffering. He

stands in solidarity with those who are oppressed. He is in solidarity with those who are suffering. So it is a message of comfort and hope for us. But it is also a message to the world: This is what Christmas looks like in Bethlehem. This is what Christmas looks like in Palestine, with the occupation, with the destruction, with the bombing of children.

Whereas the world celebrates, our children are under the rubble. Whereas the world celebrates, our families are displaced and their homes are destroyed. This is Christmas for us in Palestine.

Rev. Dr Munther Isaac of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem

Source: Representation of the State of Palestine in Austria

"Death and destruction in Gaza"

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ficial reports that "half of Gaza's population is starving." He goes on to report that, "Nine out of 10 families in some areas are spending 'a full day and night without any food at all'."⁸

Inhuman rhetoric

Third, Israeli leaders talk about Palestinians and what they would like to do in Gaza in shocking terms, especially when you consider that some of these leaders also talk incessantly about the horrors of the Holocaust. Indeed, their rhetoric has led *Omer Bartov*, a prominent Israeli-born scholar of the Holocaust, to conclude that Israel has "genocidal intent."⁹ Other scholars in Holocaust and genocide studies have offered a similar warning.¹⁰

To be more specific, it is commonplace for Israeli leaders to refer to Palestinians as "human animals", "human beasts," and "horrible inhuman animals."¹¹ And as Israeli President *Isaac Herzog* makes clear, those leaders are referring to all Palestinians, not just Hamas: In his words, "It is an entire nation out there that is responsible."¹² Unsurprisingly, as the *New York Times* reports, it is part of normal Israeli discourse to call for Gaza to be "flattened," "erased," or "destroyed."¹³ One retired IDF general, who proclaimed that "Gaza will become a place where no human being can exist," also makes the case that "severe epidemics in the south of the Gaza Strip will bring victory closer."¹⁴ Going even further, a minister in the Israeli government suggested dropping a nuclear weapon on Gaza.¹⁵ These statements are not being made by isolated extremists, but by senior members of Israel's government.

Of course, there is also much talk of ethnically cleansing Gaza (and the West Bank), in effect, producing another Nakba.¹⁶ To quote Israel's Agriculture Minister, "We are now rolling out the Gaza Nakba."¹⁷ Perhaps the most shocking evidence of the depths to which Israeli society has sunk is a video of very young children singing a blood-curdling song celebrating Israel's destruction of Gaza: "Within a year we will annihilate everyone, and then we will return to plow our fields."¹⁸

Systematic destruction

Fourth, Israel is not just killing, wounding, and starving huge numbers of Palestinians, it is also systematically destroying their homes as well as critical infrastructure – to include mosques, schools, heritage sites, libraries, key government buildings, and hospitals.¹⁹ As of 1 December 2023, the IDF had damaged or destroyed almost 100,000 buildings, including entire neighborhoods that have been reduced to rubble.²⁰ Consequently, a stunning 90

percent of Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians have been displaced from their homes.²¹ Moreover, Israel is making a concerted effort to destroy Gaza's cultural heritage; as NPR reports, "more than 100 Gaza heritage sites have been damaged or destroyed by Israeli attacks."²²

Humiliations

Fifth, Israel is not just terrorizing and killing Palestinians, it is also publicly humiliating many of their men who have been rounded up by the IDF in routine searches. Israeli soldiers strip them down to their underwear, blindfold them, and display them in a public way in their neighborhoods – sitting them down in large groups in the middle of the street, for example, or parading them through the streets – before taking them away in trucks to detention camps. In most cases, the detainees are then released as they are not Hamas fighters.²³

Evil role of the Biden administration

Sixth, although the Israelis are doing the slaughtering, they could not do it without the Biden administration's support. Not only was the United States the only country to vote against a recent UN Security Council resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, but it has also been providing Israel with the weaponry necessary to wage this massacre.²⁴ As one Israeli general (*Yitzhak Brick*) recently made clear: "All of our missiles, the ammunition, the precision-guided bombs, all the airplanes and bombs, it's all from the U.S. The minute they turn off the tap, you can't keep fighting. You have no capability [...]. Everyone understands that we can't fight this war without the United States. Period."²⁵ Remarkably, the Biden administration has sought to expedite sending Israel additional ammunition, by-passing the normal procedures of the Arms Export Control Act.²⁶

More killings in the West Bank too

Seventh, while most of the focus is now on Gaza, it is important not to lose sight of what is simultaneously going on in the West Bank. Israeli settlers, working closely with the IDF, continue to kill innocent Palestinians and steal their land. In an excellent article in the *New York Review of Books* describing these horrors, *David Shulman* relates a conversation he had with a settler, which clearly reflects the moral dimension of Israeli behavior toward the Palestinians. "What we are doing to these people is actually inhuman," the settler freely admits, "But if you think about it clearly, it all follows inevitably from the fact that God promised this land to the Jews, and only to them."²⁷ Along with its assault on Gaza, the Israel government has markedly increased the

number of arbitrary arrests in the West Bank. According to *Amnesty International*, there is considerable evidence that these prisoners have been tortured and subjected to degrading treatment.²⁸

As I watch this catastrophe for the Palestinians unfold, I am left with one simple question for Israel's leaders, their American defenders, and the Biden administration: have you no decency? ●

¹ <https://jstreet.org/press-releases/moment-of-truth-for-israels-government/>

² Both quotes can be found in: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-12-09/ty-article-magazine/highlight/the-israeli-army-has-dropped-the-restraint-in-gaza-and-data-shows-unprecedented-killing/0000018c-4cca-db23-ad9f-6cdae8ad0000>

³ https://www.972mag.com/mass-assassination-factory-israel-calculated-bombing-gaza/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

⁴ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-12-09/ty-article-magazine/highlight/the-israeli-army-has-dropped-the-restraint-in-gaza-and-data-shows-unprecedented-killing/0000018c-4cca-db23-ad9f-6cdae8ad0000>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/25/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-death-toll.html>

⁶ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2023-11-20/secretary-generals-press-conference-unep-emissions-gap-report-launch>

⁷ https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/defense-minister-announces-complete-siege-of-gaza-no-power-food-or-fuel/

⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67670679>. Also see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/11/opinion/international-world/us-government-gaza-humanitarian-aid.html>

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/10/opinion/israel-gaza-genocide-war.html>. Also see: <https://www.nybooks.com/online/2023/11/20/an-open-letter-on-the-misuse-of-holocaust-memory/>

¹⁰ <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/global-currents/statement-of-scholars-7-october/>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fr24GCdGyM>

¹² <https://news.yahoo.com/israeli-president-says-no-innocent-154330724.html#:~:text=It%20is%20an%20entire%20nation,It%27s%20absolutely%20not%20true>

¹³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/15/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-war-rhetoric.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/10/opinion/israel-gaza-genocide-war.html>; <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2023-11-23/ty-article-opinion/premium/giora-eilands-monstrous-gaza-proposal-is-evil-in-plain-sight/0000018b-f84b-d473-afb-f9eb09af0000>; <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/11/influential-israeli-national-security-leader-makes-the-case-for-genocide-in-gaza/>

¹⁵ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/far-right-minister-says-nuking-gaza-an-option-pm-suspends-him-from-cabinet-meetings/>

¹⁶ <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/10/israeli-think-tank-lays-out-a-blueprint-for-the-complete-ethnic-cleansing-of-gaza/>

¹⁷ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-11-12/ty-article/israeli-security-cabinet-member-calls-north-gaza-evacuation-nakba-2023/0000018b-c2be-dea2-a9bf-d2be7b670000>

¹⁸ <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/watch-israeli-children-sing-we-will-annihilate-everyone-gaza>

¹⁹ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-war-gaza-public-library-destroyed-bombing>; <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231211-report-israel-destroyed-192-mosques-in-gaza-strip/>; <https://www.npr.org/2023/12/09/1218384968/mosque-gaza-omari-israel-hamas-war>

²⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67565872#>

²¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/israel-gaza-attacks-north-south-us-veto-un-ceasefire-resolution/>

²² <https://www.npr.org/2023/12/03/1216200754/gaza-heritage-sites-destroyed-israel>

Criticising Israel's policies is not anti-Semitism

In an open letter, Jewish writers warn of a dangerous conflation

A group of Jewish writers drafted this letter after seeing an old argument gain new power: the claim that critiquing Israel is antisemitic. Editors at a corporate-owned magazine were prepared to publish the letter, but their lawyers advised against it. The writers share this letter in solidarity with those who continue to speak out in support of Palestinian freedom.

We are Jewish writers, artists, and activists who wish to disavow the widespread narrative that any criticism of Israel is inherently antisemitic. Israel and its defenders have long used this rhetorical tactic to shield Israel from accountability, dignify the US's multibillion-dollar investment in Israel's military, obscure the deadly reality of occupation, and deny Palestinian sovereignty. Now, this insidious gagging of free speech is being used to justify Israel's ongoing military bombardment of Gaza and to silence criticism from the international community.

We condemn the recent attacks on Israeli and Palestinian civilians and mourn such harrowing loss of life. In our grief, we are horrified to see the fight against antisemitism weaponised as a pretext for war crimes with stated genocidal intent.

Antisemitism is an excruciatingly painful part of our community's past and present. Our families have escaped wars, harassment, pogroms, and concentration camps. We have studied the long histories of persecution and violence against Jews, and we take seriously the ongoing antisemitism that jeopardises the safety of Jews around the world. This October just marked the five-year anniversary of the worst antisemitic attack ever committed in the United States: the eleven worshipers at *Tree of Life – Or L'Simcha* in Pittsburgh, who were murdered by a gunman who espoused conspiracy theories that blamed Jews for the arrival of Central American

“We are Jewish writers, artists, and activists who wish to disavow the widespread narrative that any criticism of Israel is inherently antisemitic. Israel and its defenders have long used this rhetorical tactic to shield Israel from accountability, dignify the US's multibillion-dollar investment in Israel's military, obscure the deadly reality of occupation, and deny Palestinian sovereignty. Now, this insidious gagging of free speech is being used to justify Israel's ongoing military bombardment of Gaza and to silence criticism from the international community.”

migrants, and in so doing, dehumanised both groups. We reject antisemitism in all its forms, including when it masquerades as criticism of Zionism or Israel's policies. We also recognise that, as journalist *Peter Beinart* wrote in 2019, “Anti-Zionism is not inherently antisemitic – and claiming it is uses Jewish suffering to erase Palestinian experience.”

We find this rhetorical tactic antithetical to Jewish values, which teach us to repair the world, question authority, and champion the oppressed over the oppressor. It is precisely because of the painful history of antisemitism and lessons of Jewish texts that we advocate for the dignity and sovereignty of the Palestinian people. We refuse the false choice between Jewish safety and Palestinian freedom; between Jewish identity and ending the oppression of Palestinians. In fact, we believe the rights of Jews and Palestinians go hand-in-hand. The safety of each people depends on the other's. We are certainly not the first to say so, and we admire those who have modeled this line of thinking in the wake of so much violence.

We understand how antisemitism and criticism of Israel or Zionism have been conflated. For years, dozens of countries have upheld the *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's* working definition of antisemitism. Most of its eleven examples of antisemitism regard comments on the state of Israel, with some open to interpretation enough that they limit the scope of acceptable critique. What's more, the *Anti-Defamation League* classifies Anti-Zionism as antisemitism, despite the misgivings of many of its own experts. These definitions have scaffolded the Israeli government's deepening relationships with far-right, antisemitic political forces, from Hungary to Poland to the United States and beyond

– endangering Jews in diaspora. To counter these sweeping definitions, a group of scholars of antisemitism published the *Jerusalem Declaration* in 2020, offering more specific guidelines for identifying antisemitism and distinguishing it from criticism and debate around Israel and Zionism.

Accusations of antisemitism at the slightest objection to Israeli policy have long allowed Israel to uphold a regime that human rights groups, scholars, legal analysts, and Palestinian and Israeli organisations have called apartheid. These accusations continue to cast a chilling effect across our politics. This has meant political suppression in Gaza and the West Bank, where the Israeli government conflates the very existence of Palestinian people with Jew hatred the world over. In propaganda aimed internally at its own citizens and externally toward the West, the Israeli government asserts that Palestinian grievance is not about land, mobility, rights, or freedom, but instead, antisemitism. In the last weeks, Israeli leaders have continued to instrumentalise the history of Jewish trauma to dehumanise Palestinians. Meanwhile, Israelis are arrested or suspended from their jobs for social media posts defending Gaza. Israeli journalists fear consequences for criticising their government.

Characterising all critiques of Israel as antisemitic also conflates Israel and all Jewish people in the popular imagination. In the last two weeks, we've seen Democrats and Republicans alike gate-keep Jewish identity on the basis of support for Israel. A vague letter signed by dozens of public figures and published on October 23 parroted President *Biden's* positioning of himself as an advocate for Jewish people based on his support for Israel. When

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“Death and destruction in Gaza”

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²³ <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/israel-says-groups-of-hamas-militants-surrendered-amid-gaza-fighting-7891bc22>

²⁴ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-vetoes-un-security-council-resolution-demanding-immediate-gaza-ceasefire/>

²⁵ <https://www.jns.org/biden-is-the-primary-obstacle-to-israeli-victory/>

²⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/09/world/middleeast/us-israel-tanks-ammunition.html>

²⁷ <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2023/12/21/a-bitter-season-in-the-west-bank-david-shulman/>

²⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/israel-opt-horrifying-cases-of-torture-and-degrading-treatment-of-palestinian-detainees-amid-spike-in-arbitrary-arrests/>

Source: <https://mearsheimer.substack.com/p/death-and-destruction-in-gaza> of 12 December 2023; with kind permission of the author.

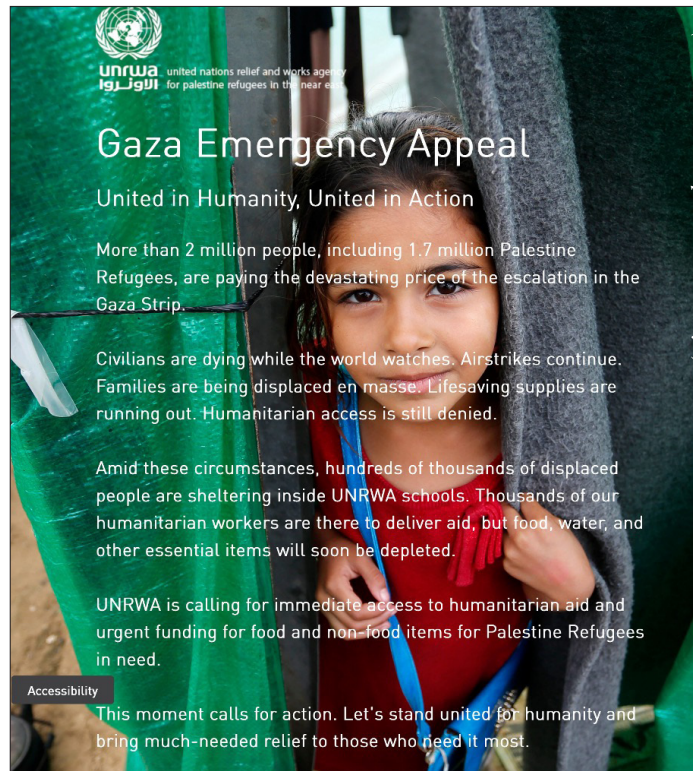
UNRWA's urgent assistance in the Gaza Strip

Neutral Switzerland is required here

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

The situation for the people of Gaza is so disastrous that even the USA recently admonished the Israeli government to avoid civilian casualties and to comply with international law. Vice President *Kamala Harris*: "Too many innocent Palestinians have been killed. Frankly, the scale of civilian suffering, and the images and videos coming from Gaza, are devastating."¹ Meanwhile, Prime Minister *Netanyahu* announced Israel's "Fight until Victory" and, after a few days of ceasefire, continued his massive bombing of the cities and infrastructure also of the southern part of the Gaza Strip. Most of the strip's residents now live there – if they are still alive – crowded together and under the worst possible conditions. The fact is: It would be easy for Washington to stop the murder, as Israel has been on the US drip for decades.

Along with the ICRC, UNRWA is the main humanitarian organisation trying to alleviate the suffering of the people of Gaza. UNRWA (*United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*) is the United Nations relief agency for Palestine refugees in the Middle East. According to a 2020 report by the Federal Council, Switzerland has been supporting the UNRWA since its founding in 1949, and in recent years with around 20 million francs per year.² And now, of all times, the Swiss parliamentarians discussed in their winter session (December 4–22, 2023) whether they want to delete the 20 million from the 2024 budget or leave it standing.



"No UN organisation is scrutinised as closely as we are"

The report by Swiss diplomat *Philippe Lazzarini*, Commissioner General of UNRWA, on 28 November 2023 in "Echo der Zeit" should actually bring everyone to their senses.

During the ceasefire that lasted several days, UNRWA was able to bring relief supplies to the site. But "*La situation est dés-*

espérée, the situation is desperate." He recently visited a UNRWA school in the Gaza Strip, where 35,000 people are currently housed in close quarters: "People lack everything. They lost everything and had to leave everything behind. They have lost their houses and apartments and have lost relatives. They no longer even own a blanket or a mattress. The hygienic conditions are

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"Criticising Israel's policies ..."

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the 92NY postponed an event with author *Viet Thanh Nguyen*, who had recently signed a letter calling for an end to Israel's attacks on Gaza, its statement began by forefronting its identity as "a Jewish institution." As others have observed, tools to historicise the October 7 attacks are seen as a repudiation of Jewish suffering rather than necessary to understand and end such violence.

The idea that all criticism of Israel is antisemitic extends a view of Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims as inherently suspect; agents of antisemitism until they explicitly say otherwise. Since October 7, Palestinian journalists have faced unprecedented suppression. A Palestinian citizen of Israel was fired from his job at an Israeli hospital for a *Facebook* post from 2022 that quoted the first pillar of Islam. European leaders have banned pro-Palestine protests and criminalised displays of the Palestin-

ian flag. In London, a hospital recently took down artwork by children from Gaza after a pro-Israel group claimed it made Jewish patients feel "vulnerable, harassed and victimised." Somehow, even artwork by Palestinian children was accompanied by a hallucination of violence.

US leaders have welcomed this chance to further conflate Jewish safety with unquestioning, unwavering military funding for Israel with no intention of making peace. On October 13, the US State Department circulated an internal memo urging officials not to use the language of "de-escalation/ceasefire," "end to violence/bloodshed," or "restoring calm." On October 25, Biden doubted the Palestinian death toll and called it the "price" of Israel's war. Such cruel logic will continue to foster both antisemitism and Islamophobia. The Department of Homeland Security is preparing for an expected rise in hate crimes against both Jews and Muslims – it has already begun.

For each of us, Jewish identity is not a weapon to wield in a fight for statist power but a fount of generational wisdom that says justice, justice, you shall pursue. *Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof*. We object to the exploitation of our pain and the silencing of our allies.

We call for a ceasefire in Gaza, a solution for the safe return of the hostages in Gaza and Palestinian prisoners in Israel, and an end to Israel's ongoing occupation. We also call on governments and civil society in the United States and across the West to stand up against the repression of support for Palestine.

And we refuse to allow such urgent, necessary demands to be suppressed in our names. When we say never again, we mean it.

Signed by over 2000 US-American Jewish authors, artists and activists (as of 13 December 2023)

Source: <https://www.nplusunemag.com/online-only/a-dangerous-conflation/> of 2 November 2023 with many links to the various statements

"UNRWA's urgent assistance ..."

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absolutely deplorable. You have to wait for hours to go to the toilet. The people I spoke to repeatedly burst into tears and said they felt completely powerless, impoverished, humiliated. They have the impression that they are stripped from their dignity."

Suspicious were also expressed in parliament that Hamas could benefit from UNRWA aid supplies. Philippe Lazzarini clearly rejected this on *Radio SRF*: "No aid will be diverted from the UNRWA relief supplies." He made it clear to the USA and various European countries that UNRWA works without intermediaries, that it coordinates the distribution of aid on a daily basis with the Israeli military authorities and discloses in detail where it transports things: "So we are very transparent and we are consistent checked. No UN organization is scrutinized as closely as we are."³

Quick shot in the National Council based on unsubstantiated allegations

Given the current humanitarian plight of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, it would be ill-advised for Switzerland to remove its contribution to UNRWA from the budget. Nevertheless, on 11 December the National Council rejected the 20 million francs budgeted by the Federal Council for 2024 for UNRWA with 116 votes to 78. This was based on an individual appli-

cation submitted just a few days before. A quick shot to the disadvantage of the suffering civilian population.⁴

The justification for the application was based primarily on reports from the NGO *UN Watch*, which has been monitoring the activities of the UN and its organisations from an Israeli perspective since 1993. *UN Watch* criticises that Israel is often treated unfairly, which violates fundamental principles of the UN Charter.⁵ In this context, *UN Watch* has been spreading one-sided "reports" about UNRWA for years. They use teachers in their schools who "glorify Hamas terrorists as martyrs or even call for violence against Jews" in class, the applicant quotes in the National Council. Whether and to what extent this accusation is true remains unclear.

But what's important now is preventing further mass deaths in the Gaza Strip. Apparently, some people don't realize that the employees of humanitarian organizations such as UNRWA or the ICRC do not divide people into a friend-enemy schema, but rather that every human life is precious to them. They provide their help neutrally and impartially to the people who need it. This comes at the risk of their own lives: more than 100 UN aid workers have been killed since the start of the war.

Council of States: For Switzerland as the depositary state of the Geneva Conventions, civilian victims are top priority

Unlike the National Council, three days later a narrow majority of the Council of States (23 against 21, with one abstention) approved the Swiss contribution of 20 million francs to aid for Palestine. Two excerpts from the Council of States debate on 14 December 2023:

Maya Graf (Green Party Baselland): "Switzerland has an enormous responsibil-

ity here. [...] This request for a reduction of 20 million francs is based on the allegations against UNRWA that were always in the air but could not be proven. [...]

We are not in a position here and now to really assess all of this, and if there are doubts about it, then those responsible at the FDFA must have the opportunity to comment on it. UNRWA, as you know, is headed by the Swiss Philippe Lazzarini. In recent weeks he has increasingly called for more funding to be made available to UNRWA. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is doing very important work in what we all know is a very, very difficult context; That's what he has been in the last few weeks with regard to the supply situation for the people in Gaza. Knowing all this, we should proceed cautiously and suspend the decision on the cuts today."

Isabelle Chassot (Die Mitte Fribourg): "To be clear: I don't know whether the allegations of closeness between UNRWA and Hamas are true. But what I know for sure is that what is happening in Gaza today is one of the worst humanitarian crises we have ever experienced, that the needs of the civilian population are immense and that Switzerland, as a depositary state of the Geneva Conventions, bases its policy on international law aligns. For them, civilian victims come first. Switzerland has also been supporting UNRWA for many decades."⁶ [Translation *Current Concerns*]

Swiss aid to Palestine comes to a halt

Unfortunately, on 18 December, the National Council went one better and rejected the contribution to UNRWA with 108 votes to 85. The Council of States, on the other hand, remained yes with a clear majority on December 19 (27 yes to 18 no). "We keep

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"UNRWA's mandate contributes to stability in the region" (Federal Council 2020)

mw. The Federal Council noted UNRWA's indispensable activities and Switzerland's humanitarian and neutral role in the Middle East in its media release of 14 October 2020 on its UNRWA report.

The Federal Council placed the significant expansion of its scope of activities, which is currently being criticized by some parliamentarians, in a historical context: "The history of UNRWA is closely linked to the Middle East conflict. As the conflict has not yet been resolved, UNRWA's mandate and area of activity have gradually evolved since the 1950s. Originally, the focus was on humanitarian aid. Quasi-governmental tasks in areas such as education and health were soon added." In response to the accusation that UNRWA takes on a "too political a role", the Federal Council recalled that it works "in the

highly politicized environment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict". It emphasized "that UNRWA's mandate remains relevant and contributes to stability in the region".

Three years ago, the Federal Council clearly stated the task facing the international community and Switzerland, namely "that the issue of the Palestinian refugees must be resolved in a sustainable manner within the framework of a comprehensive negotiation agreement. Switzerland will continue to work for an end to the Middle East conflict."

This for the notebook of today's Federal Council and Parliament.

Source: "UNRWA: Review and outlook after 70 years". Report of the Federal Council of 14 October 2020 <https://www.news.admin.ch/news/message/attachments/63245.pdf> (emphasis *mw*)

South Africa's position on the war in Gaza

President Cyril Ramaphosa has today, 13 December 2023, met with the leadership of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) at the Presidential residence Mahlabisa Ndlopfu in Pretoria.

The SAJBD petitioned President Ramaphosa to namely

1. Restore full diplomatic recognition of Israel, including the re-opening of the South African embassy in Tel Aviv and providing assurances that the Israeli embassy in Pretoria will not be closed to enable the return of the Israeli Ambassador to South Africa;
2. Speak and/or act against the boycott of Israeli and Jewish businesses in South Africa;
3. Protect the South African Jewish community against anti-Semitic incidents and/or attacks.

President Ramaphosa reiterated the South African government position on the current conflict in Israel and Palestine that the South African government

1. Stands with the people of Palestine who have endured over 7 decades of apartheid type of brutal occupation;
2. Condemned the attacks carried out by Hamas on the 7th of October 2023 on Israeli citizens, including women and children;
3. Calls for all hostages to be returned;
4. Condemns the genocide that is being inflicted against the people of Palestine, including women and children,

through collective punishment and ongoing bombardment of Gaza;

5. Calls for the *International Criminal Court* to investigate all the atrocities and war crimes committed in Israel and Palestine and to hold all those responsible to account;
6. Calls for the immediate cessation of hostilities to allow for more humanitarian aid to flow into Gaza and;
7. Calls for the resumption of negotiations between Palestinians and Israel that will lead to a two-state solution along the 1967 internationally recognised borders with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

President Ramaphosa indicated that the South African diplomats based in Tel Aviv will remain in South Africa for consultations during the current state of conflict, however, the government will endeavor to make available all the necessary support that is required by South African citizens in need of assistance.

The President further emphasised the government's denunciation of anti-Semitic behavior towards Jewish people in South Africa, including the boycott of Jewish owned businesses, and Islamophobia. President Ramaphosa called on all South Africans to remain true to the tenets of the country's constitution.

All participants appreciated the opportunity to engage openly and frankly and committed to continue seeking solutions to the issues of concern that were raised

and to the devastating and intractable conflict in the Middle East.

Source: <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/president-ramaphosa-meets-south-african-jewish-board-deputies> of 13 November 2023

Letter to  the Editor

No end to the Middle-East conflict to be seen

The Hamas' attack is and was an unjustifiable catastrophe. The fact that this was not foreseen from Mossad, presumably the best-informed secret service, is hard to believe. The real causes for this underlying conflict simmering for many years will of course not be examined. Without this conflict there would also be no Hamas. It will never be solved because Israel has no interest in doing so. It was emphasised too many times that this is biblical and therefore Israeli's territory. UN sanctions have no influence as they are not enforced. As long as the Israeli Leaders are not ready for a just and fair solution, there will be no change. Without a state for the Palestinians, there will be no peace. For decades nothing has been done and now the Palestinians are forced out of their own country. First to the south, and when the Egyptians open the gates, there they are to disappear completely.

Werner Ritter, Schaffhausen

"UNRWA's urgent assistance ..."

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fighting!" a Councillor of States responded to my personal call for humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip. On 20 December the National Council insisted on its No for the third time (110 votes to 84). After the three-fold difference, both councils now approved the proposal of their unification conference by a majority in the final vote on December 21: "The contributions for humanitarian aid for the Middle East will be paid out in tranches. The foreign policy commissions of the Federal Assembly are consulted before payment is made. The Federal Council ensures that the financial resources, including supplementary loans, only benefit the suffering civilian population in the Middle East." At least it's a step in the right direction – the perseverance of the fighters for humanity is bearing fruit; some opponents reacted dissatisfied and voted no again.

"We believe the rights of Jews and Palestinians go hand-in-hand"

Note on the debate in the Swiss Parliament: If Palestinian teachers in UNRWA

schools criticise the hegemonic Israeli policies and the undignified treatment of the Palestinian population – who can blame them? To describe the outcry of those who have been oppressed for decades as "antisemitism" falls short. Antisemitism comes from Europe, not from the Middle East, and involves rejection and hatred of Jewish people. Criticism of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians, however, is not inherently antisemitic. However, it is racist when a member of the Israeli government describes the gagged people in the Gaza Strip as "animals". It always depends on the context and the wording.

Our task as citizens of Switzerland – or from wherever – must be to strive for the humane path. This is the path taken, for example, by the Israeli *Shai Doron*, who is building an indoor swimming pool for the Palestinian population in the middle of Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem – in friendly collaboration with the Palestinian *Wasim Elhaj*. "Others see problems, I see solutions," says Doron. "Doron's foundation worked on the plan for the indoor swimming pool for two years. He collect-

ed twenty million dollars in donations, convinced the city administration and received a building permit. In the summer of 2022, the excavators began digging in East Jerusalem in the Beit Hanina district."⁷

Finally, I would like to give the floor to the Jewish writers from the USA, who recently issued an appeal to the public: "It is precisely because of the painful history of antisemitism and lessons of Jewish texts that we advocate for the dignity and sovereignty of the Palestinian people. We refuse the false choice between Jewish safety and Palestinian freedom; between Jewish identity and ending the oppression of Palestinians. In fact, we believe the rights of Jews and Palestinians go hand-in-hand. The safety of each people depends on the other's. We are certainly not the first to say so, and we admire those who have modeled this line of thinking in the wake of so much violence."⁸

¹ "US Vice President Kamala Harris calls for restraint in view of Israeli attacks on Gaza". *Reuters* of 2 December 2023.

² "Bundesrat verabschiedet UNRWA-Bericht" (Federal Council adopts UNRWA report). *Media re-*

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Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Resolving the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

The current Palestinian-Israeli conflict has caused heavy civilian casualties and a serious humanitarian disaster. It is a grave concern of the international community. President *Xi Jinping* stated China's principled position on the current Palestinian-Israeli situation on a number of occasions. He stressed the need for an immediate ceasefire and ending the fighting, ensuring that the humanitarian corridors are safe and unimpeded, and preventing the expansion of the conflict. He pointed out that the fundamental way out of this lies in the two-state solution, building international consensus for peace, and working toward a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question at an early date.

Pursuant to the *Charter of the United Nations*, the Security Council shoulders primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and should thus play an active and constructive role on the question of Palestine. In this connection, China offers the following proposals:

1. *Implementing a comprehensive ceasefire and ending the fighting.* Parties to the conflict should truly implement the relevant UNGA and UNSC resolutions and immediately realize a durable and sustained humanitarian truce. Building on UNSC Resolution 2712, the Security Council, in response to the calls of the international community, should explicitly demand a comprehensive ceasefire and end of the fighting, work for deescalation of the conflict, and cool down the situation as soon as possible.
2. *Protecting civilians effectively.* The UNSC resolution demands in explicit terms that all parties comply with

their obligations under international humanitarian law, notably with regard to the protection of civilians. It is imperative to stop any violent attacks against civilians and violations of international humanitarian law, and avoid attacks on civilian facilities. The Security Council should further send a clear message on opposing forced transfer of the Palestinian civilian population, preventing the displacement of Palestinian civilians, and calling for the release of all civilians and hostages held captive as soon as possible.

3. *Ensuring humanitarian assistance.* All relevant parties must, as per requirements of the UNSC resolution, refrain from depriving the civilian population in Gaza of supplies and services indispensable to their survival, set up humanitarian corridors in Gaza to enable rapid, safe, unhindered and sustainable humanitarian access, and avoid a humanitarian disaster of even greater gravity. The Security Council should encourage the international community to ramp up humanitarian assistance, improve the humanitarian situation on the ground, and support the coordinating role of the United Nations as well as the *UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East* (UNRWA) in humanitarian assistance, and prepare the international community for supporting post-conflict reconstruction in Gaza.
4. *Enhancing diplomatic mediation.* The Security Council should leverage its role in facilitating peace as mandated in the UN Charter to demand that parties to the conflict exercise re-

straint to prevent the conflict from widening and uphold peace and stability in the Middle East. The Security Council should value the role of regional countries and organizations, support the good offices of the UN Secretary General and the Secretariat, and encourage countries with influence on parties to the conflict to uphold an objective and just position so as to jointly play a constructive role in deescalating the crisis.

5. *Seeking political settlement.* According to relevant UNSC resolutions and international consensus, the fundamental settlement of the question of Palestine lies in the implementation of the two-state solution, restoration of the legitimate national rights of Palestine, and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine that enjoys full sovereignty based on the 1967 border and with east Jerusalem as its capital. The Security Council should help restore the two-state solution. A more broad-based, authoritative and effective international peace conference led and organized by the UN should be held as soon as possible to formulate a concrete timetable and roadmap for the implementation of the two-state solution and facilitate a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. Any arrangement on the future of Gaza must respect the will and independent choice of the Palestinian people, and must not be imposed upon them.

Source: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjbxw/202311/t20231129_11189405.html of 30 November 2023

"UNRWA's urgent assistance ..."

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lease from the Federal Council of 14 October 2020.

3. Kramer, Brigitte. "Gaza-Streifen: bringt die Waffenruhe Erleichterung?" (Gaza Strip: Will the ceasefire bring relief?) Conversation with Philippe

Lazzarini. *Radio SRF, Echo der Zeit* of 28 November 2023.

4. 23,041 Voranschlag der Eidgenossenschaft 2024 (Confederation budget for 2024). 202 EDA/A231.0332 Humanitarian actions (UNRWA). *Minutes* of 11 December 2023
5. <https://unwatch.org/about-us/mission-history/>
6. 23,041 Voranschlag der Eidgenossenschaft 2024 (Confederation budget 2024). 202 EDA/A231.0332

Humanitarian actions (UNRWA). *Minutes* from 14 December 2023

7. Wenger, Karin. "Ein Schwimmbad für Palästinenser" ("A swimming pool for Palestinians"), in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* from 19 December 2023.
8. Excerpt from "A Dangerous Conflation. An open letter from Jewish writers" (<https://www.nplu-sonemag.com/online-only/online-only/a-dangerous-conflation/>), see also p. 3

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What drives people into waging wars?

Thoughts on the famous correspondence between Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud

by Peter Küpfer

Why do wars still exist? Why has this scourge of humanity not been annihilated yet like pestilence? Is there something rooted in our human genes which drives us into raising arms against our fellow human beings? Are there family traits of belligerence? Often this question prompts a simplifying and pessimistic response: There have always been wars and that's just the way it is and will be for ever as long as humankind exists. In the first third of the exceptionally war-like 20th century this problem of belligerence was discussed more often and more passionately than today, and from divergent standpoints – especially in the years between the world wars. At that time humanity was still under shock from the death toll and devastations of the first world war. And already disturbing developments seemed to indicate that a second war was looming with renewed destruction. The discussion about psychic inclinations towards peace within the human species was started back then. In this situation Albert Einstein, the globally well-known physicist, published an open letter to a pioneer of the research into the subconscious mind in which he posed the question: What inner forces keep driving people towards belligerent propaganda?

Because he hoped to get an answer to this very question, on 30 August 1932 – a few months before Adolf Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor in Germany and later empowered to practical autocracy by far-reaching edicts – in these fateful days, Albert Einstein, a self-confessed pacifist, published an open letter to one of the founders of the psychology of the subconscious mind, Sigmund Freud, an outstanding researcher of his time. Einstein had been encouraged to pen this letter by the *League of Nations*. He stated that he was puzzled by his observation that in civilised countries “the bulk of the people” kept allegiance to a belligerent minority who “abused them ... for their lusts”¹. This behaviour, Einstein remarked, was obviously self-destructive since the people of all nations had to be interested in preserving peace for their own sake. And especially concerning for him: how could war propaganda take hold so quickly of whole populations that it amounted to a kind of belligerent mass psychosis. Einstein gives a partial answer himself, unfortunately it remains valid to this day: “An obvious answer to this question would seem to be that the minority, the ruling class at present, has the schools and press, usually the Church as well, under its thumb. This enables it to organise and sway the emotions of the masses, and makes its tool of them.” And he adds another, em-

inently psychological question: “Is it possible to control man’s mental evolution so as to make him proof against the psychosis of hate and destructiveness?” This is the question about the inner, psychic conditions of peacefulness, in the individual as well as in humankind.

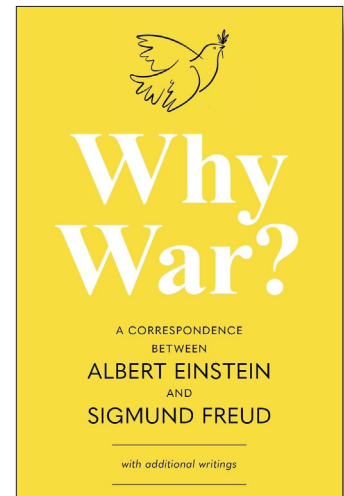
Freud’s answers reflect the contemporary narrative on human nature

Freud published his answers to Einstein’s text both promptly and elaborately. However, his answer is as discouraging as it is creepy. Einstein’s rather clear questions are, at best, only partially answered (as Freud himself admits at the end), insisting that there was no hope whatsoever. Basically, Freud uses the opportunity to lay out his theory on humans being possessed by their basic instincts, yet again. The main axiom of this theory claims that the instincts, the sexual ones in particular, cause all kinds of irritations and full-blown neurotic ailments in the people as a reaction to the harsh moral obligations in society (around 1900!) Later Freud, referring to the horrors of the first world war, would invent another supposedly basic instinct, complementary to eros. This one he called “Thanatos”, the urge towards death. In all living beings, there is a constant quarrel between the forces of life (eros, sexuality) and those of death (aggression, war) according to Freud. This “Thanatos” instinct, he argues, could be used to make people kill their fellow human beings.

These thoughts are not really informed by psychological insights but are meant to back-up the mainstream militaristic *zeitgeist* with pseudo-scientific arguments.

Misled, but not by instincts but by deeply rooted misinformation

Fortunately, further development of research into our subconscious emotional life focussed on the social environment which shapes our world-view decisively even before language skills are acquired, rather than mere instinct economy. As comprehensive psychological research by the Vienna school of Alfred Adler and personal depth psychology was able to show, subconscious emotional orientations are mainly shaped by early perceptions in young children. As cultural beings, we humans are mainly influenced by our cultural experiences and social environment, rather than instincts. The way we are treated since our early childhood will pave the way for our orientation in the world, depending on our immediate social environment – and the conclusions which we as children draw from our experiences, consciously or subconsciously. An authoritarian environment will favour anx-



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iousness and the desire to over-adapt, which later can switch to aggressiveness and revolt. In an understanding and encouraging environment on the other hand, other character traits will develop: empathy, a desire to understand other people’s motives, co-operation, consideration.

It is therefore easy to comprehend how big a role school plays in the character development of the young human being. We are more and more convinced: education is not simply facts being memorised, it is guidance in relatedness, knowledge and wisdom being acquired in interaction with the world. If this competent human guidance is missing, the culture which holds society together will crumble. Because human culture in the humanistic sense needs conscious transfer to the next generation. This requires empathic, mature and sensible personalities. Parents who insist on their children contributing to the needs of the family routine according to their ages, teacher who are not just coaches but partners on the journey towards human companionship, by their knowledge and decent behaviour. Media too, but those which focus on the interests of all instead of just lobbying. A society which loses track of the obligation to maintain their culture, will lose this culture altogether.

Theorising based on an out-dated image of man

In another main segment of his answer Freud yet again indulges in antiquated clichés. He refers to Einstein’s remark that both history and the current events in Europe were proof that the question of right versus might was far from being solved. Sooner or later, one would always have to conclude that might makes right and not vice versa. But again, he breaks this down from the adequate political-legal perspective to a

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“What drives people ...”

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questionable bio-psychological level by suggesting to equate the right versus might dualism with that of right versus violence. This viewpoint does, however, blend out entirely more than one century of development away from the authoritarian-absolutistic coercive state towards the democratic state of the citizenry. Freud’s “line of proof” turns out to be as fallacious as his basic assumption: it starts with concepts which cannot be maintained in the light of more modern theories on the evolution of the human species and their psyche. This may not be Freud’s fault alone, but it certainly shows a limitation of his thought. He argues: Just as the question of violence is settled by the law of superior bodily strength in the hordes of higher animals – according to what we refer to now as the “pecking order” – the same was true for human societies. He invokes the primordial horde, in which all individuals obey the one with the biggest muscles. The whole cultural history of mankind did nothing to change any of that primordial principle, he asserts. Progress in civilisation would increase the technical capabilities but these were only utilised to develop more sophisticated weapon systems with the only result to replace muscle strength with the access to these superior technologies. A certain system of checks and balances may have enabled the suppressed masses to withstand the ruling warrior elite, forcing them to adhere to some control mechanisms of counter-weight and moderation. The weak stance of religion in our cultures was proof that ideals didn’t play any role in that, Freud argues. Religion could not extend the principle of love towards your fellow human being to include hostile states, and the same was true for the league of nations which lacked the might to enforce all those rights they postulate.

Freud’s answer narrows the vision

Freud’s answer is therefore disappointingly conventional, trivial in that it is informed by an un-questioned *zeitgeist* model and at the same time disappointingly circular in its reasoning. At the end, Freud’s “psychological explanation” on how it is that the masses always go to war happily boils down to: because it has always been like this. The fact that wars exist is meant to explain why Europeans have cheered their leaders who sent them into the murderous world war. Supposedly, wars (domestically and if possible also abroad) have always been fuelled by the very existence of rules and government so that all elites become belligerent inevitably. Strange as this line of thought appears, it is based on Freud’s rather grim axiom that laws have always been established by blunt violence amongst human beings. Human community and their culture are nothing but a by-product of power and violence being imposed on the weaker

individuals. Were that the case, the whole human history would indeed be nothing but a contrast bath of dismal terror and counter-terror. Is it conceivable how under such circumstances of perpetual war things like agriculture, manufacturing, trade, education, architecture, road building, philosophy, mathematics, technology, welfare and the idea of democracy as a desirable state of affairs should ever have developed? All under the ever-swinging whip of sleepless tyrants? Sleepless, because they had to live in constant fear of the next coup d’etat?

Such basic principles discard with a single stroke the possibility of states being founded as treaties of responsible citizens (*Rousseau*), as well as the separation of powers as the principle of functioning democracies (*Montesquieu*), rule of law and by the people (European enlightenment based on natural law and human rights), also *Kant* (the state is only conceivable as the rule of law insofar as its laws are founded on natural law and human rights being guaranteed. As a state, the community has to live and fulfil the axioms of human dignity in-order to maintain itself.)

Seen through Freud’s one-dimensional lens all efforts world-wide to establish institutions like the league of nations, or the UN, as instruments to grant equal rights to all states – according to the principle “one state, one vote” regardless of their power and size – are swept aside as pointless. This simple but fundamental principle is guaranteed to every individual citizen, everyone is entitled to them because he or she is human, no matter if influential or socially lower class. Rights and jurisdiction cannot differ from person to otherwise, unless they are corrupt.

The “primordial horde” had to create culture

Nobody knows whether Freud’s «primordial horde» ever existed. As for every situation when we don’t know something but would like to know – we imagine things. Was the cradle of humanity a «primordial horde»? Did it function in the way Freud liked to imagine, according to his personal views on humanity? What we do know, however, is the following: human beings are, to put it in *Adolf Portmann’s* terms, a “social prematurity”. Without his caring social network, the newborn infant is doomed and will die. While a new-born lamb will get up on his feet in record time, immediately feed at the udder of what he had identified to be his mother, soon afterwards jump around with joy, all of this takes much longer in newborn human babies. In order to survive it needs care (just as animal babies) but also culture (this is the difference in the human species): warmth, clothing, hygiene, special preferably cooked meals. Much time will pass before it is able to walk, let alone talk. As a social prematurity it needs the social womb, as Portmann puts it, an atmosphere of calm

and considerate care. All it needs comes from the outside. Therefore, giving birth to children, nurture them and bring them up, requires a minimum of culture. This is the root from which human civilisation developed, not from war but from the need of protection and care. A people or horde, for that matter, which was constantly fighting enemies both inside and outside, wouldn’t have time for elementary cultural achievements. The same fate waits for a people which can no longer figure out how to pass on their culture to their offspring. Helpfulness, curiosity, the ability to listen and learn how to contribute to common goals – all this is way beyond instincts in humans but cultural achievements which need to be learned from somebody. This somebody, the closest person, used to be naturally the mother, in a wider circle the family and finally the cultural community. All these role models don’t emphasise war as their main objective, but peacefulness. Humanity did not survive because some hordes won their wars – quite the opposite: so far humanity managed to survive despite all the wars. By relatedness. By companionship. By diligence, the readiness to make sacrifices, too, and specialisation in the work process. All this requires consent, understanding, preferably in peaceful circumstances. Without we would long ago have ceased to exist, or even more likely, would never have appeared on the stage but be eradicated as some error of evolution, corrected by nature.

We “learn” our character including our ability to be peaceful

Therefore, it remains true, everything a human being does or knows had to be learned. He is neither a slave of his impulses nor his (mainly lost) instincts. As his main gift he got his cerebrum, in which, with time, his world view, his image of man, of friend and foe, will develop. This explains how education – education of soul and spirit, of the heart, the emotions, the sense of responsibility, education towards contribution within a meaningful context – is essential for his survival as an individual but also for the human community as such. If children see phantasy figures as their only role models, if they admire violence and coolness (never showing compassion and thereby losing it), then they and their environment miss out on the great gift that evolution handed to us on our way: social learning, learning in the co-operation of daily life, which require functioning family structures and a good school. This is not primarily a cognitive process, but an emotional one. We can learn war, but also peacefulness. The sooner we start with the peace work in small groups, the more stable the result will be. From neglect, however, only one thing will be born: chaos. •

¹ Quotes from Einstein, Albert/Freud, Sigmund. *Why war?* Warbler Classics 2023

Leaning Tower of PISA and the right to education

The basics of the education plight in Switzerland

by Eliane Perret

Education for all – a peace concern

Following the horrors of the Second World War, responsible individuals aimed to establish the foundations for peaceful coexistence worldwide through the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Recognising that the goal and direction of education profoundly influence human emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, Article 26, in its second paragraph, states:

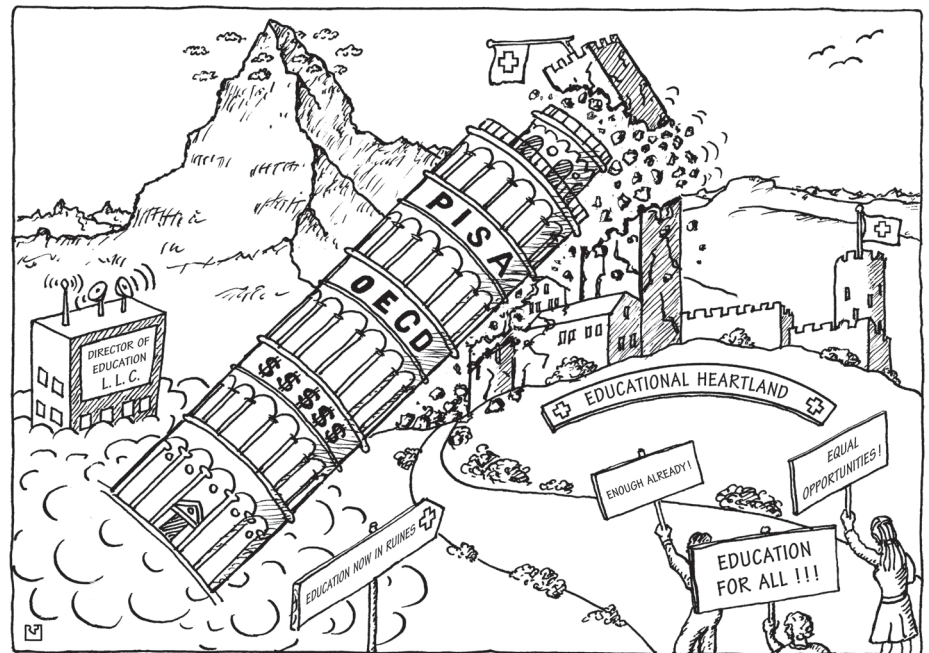
“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”¹ A glance at the world situation today reveals that this objective is far from being realised, despite the majority of countries signing and ratifying this document.

A special educational policy task

Switzerland plays a distinctive role in education as a neutral and directly democratic country. Ensuring that all children and young people receive an education enabling them to exercise their civic rights and duties is crucial for the functioning of the country’s modern direct democracy and the preservation of freedom. This necessitates primary schools to educate individuals with a solid knowledge base, allowing them to contribute to global peace by extending their perspectives beyond personal horizons.

However, the current state of our schools and the educational level of departing students indicate a different reality. We do not need a PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) test to realise that a genuine educational crisis is evident. The test just established the results of the reforms – reforms triggered by the first PISA – test results. All the more disconcerting was the reporting in many media in recent weeks, reporting on Switzerland’s pleasing results and emphasising that it was one of the eighteen countries that had achieved better results than the average in maths, reading and science and was therefore doing well to very well. In an international comparison, there were still many countries that were behind our country.

But is this an honest basis for comparison when you look at who was even worse? And one is even more perplexed by the statement of the report: “Despite this good result in international compar-



The results of the Pisa tests show that the school reforms of recent decades – alien to theory and culture – have hit the former educational stronghold of Switzerland at its core. A re-evaluation is imperative. (picture rp)

ison, it should be noted that almost one-fifth of Swiss pupils do not achieve the minimum competences in mathematics described by the OECD. In reading, with a quarter falling below the minimum level.² In science, too, it is almost a fifth of young people who do not achieve above the minimum level. In other words, 20 to 25 out of every 100 pupils complete their nine years of schooling without reaching the required proficiency levels in the tested subjects. Where are the times when Switzerland was at the top of international comparisons and being regarded as a centre of education?

This alarming situation calls for an urgent and comprehensive discussion, starting with an examination of the purpose and implications of the PISA assessment, including its history and educational policy orientation. Rigorous, scientifically grounded analyses and responses are readily available. Acknowledging and acting upon them should be the priority and a commitment to the well-being of the next generation.

The “Sputnik crisis” and its consequences

Fifteen years ago, in 2008, *Roman Langer*, a research assistant at the *Institute of Education and Educational Psychology at Johannes Kepler University Linz*, published an analysis of the history of the PISA tests, which remains relevant today³. Langer investigates the motives

behind the PISA initiative, tracing developments in education policy since the mid-1950s when the post-war world order emerged. The “Sputnik crisis” in 1957, when the Soviet Union launched the first probe into orbit, marked a turning point. The perceived technical and military advantage of the USSR over the USA frightened the latter and was seen as a threat to their political and economic supremacy. Thus, the impetus – as Langer states – for modern Western school reforms was created, ultimately leading to the emergence of PISA tests.

The American education system was acknowledged globally as being in disarray during this period, characterised by a shift towards expensive private elite schools and the neglect of state schools. Rather than addressing its failing school system comprehensively, the USA, post the “Sputnik shock”, initiated an emergency program in 1958 based on utilitarian principles, disregarding the success criteria of European education systems.

A new player is being established

Today, it is a fact and unfortunately also accepted that our education system is reviewed by the PISA tests developed by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

Although the (OECD) was founded in 1961, it initially played a secondary role in education policy, as this domain fell

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“Leaning Tower of Pisa and the right ...”

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under the purview of UNESCO. However, the OECD exhibited ambitions from the start to become a significant player in global education policy.

In its founding year, it organised a conference on economic growth and investment in education. It strove for an informal standardisation of education policy in the western world and attempted to place the natural sciences at the centre of education plans.

In the 1960s, the USA sought the OECD’s assistance to develop indicators and a handbook for evaluating educational and learning performance in member states, marking the organisation’s first steps into the realm of education policy. The OECD thus became a provider of scientifically sound analyses and a forum for discussion.

Liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation

From the mid-1970s, an economic crisis dominated events in Western countries. Liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation of trade and markets were intended to generate growth and innovation. The neoliberal economic shift, championed by the *Chicago School of Economics* (with *Milton Friedman* and *Friedrich von Hayek*) replaced the economic theory of John Maynard Keynes and set the course from then on. International economic organisations such as the *World Bank*, IMF, WTO and OECD were used to implement this strategy. Accordingly, the foundations and objectives of education were also to be changed. A genuine paradigm shift was underway.

Either I decide or ...

The USA, reacting to the “Sputnik crisis”, intended to reorganise its education and school system. The 1983 education report titled “A Nation at Risk”, which painted a dismal picture of American schools, prompted a wave of reforms akin to the later changes in German-speaking European countries’ education systems.

In the USA, the education and school system were to be reorganised. This was prompted by the education report “A Nation at Risk”, which was published in 1983 and gave American schools a miserable report card. This in turn was a shock, comparable to the “Sputnik crisis” (and later the “PISA crisis” in Switzerland, Germany and Austria). It triggered a wave of reform in the American education system in which the later changes in the education and school system in German-speaking European countries are already recognisable.

The relationship between the USA, UNESCO, and the OECD played a cru-

cial role in these developments. UNESCO, which had been dominant in global educational developments, faced a shift in its majority situation, leading to the USA’s withdrawal in 1984, followed by the UK and Singapore.

The birth of PISA

The OECD was now to step into this gap by upgrading its role in the education sector.

The USA exerted direct pressure on the OECD to develop indicators allowing an international comparison of education system quality. The OECD initially resisted but yielded to the USA’s demands, replacing UNESCO in its role for education policy and becoming a proponent of a new education strategy. The process involved appointing national coordinators to popularise the “indicator culture”, leading to the creation of a comprehensive system for collecting education and school performance data in OECD member states.

The USA put direct pressure on the organisation to develop indicators that would allow an international comparison of the quality of education systems. Among other things, this was intended to build up pressure “from above” in the USA itself and undermine the previous educational sovereignty of the American states. (Incidentally, France also used a similar approach to order and implement reforms at national level). The OECD initially refused the USA’s request. However, when the USA threatened to leave the organisation, it gave in and changed its education policy. From then on, it replaced UNESCO in its role for education policy and became the promoter of a new education strategy. This required a network of employees. In the mid-1990s, the OECD therefore appointed national coordinators to popularise the “indicator culture”, as we know it today as assessment criteria, in educational circles. It then recruited academics who, with their focus on data processing, would increasingly dominate the debate on educational issues. And finally, a comprehensive system for collecting education and school performance data in the member states of the OECD was created. This was the birth of PISA.

Lobbying and an army of scientists

The planned review of national educational performance by PISA, presented to OECD member states in 1995, faced initial rejection. Undeterred, promoters continued to pursue the plan, supplementing it with background lobbying. An army of 300 academics was engaged to insulate PISA from methodological criticisms, blending the OECD’s economic policy strategy with the perceived expert status of involved scientists.

They influenced education policy decision-makers through think tanks and spin doctors, presenting their interests to governments and leveraging networks with international organisations. In 1997, after overcoming initial resistance, PISA was adopted by OECD member states. Reform processes at universities were established, driven by Germany, France and Italy. Rising resistance was overcome by bringing together the various players, with the EU playing an important role. This ultimately led to a second vote in 1997, in which PISA was adopted by the member states. The *peer pressure* and the accompanying slogan—we must move with the times and prepare schools for the world of tomorrow—certainly played a role. The introduction of an OECD-orientated evaluation system must not be shirked. Since then, this eternal argument “School for the world of tomorrow” has been fed into every reform in order to marginalise opponents as outdated and stifle discussions.

OECD in the leading role

With PISA firmly established, the OECD’s role in shaping educational quality criteria accelerated. Simultaneously, education ministers from Germany, France, Italy, and the UK initiated a precise, military-like organised initiative to reform Europe’s universities, citing globalisation and rapid changes as justifications.

Powerful Western political players set targets at national and international levels, with governments ultimately granting the OECD a leading role in defining educational quality criteria.

Questions arise about the level of awareness among individual political decision-makers.

The “Pisa shock” triggers a wave of reform

The first PISA study in 2000, akin to the “Sputnik crisis” and the “A Nation at Risk” report, triggered a shock in various countries and led to rapid and widespread adoption of fundamental education system reforms. Solution concepts were rapidly adopted as shown by various studies while the USA paid little attention to its own country’s poor results.

All this happened without in-depth, careful public debate and without a thorough scientific discourse. In Switzerland no critical questions were being asked concerning the concepts propagated by the OECD. Also, no-one scrutinised at what the testing rig was targeted. There was every reason to do so, as Switzerland had always been recognised as having an exemplary education system. The new concepts represented a theoretical and cultural break with the European educational tradition.

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Swiss Federal Constitution for 175 years

The Federal Constitution and Catholicism in Switzerland

Successive integration of the losers

by René Roca, Research Institute for Direct Democracy (www.fidd.ch)

In the second half of the 19th century, and to some extent to this day, Swiss historians cultivated the “master narrative” that the Swiss liberals alone created the federal state with all its achievements. Even if the liberals, especially the moderate ones, can claim a large share of the federal state for themselves, the influence of Catholic conservatives and early socialists should not be ignored. Even in the current year, in which we are celebrating the 175th anniversary of the Swiss Federal Constitution, articles have appeared that emphasise the liberal side alone. The following article emphasises and acknowledges the contribution of the Catholic conservatives to the federal state. Further articles will follow to focus on the role of other political and ideological forces.

At the beginning of this year, President Alain Berset gave a New Year’s address at the National Museum in Zurich to mark the 175th anniversary of the Swiss Federal Constitution. Among other things, he also addressed the influence of Catholicism:

After the Sonderbund War, the victorious cantons did not simply write*

a new constitution and impose it on the Catholic cantons.

They involved them in the task. And created a sovereign state that was on an equal footing with the powers of Europe.

This constitution of 1848 was a decisive step for Switzerland. [...] We owe our culture of dialogue to it. It was followed by other important steps, I am thinking in particular of the introduction of the initiative and referendum – the basis of our direct democracy. It is these institutions and values that we are still committed to today.

The President of the Swiss Confederation refers to key points in the history of the creation of the 1848 Swiss Federal Constitution, and to important consequences, underlining the influence of the Catholic cantons in this regard. This was also emphasised by the Swiss historian Oskar Vasella (1904–1966), who called for the prehistory of the Sonderbund to be studied more closely to better understand the sources of the Swiss Federal Constitution:

Perhaps the revolutionary wave was only broken after all by the years of the conservatives’ resistance as well as by the Sonderbund War. The Federal Constitution of 1848 saved the principle of the states and thus also preserved the idea of a balance between the small and large states.

Despite the defeat of the *Sonderbund*, some of its demands were incorporated into the new federal constitution of 1848, as Vasella points out, including the principle of the states. The 23-member “Federal Revision Commission”, which included no conservative Catholic representatives but some liberal Catholics, endeavored to respect the rights and freedoms of the *Sonderbund* cantons and the Catholic religion when drafting the federal constitution. In particular, the victors took into account the cantons’ desire for extensive sovereignty, which was also expressed by liberal Catholic groups. In this way, it was possible to gradually integrate the losers well into the new federal state.

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“Leaning Tower of Pisa and the right ...”

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Numerous studies, often lacking independence, scrutinised the enthusiasm for reform, with one noting the surprising ease with which fundamental reforms occurred in Switzerland, without the expected resistance from cantons⁴ as the most important veto-players.

And Switzerland?

Switzerland, though previously renowned for its excellent school system with minimal disparities between the best and worst pupils, adopted new education policy strategies without external pressure.

The good integration of the school system into the Swiss democratic processes was also highlighted. Nevertheless, the OECD concept and its promoters found supporters in Switzerland. Ernst Buschor, formerly a professor of economics at the St. Gallen School of Economics and then Director of Education in Zurich, spearheaded the reform concept. Having barely been elected to government, he began to put his ideas into practice as of 1993, first in the Department of Health and Welfare and then in the Department of Educa-

tion. After attending a symposium in Boston, he set to work on the basic concept for a reform that has been the face of our schools ever since.⁵

Our school system was turned upside down while ignoring the fundamental findings of developmental psychology and pedagogy. Today, we have got a distorted school: the developments and improvements to school based on European research and practice, with their orientation towards a personal image of the human being, have been purged.

Obviously, they avoided a discussion about the pedagogical and psychological insights underlying successful learning.

The resulting implementation focused on unconnected teaching concepts, aiming at accompanying the children as an “Ich-AG”⁶ in their “self-optimisation” and bringing their “human capital” to light. The broad education for all children from all social classes became a casualty, leading to the current state where the right to education, a mandatory task for the country, is compromised.

It is therefore not surprising that this strategy has not been successful. On the contrary, our country has been struck at its

core, as the right to education is an obligatory task of our country. •

¹ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

² Erzinger, A.B. et al. (eds.). (2023). *Pisa 2022. Switzerland in focus*. University of Bern. S.31. <https://dx.doi.org/10.48350/187037>

³ Langer, R. (2008) “Warum haben die PISA gemacht? Ein Bericht über einen emergenten Effekt internationaler politischer Auseinandersetzungen» (Why did they do PISA? A report on an emergent effect of international political disputes). In: Langer, R. (ed.). *Warum tun die das? Governanceanalysen zum Steuerungs Handeln in der Schulentwicklung*. (Why do they do it? Governance analyses of steering action in school development.) Wiesbaden: VS, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. This very readable text is an essential basis for this article.

⁴ Bieber, T. (2010). *Sanfte Steuerungsmechanismen in der Bildungspolitik. Die PISA Studie und der Bologna Prozess in der Schweiz*. (Soft governance in education: The PISA study and the Bologna Process in Switzerland) University of Bremen: Trans- State Working Papers No. 117. Sfb597

⁵ Pelizzari, A. (2001). *Die Ökonomisierung des Politischen. New Public Management und der neoliberale Angriff auf die öffentlichen Dienste*. (The economisation of the political. New Public Management and the neoliberal attack on public services.) Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft

⁶ Ich-AG refers to a sole proprietorship set up by an unemployed person who has received a start-up grant for this business start-up.

"The Federal Constitution ..."

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The new Federal Constitution and Swiss Catholicism (1848–1874)

The explicit war aims of the *Tagsatzung* troops, based on a decision by the majority of the *Tagsatzung*, were the dissolution of the *Sonderbund* and the banning of the Jesuit order. The *Sonderbund* war was short and with the armistice, the *Sonderbund* war council was hastily dissolved. The Jesuit ban was moulded into a separate article by the commission that drew up the Federal Constitution in 51 days:

Art. 58. The Jesuit Order and its affiliated [associated] societies may not be admitted to any part of Switzerland.

This violation of religious freedom was not limited to the Jesuit order. The Jewish population in Switzerland was granted freedom of establishment only in 1866 and the right to practise their religion freely in 1874. However, the ban on Jesuits and the discrimination against non-Christian religions should not obscure the fact that the federal state set clear federalist accents by establishing cantonal school and church sovereignty and introducing the Council of States and the cantonal majority, thus accommodating the Catholic losers.

The Federal Constitution combined the national principle with the continued existence of the states as sovereign cantons. The Confederation and the constituent states fulfilled their task in a dualistic cooperation based on subsidiarity. In this way, the *Sonderbund* indirectly helped to make a centralised solution more difficult as well as to prevent further revolutionary transformations in accordance with the wishes of the liberal-radicals.

The first total revision of the Federal Constitution, 1874

The initially unsuccessful 1872 attempt to completely revise the Federal Constitution was another important step towards integrating the losers. The democratic movement had achieved success at cantonal level in the 1860s and now demanded the expansion of direct democratic institutions at federal level as well. However, the constitutional struggle was given an element of cultural warfare by the introduction of civil marriage urged in 1869. The *First Vatican Council* in 1870, which elevated papal infallibility to a dogma, intensified the cultural struggle in Switzerland as well as in Europe. This historical context and ultimately also the overloading of the total revision of 1872 played into the hands of the draft's opponents, the conservative Catholic camp and the federalists of French-speaking Switzerland; the revision was rejected in a referendum.



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In 1874, only the conservative Catholics were still opposed to the hastily initiated second attempt – still characterised by the cultural struggle. This was because, although incorporating federalist concerns more strongly, the bill tightened certain culturally militant provisions, such as the ban on Jesuits. These provisions were subsequently referred to as the “religious exemption clauses”. The Jesuit ban of 1848 was now amended as follows:

Art. 51 The Jesuit Order and its affiliated societies shall not be admitted to any part of Switzerland, and their members shall be forbidden to engage in any activity in church or school.

This prohibition may be extended by federal decree to other religious orders whose activity is dangerous to the state or disturbs the peace of the confessions.

Art. 52 The establishment of new monasteries or religious orders or the restoration of abolished ones is prohibited.

The majority of Catholics (including liberal Catholics) felt that this was discriminatory, but they were unable to make their voices heard and the bill was adopted. (The “religious exemption clauses” were only repealed in a referendum on 20 May 1973!) And yet the revision meant that the conservative Catholics were better integrated into the liberal federal state because a decisive innovation of the constitutional revision of 1874 was the introduction of the optional referendum.

The “Conservative-Catholics” used the referendum time and again and were thus able to play a more or less constructive role. In this way, direct democracy demonstrated its immense integrative power also at federal level for the first time, even if over the years, the Conservative-Catholics over exploited this new citizens’ right and

repeatedly unleashed veritable “referendum storms”. At the same time, cultural militancy visibly waned. With the depression after 1873, the concerns of the population shifted further towards economic issues and the change of pontificate to *Leo XIII* brought about a calming of church politics.

Josef Zemp as father of the constitutional initiative and first conservative Catholic Federal Councillor

Josef Zemp (1834–1908) from Lucerne played a central role in initiating the constitutional initiative at the federal level in 1891. He had been a member of the Council of States since 1871, and after that a member of the National Council, and he was the leader of the Conservative-Catholic parliamentary group from 1881 to 1885. The “Zemp-Keel-Pedrazzini” motion, which demanded a partial revision of the Federal Constitution with a five-point programme, was tabled in 1884. Among other things, the parliamentarians demanded electoral reform (more proportional representation!) and an extension of the people’s rights (right of initiative). The motion represented a historic turning point in the development of political Catholicism, as it signaled the willingness of the previous opposition, including the opponents of the 1872/74 revision, to cooperate constructively in the federal state, which had been dominated by the “free-minded” (the liberals) since 1848.

In 1891, the initiative for the partial revision of the constitution was implemented, as requested by the motion. This facilitated the ongoing development of constitutional law and made a further total revision unnecessary in the future. In the same year, Zemp was elected as the first Conservative-Catholic Federal Councillor. Zemp’s personality in particular ensured that the process of reconciliation and integration continued during his term of office as Federal Councillor and that a concordance policy gradually took shape. In return, the Catholic Church provided a meaningful answer to the social question of industrialisation with its Catholic social doctrine on the basis of natural law. In 1891, the “Labour Pope” *Leo XIII* published the first social encyclical under the title “*Rerum Novarum*”.

* The *Sonderbund War* of November 1847 was a civil war in Switzerland, then still a relatively loose confederacy of cantons. It ensued after seven Catholic cantons formed the *Sonderbund* (“separate alliance”) in 1845 to protect their interests against a centralisation of power. The war concluded with the defeat of the *Sonderbund*. It resulted in the emergence of Switzerland as a federal state, concluding the period of political “restoration and regeneration” in Switzerland.

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Politics and peace: past and present

John F. Kennedy's speech at the American University in Washington, 10 June 1963

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

We must not let 2023 pass into history without emphasising once again that politicians and states not only have fundamental tasks and duties: They must also fulfil them. The breach of law committed in our countries by politicians and the state when they invoke "reason of state", "emergency rule", "exceptional distress", or other such constructs opens liberal and democratic constitutional states to the gravest dangers. As a rule, such invocations not only conceal a breach of the law and a regression to absolutist conditions; they also signal increasingly aggressive policies of power and war.

Political ethics, as formulated in the context of *natural law*¹, for example, assigns politics and the state the foremost tasks and duties: the safeguarding of internal and external peace. Politics and the state should guarantee that the people living in the territory of the state can develop their personalities with equal rights in freedom and dignity and live and work together in solidarity.

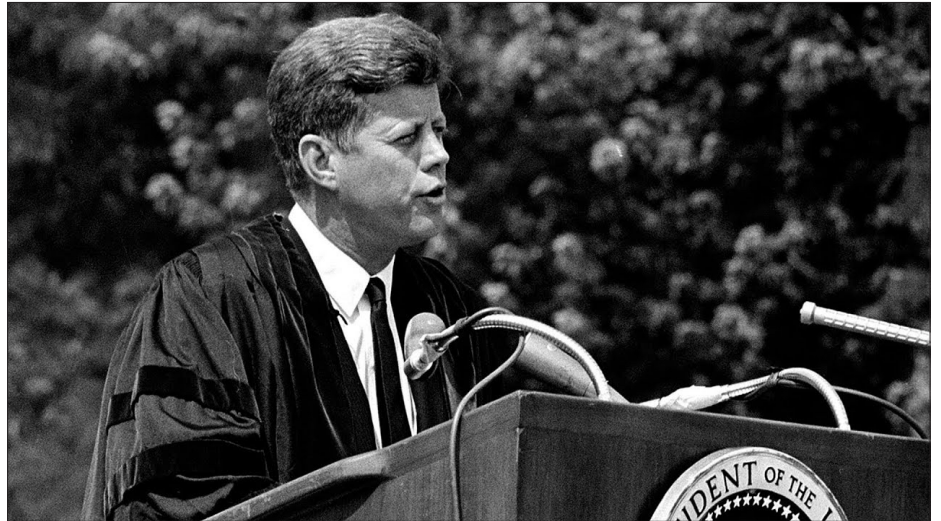
Our politicians and our states have effectively repudiated these responsibilities. Too many of them think that political ethics entail unrealistic ideals. Reality forces politicians and the state to pursue a policy of power and, therefore, also of war. Peace is merely a utopian notion far from reality. Ethics and morality have no place in (practical) politics.

However, a look at the past and present shows that there have been and still are well-known politicians who wanted and want to act in the spirit of political ethics and who have acted and continue to act accordingly. As a result, they have become beacons, personalities who provide orientation – even if they were and are threatened with violent resistance and their plans could not and cannot be realised immediately.

At this point, we would like to recall the peace speech given by US President *John F. Kennedy* on 10 June 1963 to professors and students at the *American University* in Washington.² It should also be remembered because today, 60 years later, we are looking almost in vain for such speeches, let alone actions, from politicians in the Western hemisphere. At present, we are likely to hear comparable thoughts and sentiments only from other parts of the world.

Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

John F. Kennedy gave his speech slightly more than six months after the Cuban



US President John F. Kennedy's speech of 10 June 1963. (picture screenshot)

Missile Crisis had been resolved. The world had "just lucked out" of a nuclear war, not least because it was not the Hawks in the U.S. and the Soviet Union who prevailed, but those on both sides who argued in favour of seeking a peaceful, negotiated solution and avoiding a loss of face or even a humiliating defeat for the other side.

Recently released documents from Moscow³ show that, even before the Cuban Missile Crisis, the American president had sought contact with *Nikita Khrushchev*, then the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, and that both had endeavoured to ease bilateral relations and disarmament. Khrushchev had repeatedly spoken of the possibility of "peaceful co-existence" between the two nuclear powers in the years before the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Kennedy was not allowed to follow up his words of 10 June with many political steps. Less than six months after his Washington speech, he was assassinated, on 22 November 1963 – probably also because of his peace efforts, as documents now available strongly suggest.⁴

"The most important topic on earth: peace"

I will note here only a few key ideas. At the beginning, the US President emphasises that he is concerned with "the most important topic on earth": "global peace". He then defines what he means by peace:

What kind of peace do I mean and what kind of a peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or

the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, and the kind that enables men and nations to grow, and to hope, and build a better life for their children – not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women, not merely peace in our time but peace in all time.

Kennedy then states why peace is so important to him, especially in his time:

I speak of peace because of the new face of war. Total war makes no sense in an age where great powers can maintain large and relatively invulnerable nuclear forces and refuse to surrender without resort to those forces. It makes no sense in an age where a single nuclear weapon contains almost ten times the explosive force delivered by all the allied air forces in the Second World War. It makes no sense in an age when the deadly poisons produced by a nuclear exchange would be carried by wind and water and soil and seed to the far corners of the globe and to generations yet unborn.

What is more:

Today, the expenditure of billions of dollars every year on weapons acquired for the purpose of making sure we never need them is essential to the keeping of peace. But surely the acquisition of such idle stockpiles – which can only destroy and never create – is not the only, much less the most efficient, means of assuring peace.

"Politics and peace ..."

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Another, real peace is therefore "the necessary rational goal of reasonable people".

War is avoidable.

Kennedy spoke out against blaming the Soviet Union alone for the lack of peace and declaring the impossibility of peace. Instead, he called on the citizens of his own country to reflect on their own attitude to peace:

First examine our attitude towards peace itself. Too many of us think it is impossible. Too many think it is unreal. But that is a dangerous, defeatist belief. It leads to the conclusion that war is inevitable, that mankind is doomed, that we are gripped by forces we cannot control. We need not accept that view. Our problems are manmade; therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man's reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable, and we believe they can do it again.

Policy of many small steps.

According to Kennedy, his ideas were not a fantasy, but a realistic view of the global political situation and the fact of competing world powers:

I am not referring to the absolute, infinite concept of universal peace and good will [...]. Let us focus instead on a more practical, more attainable peace, based not on a sudden revolution in human nature but on a gradual evolution in human institutions – on a series of concrete actions and effective agreements which are in the interest of all concerned. There is no single, simple key to this peace; no grand or magic formula to be adopted by one or two powers. Genuine peace must be the product of many nations, the sum of many acts. It must be dynamic, not static, changing to meet the challenge of each new generation. For peace is a process – a way of solving problems.

He then adds:

With such a peace, there will still be quarrels and conflicting interests, as there are within families and nations. World peace, like community peace, does not require that each man love his neighbour, it requires only that they live together in mutual tolerance, submitting their disputes to a just and peaceful settlement. And history teaches us that enmities between nations, as be-

tween individuals, do not last forever. However fixed our likes and dislikes may seem, the tide of time and events will often bring surprising changes in the relations between nations and neighbours. So let us persevere. Peace need not be impracticable, and war need not be inevitable. By defining our goal more clearly, by making it seem more manageable and less remote, we can help all people to see it, to draw hope from it, and to move irresistibly towards it.

Respect for your counterpart

Kennedy does not deny that he rejects the political system of the Soviet Union. But he also says, "But we can still hail the Russian people for their many achievements in science and space, in economic and industrial growth, in culture, in acts of courage."

And he adds:

[...] And no nation in the history of battle ever suffered more than the Soviet Union in the Second World War. At least 20 million lost their lives. Countless millions of homes and families were burned or sacked. A third of the nation's territory, including two-thirds of its industrial base, was turned into a wasteland.

Common interests

Finally, and with these passages my review of Kennedy's peace speech should end, he says:

Today, should total war ever break out again – no matter how – our two countries will be the primary target. [...] All we have built, all we have worked for, would be destroyed in the first 24 hours. And even in the Cold War, which brings burdens and dangers to so many countries, including this nation's closest allies, our two countries bear the heaviest burdens. For we are both devoting massive sums of money to weapons that could be better devoted to combat ignorance, poverty, and disease. We are both caught up in a vicious and dangerous cycle, with suspicion on one side breeding suspicion on the other, and new weapons begetting counter-weapons. In short, both the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its allies, have a mutually deep interest in a just and genuine peace and in halting the arms race. [...]

So let us not be blind to our differences, but let us also direct attention to our common interests and the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot

end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's futures. And we are all mortal.

Opposing the policy of war

Simply referring to the peace speech Kennedy delivered 60 years ago last year will not bring about a reversal of the policies and programs of today's politicians and other supporters of war. On the contrary, there are still too many politicians and representatives of other social "elites" on both sides of the Atlantic who reject serious peace negotiations and instead favour a continuation and expansion of the war in Ukraine – and not only there. Examples include statements by President *Biden* to the U.S. Congress on 6 December, the speeches by the German Social Democratic leadership at their party conference on 9 and 10 December, the guest article by *Annalena Baerbock*, Germany's Green foreign minister, published on 10 December in the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", and an appeal by 70 German politicians and other supporters of war published in the weekly *Die Zeit* on 14 December and calling for the war in Ukraine not to end. The propaganda lie that Russia is threatening Europe's freedom is always at the centre.

This is the current political reality in a West, whose "elites" want to make us "fit for war". But that shouldn't stop citizens from thinking about whether Kennedy wasn't right in 1963 – and whether he wouldn't be right today. Citizens can oppose the escalating war policy of our "elites" – and they can take up and support the worldwide peace initiatives that exist today, including those from the political sphere – even if it is the supposed "enemy" who formulates them.

We citizens do not have to follow the drums of war. Surveys repeatedly confirm⁶ that this is actually the case. It is very good when passive disagreement is followed by peace-promoting activities – each person in his or her own way. •

¹ cf., e.g., the works of Johannes Messner, for example, *Social Ethics: Natural Law in the Modern World*. B. Herder, 1949. Revised ed., 1955

² <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/PDFFiles/John%20F.%20Kennedy%20-%20American%20University%20Commencement.pdf>

³ cf. <https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2023/russland-bezweifelt-die-offizielle-version-des-kennedy-attentats/> of 20 November 2023.

⁴ cf. the very informative 2021 film by *Oliver Stone*: *JFK revisited: Through the Looking Glass*.

⁵ see, for example, "Germany is losing international influence. Survey by the Körber Foundation shows Germans' view of foreign policy". <https://koerberstiftung.de/presse/mitteilungen/deutschland-verliert-an-internationaleinfluss/> of 27 November 2023