

Tel Aviv University's Direct Involvement in Israel's War Crimes and the Ethnic Cleansing of Palestinians

This document comprises detailed and fully sourced research about the role of Tel Aviv University (TAU) as a key pillar of Israel's war crimes and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. It reveals TAU's role across a spectrum of its research centres, academic disciplines, and specific programmes and practices.

Contrary to the claims of Senior Leadership at the University of Manchester, this document shows plainly that TAU is not a fit and proper institution with which to form academic ties.

Hundreds of students and staff at the University of Manchester and the university's branch of the University and College Union (UCU) are appealing to colleagues not to apply for the UoM-TAU joint research fund, and for the university to cut ties with TAU immediately.

The document was researched and compiled collaboratively in 2024-2025 and is ongoing.

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1. TAU links to Israeli military

1.1. The student-combatant pipeline

- In July 2023, TAU won the contract to host the “Erez” BA program for soldiers in combat units. The dual-major degree includes an academic program focused on military “areas of interest,” paired with another program in the humanities, social sciences, business, or engineering. In the Erez program, the military explains, “military and academic training are intertwined,” wherein the cadets are transformed “from civilians to elite fighters”. The soldiers will be in uniform and permitted to carry their military weapons to campus. The Ministry of Defense suggested a list of topics that they consider “integral” to the Erez program. [Source](#). These include “strategy and national security,” “terror and guerrillas,” and “contemporary military thought.” Per the agreement with the state, the university commits to reporting to the military any and all “field security issues,” should it be required. And, crucially, faculty must now conduct themselves in accordance with military restrictions. The university, the agreement demands, “undertakes to ensure that the academic staff will refrain from offensive statements toward the IDF soldiers studying at the institution, whether it is statements concerning their actual military service in the IDF or whether it is statements concerning them wearing uniforms. This commitment is essential.” [source](#)
- TAU’s School of Electrical Engineering runs the “Galim” MSc program, where soldiers receive academic guidance from the Intelligence Corps to prepare for placement in technological units of the Israeli military and in the security forces. As head of the School of Electrical Engineering Mark Shtauf explained: “The Galim program is another important step in strengthening the relationship between academia and industry, and in this case the IDF. It is about utilizing the potential that exists in the connection between exceptionally high-quality youth, and the needs of the IDF’s intelligence units.” ([source](#))
- TAU hosts the “Psagot” program, an Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) funded program that students complete before entering the IOF, a 4 year combined bachelor’s degree in electronic engineering and physics. ([source](#))
- TAU also hosts the “Arazim” program, whose goal is to place outstanding technological-mathematical research students into the army’s intelligence and cyber defense divisions. [source](#)
- In January 2022, TAU, in partnership with the Israeli Air force, established the Elrom Center, which will “harness scientific knowledge to advance various areas related to air

and space power in Israel.” According to the website “The Center will develop a cadre of future researchers and establish systematic academic activity in this area in Israel...”

[source](#)

- In November 2023, the over 5,000 students from TAU who were drafted to the army during the genocide in Gaza received grants of NIS 1,000 (£226.10). Along with this, TAU intended to make substantial additional grants, especially for those serving in combat or combat-support units. It also provided additional aid to students on reserve duty. [source](#)
- TAU invited students to join a volunteer day at the IOF's logistical system where they packaged combat rations for the soldiers committing genocide on the front lines. Coordinator of this scheme - marinafel@tauex.tau.ac.il. ([source](#))

1.2. Marrying educational output with militarism

- Israeli universities, including TAU, play a fundamental role in military research and development: “Unlike in the United States where research is conducted at national labs, Israel has no such equivalent institutions ... Military R&D in Israel would not exist without the universities. They carry out all the basic scientific investigation, which is then developed either by defense industries or the army.” —Former Major General Professor Isaac Ben-Israel, former head of the Yuval Ne’eman Workshop at Tel Aviv University ([source](#)).
- The Yuval Ne’eman Workshop for Science, Technology, and Security is part of TAU. It leads research around applications for the security state, cybersecurity, missiles, weapons etc. It hosts an annual cybersecurity conference alongside the Israeli state and Israeli weapons expos. ([source](#)).
- TAU’s Center for Nanoscience and Nanotechnology collaborates on R&D with Israeli weapons companies, including IAI, Rafael and Elbit. ([source](#)).
- TAU Ventures, Tel Aviv University’s venture capital fund, for instance, worked with the Shin Bet, infamous for torturing and abusing Palestinians, to establish the Xcelerator program for start-ups. Selected student projects received a \$50,000 grant from the Shin Bet and participated in a mentoring and consultation program run by the agency. [Source](#).
- TAU ventures also has Xtend on its portfolio, a drone and robotics company that essentially acted as a frontline force for the Israeli army during the Gaza genocide. According to its [website](#), Xtend has “redirected energies to supporting the IDF 100%.” On its website, which features testimonials from Israeli troops in Gaza, Xtend says that it

enables “soldiers to perform accurate manoeuvres in complex combat scenarios.” In an [interview](#) with The Wall Street Journal, Xtend owners said that the company has been working with the IDF for some time — initially to take down incendiary balloons originating from the Gaza Strip. Since then, its drones have been used to map and scout out subterranean tunnels dug by Hamas in Gaza — and, far more alarmingly, sent on reconnaissance missions [equipped with explosive payloads like grenades](#). [Source](#), [source](#)

- [Project inobit](#) which is a collaboration between Elbit Systems, Israel’s largest private arms manufacturer, and TAU has been running for 3 years, and brings in students from all over the engineering faculty to work on developing the capabilities of drones. Elbit Systems is notorious for its role in the killing of Palestinians and in turning Gaza into a testing ground for weaponry.
- TAU has a long history of collaboration with Elbit Systems, both materially, and through offering up its students as an active recruitment base. In November 2024, as the genocide in Gaza began, TAU [engineering researchers met with Elbit](#). TAU has also invited its students to [Over 15 events hosted by Elbit](#) since 2018. [TAU innovation labs](#), which “acts as a special school for applied research with its own faculty” has Elbit systems as one of its partners. A biomimicry lab led by TAU, the TAU Bio Inspired Robotics Lab, which aims to [make robots mimicking reptiles and insects](#), also shares all of its research with Elbit systems.
- TAU researchers, led by doctoral student Omer Tzidki and postdoctoral fellow Anton Kharchevskii, have developed remote-control vehicles for the IOF. This new technology promises to ‘revolutionise battlefield strategies’ and ‘enhance military operations’. [Source](#)
- TAU developed live dog cameras for army units linked to the brutal attack of Gazan civilians, including the mauling and murder of Muhammad Bhar, a 24 year old man with Down’s syndrome ([source](#)). TAU is described this as an “engineering war room”, where weapons are developed to attack and murder Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the West Bank. A graduate of the university said “Did you know since the beginning of the war there is a war room operating on campus taking care of our fighters on the ground?”. A Palestinian student at TAU said that “some of my fellow students are taking part in war rooms, designing more efficient methods to carry out the genocide in Gaza” and that “this marriage of militarism and educational institutions makes it extremely challenging to seriously engage with my studies, as I constantly question the ideology behind what we’re being taught.” ([source](#))

1.3. Providing integral IOF Intelligence (this section is based on Maya Wind's book *Towers of Ivory and Steel: How Israeli Universities Deny Palestinian Freedom*, London: Verso, 2024)

- TAU contains the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. Originally envisaged by the first head of Mossad, it was established by the Israeli military as a node of its intelligence apparatus, meant to serve as a bridge between military intelligence and academia. Incorporated into TAU in 1966. Many of its researchers worked either previously or simultaneously in the Israeli Intelligence Corps and received classified information from the military for their research. Barred access to Palestinian citizens of Israel. Served as an auxiliary research wing of the military. In the early 2000s, Moshe Dayan Center experts worked with the military to guide Israeli policy during the Second Palestinian Intifada. More recently, the center published recommendations for the Israeli government on how to “manage” its permanent military occupation. The head of the Palestinian Studies Forum at the Moshe Dayan Centre is Michael Milshtein, who was previously head of the Palestinian affairs department of the IDF military intelligence ([source](#)) and has written articles such as “US campus protests show dark side of multiculturalism”, “The dissolution of UNRWA as an opportunity”, “Gaza's civil space as setting for a terror state”
- At TAU, professor Zvi Elpeleg drew on his expertise as a scholar of Palestinian history while repeatedly serving as military governor over various regions of the OPT, including the Gaza Strip and Nablus.
- Eyal Zisser, former chair of the department and leading Israeli Middle East studies scholar, has served as an advisor and course director of an elite military unit, the details of which remain mostly classified. Raz Zimmt leads a publication series for the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, the primary research institute of the Israeli Intelligence community. Michael Milshtein, who heads the Palestinian Studies Forum at the Dayan Center, also served as the Advisor on Palestinian Affairs in the Israeli Civil Administration governing the OPT and as the head of the Department for Palestinians Affairs in the Intelligence Corps as a retired colonel.

2. Legalising, funding and promoting war crimes

- The lead writer of the IDF code of ethics, Asa Kasher, is a professor at TAU. ([source](#)). He wrote “Ethical Doctrine for Combating Terror”, essentially outlining Israel's doctrine for supposed “anti-terror” operations. His writings aim to justify what has previously been

illegal under international law. He explicitly argues that Israel's "war on terror" should not be bound by international law as it is somehow unique. Kasher even proposed a new category to contravene the legal distinction between combatant and civilian which he coined the "third population" in reference to Palestinian civilians—persons who appear to be noncombatants but may potentially interfere with Israeli military operations.

- In 2002, Kasher joined a committee of lawyers and academics to debate what number of Palestinian civilians it would be ethical to kill to save a single Israeli. The consensus: 3.14 Palestinian civilian lives for one Israeli. [source](#)
- Kasher has worked extensively with Major General Amos Yadlin, a director of the INSS, to offer ethical guidance on Israel's approach to proportional violence. They have laid philosophical foundations for Israel's policy of disproportionate killing. They argue that Israel can ethically and legally justify greater "collateral damage" of Palestinian civilian casualties than has been previously allowed under international law. They do so on the basis of an explicit ranking of Israel's ethical obligation to safeguard human life, proposing that Israeli soldiers deployed to the OPT be placed above Palestinian civilians. As a result, they argue that it is in fact immoral for Israel to endanger its own soldiers in order to safeguard the lives of Palestinian civilians. Kasher and Yadlin's hierarchy of human life was intended to serve as a practical guide for Israeli military commanders facing operational decisions, and its effects were evident in the military operations that followed. In its military offensives on the Gaza Strip in 2008-9, 2012 and 2014, Israel used aerial bombing and artillery shelling that killed tens if not hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians, and left many more severely injured, and utterly decimated civilian infrastructure. Israel waited 10 days into its 2014 offensive to send in ground troops, and did so only after massive shelling and aerial bombardment had razed entire neighborhoods. Israeli combat soldiers deployed to the Gaza Strip reported that they were told by commanders that this execution of the offensive was intended to protect their lives in the ground incursion. [source](#)
- After the 2008 war on Gaza, TAU hired Sharvit Baruch directly from overseeing the justification of IDF crimes as head of the military department of international law, in Gaza, to lecturing in International law. Colonel Baruch had previously led a targeted strike on police cadets in Gaza, effectively targeting civilians, but justified this target by saying that it was likely they would end up being combatants. This move was backed by the minister of defence and prime minister. Under colonel Baruch, "roof knocking" which is the tactic of shooting relatively smaller munitions on Palestinian buildings immediately

before bombing as a “warning” measure was developed. It has provided legal cover for Israel’s bombing of civilian structures ever since. [source](#)

- Uzi Rabi, current head of the Dayan Center and chair of the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at TAU, has also become a major news pundit. Rabi has long presented himself as a military strategist in his interviews and popular writing. In 2018, Rabi went on Israeli radio to advocate that “those who live in Gaza should know that if they confront Israel, Israel will strike a blow that will leave them with a mental and operative disability.” As of 2022, Rabi is a permanent pundit on the Friday night news of the major outlet Channel 13, where he routinely speaks in the first person when referring to military policy and advises on Israeli tactics to counter Palestinian resistance to Israel’s military occupation.
- TAU in collaboration with Directorate of Defense Research & Development, held a DefenseTech Summit with campus, governmental and industry actors. The Head of the Israeli Directorate of Defense Research & Development spoke, as well as the Director of Israeli Missile Defense Organisation ([source](#)).
- Ariel Porat, president of TAU, referenced Amalek in a speech near the beginning of the war, this genocidal rhetoric has been referenced in the ICJ genocide case ([source](#)) ([source 2](#)).

3. TAU affiliations with the Institute of National Security Studies (INSS)

- TAU hosts the INSS, which develops and publishes guidance for the Israeli government and military. The INSS is affiliated with TAU - on the header of the INSS website, TAU’s logo is displayed prominently next to INSS’s.
- A memorandum published by the INSS in May 2024, in the middle of the genocide in Gaza, aimed to analyse Israel and US relations and so-called defense treaties between the two, pushing in favour of a bilateral treaty that would strengthen Israel and US’s role and position in the region through further normalisation deals, a reality that would happen at the expense of the Palestinian population and though Israel’s continued ethnic cleansing of Palestine. The report analyse “the pros and cons of a bilateral defense treaty from both the Israeli and American perspectives and proposes ways of addressing the sides’ concerns. All US defense treaties are fundamentally asymmetrical in their advantages. Nevertheless, the US, too, stands to gain important benefits, especially if a

treaty with Israel was tied to the emergence of a broader US-led regional architecture, with Saudi Arabia at the center.” [source](#) .

- As early as June 2018, the INSS collaborated with the Israeli Military Spokesperson Unit to host a conference titled “The Battle for Public Opinion: Gaza as a Case Study.” The conference brought together military experts, officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, journalists, and INSS fellows to discuss how Israel could best spin reports of Israeli military snipers shooting unarmed Palestinian protestors. The conference conceptualized the Great March of Return as an Israeli public relations problem, with panelists lamenting the inferiority of the Israeli narrative in the international arena.
- INSS researchers regularly formulate policy for the Israeli state to combat the BDS movement and other campaigns critical of Israel, including the recommendation to employ Israeli intelligence agencies to “incriminate,” “undermine,” and “sabotage” activists working for Palestinian rights.
- The INSS is the originator of the “Dahiya doctrine”, named after a Beirut neighborhood nearly destroyed by Israel during its 2006 assault on Lebanon. The doctrine advocates for the deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure - which is illegal under international law - as a supposed deterrence to groups taking up arms against Israel. ([source](#)). The Dahiya doctrine has been used since 2006 during Israel’s assaults on Gaza in 2008\9, in 2014 and in its latest genocidal war on Gaza since October 2023. ([source](#))

3.1. The INSS law and nationality security program

- The INSS Law and National Security Program, lead by Brauch (a lecturer at the faculty of law at TAU) has, on numerous occasions, provided legal cover as well as issued legal warnings to protect Israel from ICC court proceedings against its genocide in Gaza [source](#).
- In May of 2021, for instance, the INSS Law and National Security Program offered a defense of Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip even as it was still being carried out, claiming that it cleared the threshold of proportionality based on its reading of *excessive damage* in international humanitarian law. More broadly, the program works to undermine the legal arguments and legitimacy of international human rights organizations and regulatory bodies. In 2022, the program published a rebuttal of Amnesty International's report charging Israel with the crime of apartheid, as well as a report that delegitimized the International Criminal Court. The report put forward legal arguments challenging both the ICC's jurisdiction and its definition of war crimes, as well

as offering policy recommendations for the Israeli government to thwart investigations into Israeli activity in the occupied Palestinian territories on this basis. [source](#)

- Even in the face of the international condemnations and investigations that followed, the INSS Law and National Security Program has continued to formulate legal defenses of "roof knocking" to sustain Israeli military doctrines. [source](#)
- The INSS Law and National security program explicitly advances legal scholarship to mitigate international criticism of Israel and support it in evading accountability. Program director Pnina Sharvit Baruch contends that claims about the illegality of Israeli military actions are based on "tendentious interpretations" of the laws of war that greatly limit the freedom of military action. To counter this, Sharvit Baruch advocates that Israeli jurists promote interpretations that offer the military greater flexibility and remake international legal discourse in line with Israel's vision. [source](#)
- Following the U.N. Independent Investigation Commission's report on Israel's 2014 offensive on the Gaza Strip, which found Israel to have committed alleged violations of international humanitarian law and the laws of war, Sharvit Baruch wrote a rebuttal. Her counterreport argues that the U.N. commission was ill-equipped to investigate Israel's offensive. She grounds her arguments in opposition to its assessment of Israel's disrespect of the principle of proportionality under international humanitarian law, which is based on the damage caused weighed against the military advantage achieved. Among other arguments, Sharvit Baruch contends that because the U.N. is not privy to Israel's assessment of the military advantage achieved by its every aerial strike, the U.N. cannot possibly assess the proportionality of its military actions.

4. Affiliation with Abu Kabir Forensics Institute

TAU is affiliated with The Abu Kabir Institute, the only facility in Israel authorized to conduct autopsies in cases of unnatural death. TAU [website](#) shows Abu Kabir as an affiliated center within the Pathology Department of TAU's medical school.

The facility has harvested organs from dead Palestinians. Organs taken from dead Palestinians were utilised in medical research at Israeli universities' medical faculties and were transplanted into Israeli patients' bodies. Yehuda Hess, the former director of Israel's Abu Kabir Institute of

Forensic Medicine, has admitted to the theft of human tissues, organs, and skin from dead Palestinians over a period of time without their relatives' knowledge or approval.

Additionally, dead bodies of Palestinians are held captive by Israel in Abu Kabir. ([source](#)). Holding the bodies of dead Palestinians is a long-standing Israeli tactic of collective punishment, one that prevents families from bidding farewell to their loved ones ([source](#)).

5. The TAU record of exclusivity, intolerance and injustice towards its Palestinian students

- In 2018, the TAU administration canceled a previously authorized series of meetings, tabling, and events scheduled as part of a “Week to End the Occupation” organized by a joint Palestinian-Jewish student group shortly before the week commenced. ([source](#)).
- In 2022, Palestinian students at TAU coordinated an event to commemorate the Nakba (1948 Palestinian catastrophe when Zionist militias ethnically cleansed over 530 Palestinian villages and displaced over 750,000 Palestinians) with university security and obtained a permit. They were opposed by right wing student groups who attended, the university then handed over all power to the police. After a Palestinian student was attacked by the right wing Zionist groups, the police violently attacked the Palestinians with pepper spray and pinning them to the ground. 3 Palestinians were arrested, no Jewish students were arrested. When pressured to respond by Palestinian Knesset members, the university president blamed both sides and refused to take any action to limit police authority on campus. ([source](#))
- In 2024 TAU researchers performed archaeology focusing exclusively on Jewish history in occupied East Jerusalem ([source](#)).

6. TAU's appropriation of Palestinian land and historic knowledge

- TAU is built on the land of the destroyed village of Sheikh Mwannis. In 1991 TAU took the decision to expand its campus further across the land of the village, including the Green House, which was home to Ibraheem Abu Kheil before the 1948 Nakba: [source](#)

- TAU and Weizmann Institute performed research on ancient scrolls illegally taken from Wadi Murabba'at near Qumran in the occupied West Bank ([source](#)). Over 2,600 ancient sites in the occupied West Bank are currently overseen by the Staff Officer for Archaeology of Israel's Civil Administration.
- In 2012, TAU exhumed the Sheikh Munis cemetery to build student dormitories. Bones could be seen scattered all over the ground. In this way, student dormitories in TAU are literally built upon the dead bodies of Palestinians ([source](#)).

7. TAU's archaeology department: Digging (literally) for more Israeli settlements

- The Institute of Archaeology at TAU has participated in and led surveys and digs in illegal settlements across the occupied West Bank, including at Shiloh, South Mount Hebron, the Israeli-named mountain range the "Judean Hills," and the city of Hebron.
- TAU and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJ) take part in digs at Ir David, in the occupied East Jerusalem Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan. This land is managed by settler organisation Elad whose declared mission is to "Judaize" Palestinian East Jerusalem neighborhoods. A dig in this area caused structural damage to 38 Palestinian homes, being used to displace Palestinians. HUJ and TAU collaborated with Elad on joint courses, excavations, and research; featuring faculty on the Elad website; and speaking at Elad's conferences and events. Israeli courts found it legal for the details of archaeologists and the details of their digs to be withheld to protect their identity and prevent reputational damage ([source](#))
- 'Archaeology has been called the national sport of Israel' – James L. Gelvin, 'The Land and Its Lure' in *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) p. 10