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Germany/Israel

Germany's Enslavement to Its Past Kept It Silent on Gaza for Far Too Long

- Features -

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Germany has betrayed the memory of the Holocaust and its lessons. A country that saw its highest task as not to forget has forgotten. A country that told itself that it would never remain silent is silent. A country that once said "Never Again," and now: "again," with arms, with funding, with silence. There is no country that should be better than Germany at "discerning nauseating processes." Every German knows much more about them than Yair Golan. Here in Israel they are in full swing, yet Germany has not yet recognized them for what they are. It was only recently that it woke up too late and to too little effect.

When Germany sees the [Flag March in Jerusalem](#), it must see Kristallnacht. If it does not see the similarities, it is betraying the memory of the Holocaust. When it looks at Gaza, it must see the concentration camps and ghettos that it built. When it sees hungry Gazans, it must see the wretched survivors of the camps. When it hears the fascist talk of Israeli ministers and other public figures about killing and population transfer, about there being "no innocents" and about killing babies, it must hear the chilling voices from its past, who said the same in German.

It has no right to be silent. It must carry the flag of European resistance to what is happening in the Strip. Yet it continues to lag behind the rest of Europe, however uncomfortably, not only because of its past but also because of its [indirect responsibility for the Nakba](#), which probably would not have happened without the Holocaust. Germany also owes a partial moral debt to the Palestinian people.

The Israeli occupation would not have happened without support from the United States and Germany. Throughout this period, Germany was considered Israel's second-best friend. [It was inclusive and unconditional](#). Now Germany will pay for its long years of severe self-censorship, during which it was forbidden to criticize Israel, the sacred sacrifice.

Any and all criticism of Israel was [labeled antisemitism](#). The just struggle for Palestinian rights was criminalized. A country where a major media empire still requires its journalists to vow never to cast doubt on Israel's right to exist as a condition for employment cannot claim to honor freedom of expression. And if Israel's current policies endanger its existence, shouldn't they be entitled to criticize it?

In Germany it is difficult, if not impossible, to criticize Israel, whatever it does. This is not friendship, this is enslavement to a past and it must end in the face of [what is happening in Gaza](#). The "special relationship" cannot include a seal of approval for war crimes. Germany has no right to ignore the International Criminal Court, which was established in response to its crimes, by debating when to extend an invitation to an Israeli prime minister who is wanted for war crimes. It has no right to repeat the cliches of the past and place flowers in Yad Vashem, a 90-minute drive from Khan Yunis.

A pro-Palestinian demonstrator clenches a fist during a protest at the Humboldt University building, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in Berlin, Germany, May 22, 2024. Credit: Axel Schmidt/ REUTERS

Germany now faces its toughest moral test since the Holocaust. A few weeks after Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine, Germany was the one to lead the sanctions drive against Russia. Twenty months after the invasion of Gaza, Germany has still not taken any steps against Israel, apart from paying the same lip service as other European countries.

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Germany must change, not despite its past but because of it. It is not enough that Chancellor Friedrich Merz says it is no longer possible to justify bombing Gaza. [He must take measures to help stop it.](#) It is not enough that Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul says that Germany will not allow itself to be "put in a position where we have to show forced solidarity."

It is time for Germany to express solidarity with the victim, to free itself from the shackles of the past that alienate it from the lessons of the Holocaust. Germany cannot continue to sit idly by and make do with tepid condemnations. Given how terrible the situation is in Gaza, this is silence; Germany's disgraceful silence.

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Source: [Haaretz](#).

PS:

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