

Seminar Series Israel – Palestine: A Humanitarian Case Study

Meeting Minutes

Format: Seminar

Moderators: Lieutenant Colonel Ralf Baur, Lieutenant Kathleen Porath

Experts:

- **Dr. Anthony Wanis-St. John** – International Peace & Conflict Resolution Program, School of International Service, American University - Associate Professor
- **Dr. Stanislava Mladenova** – Watson Institute, Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies – Global Fellow & Researcher
- **Dr. Alexandria Nysten** – Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies at Watson Institute, Brown University – Research Faculty
- **Dr. Karolina Maclachlan** – Center for Civilians in Conflict – Senior Advisor - Policy & Advocacy

Audience: Open to public. Practitioners, experts, academics and advanced students

Date: 6 March 2024, 14:30 – 16:45 UTC+1

Duration: 135 min

Online Seminar of the Civil-Military Centre of Excellence

Our seminar has explored how effective collaboration between humanitarian organisations and military forces is essential for delivering aid and stabilising the region. It focused on the different aspects of the current humanitarian crisis happening in Gaza.

The key takeaways are that the humanitarian situation in Gaza is pressing. A ceasefire can only help for a short time. Peace negotiations and trust building need to start simultaneously to a ceasefire. There is already great damage done especially by bombings with great aftereffects where humanitarian aid is desperately needed. In these complex situation academia can help to create neutral spaces for knowledge exchange especially before other crisis break out.

Presentation of Dr. Anthony Wanis-St. John:

The Peace Process in the Middle East - Negotiation Aspects

Dr. Wanis-St. John wanted to point out and explore the complexities of peace-building, ceasefire conditions, and the importance of trust-building.

- Brief historical background of the conflict, highlighting its complexity and longevity.
- Civilian plight amidst the ongoing conflict, emphasizing their vulnerability and suffering.
- Success of the Oslo Peace Process and its attraction for both parties due to aspirations for improved humanitarian conditions.
- Challenges in negotiating and maintaining ceasefires, which often break down easily and lack durability.
- The necessity to address the underlying political conflict for sustainable peace.
- Ceasefires offer governments opportunities for rearmament and halting losses, while also providing civilian populations with harm reduction and protection.
- Varying interests in ceasefires among government, armed groups, and civilians underscore the complexity of the situation.
- Third-party coordination and coercion are essential for establishing stable ceasefires and facilitating peaceful settlements.
- Difficulty in trust-building due to the longstanding history of conflict among the involved parties.
- Despite challenges, trust-building is still achievable, even in the aftermath of severe situations.
- Current emphasis on trust-building mainly comes from the international community, rather than from the conflicting parties themselves.

Dr. Stanislava Mladenova:

Diving into Civil-Military - A Functional and Political Solution Perspective

Dr. Stanislava Mladenova expanded on the topic of trust-building, intertwining her expertise in civil-military relationships, thereby enriching the seminar with her elaborated perspectives.

- The importance of the military as a development actor e.g. when training other military forces, strengthening governance systems or managing the security sector.
- The US Militaries history in this role started in 1960 and goes on until today.
- E.g. the Acción Integral in the Colombian military were the goal is to strengthen the engagement with the population in an comprehensive way.
- This topic is important because the military engagement has a direct impact on the civilian environment and civil military relationship.
- Personalities and not the context or organization are often times the backbone of the civil military relationship.
- Trust is a key factor to bring different parties at one table but also to foster a everyday information exchange which is happening behind the scenes.
- The happenings in Gaza show how the ability to trust can be undermined by a single event. A lot of work is going in to stabilize the fragile situation but only one event can set everything back again.
- Everyone needs information, and everyone needs an understanding of each other's role and responsibilities, whether from a humanitarian, civilian, governmental or security perspective.
- The civilian angle of military operations must be weaved across all efforts e.g. weapons sales or institutional reforms.

Dr. Karolina Maclachlan:

The Academic - Practitioner Nexus

Dr. Karolina MacLachlan captivated the audience with compelling numbers and insights into the consequences of explosive weapon use, shedding light on the pressing humanitarian situation in Gaza both presently and in the foreseeable future.

- A great majority of the 30.000 deaths in Gaza up until now are probably civilians with 70 % of the prior mentioned number being women and children.
- The civilian harmed incidents in Gaza are four times as many per month as in the highest monthly number recorded in Iraq.
- Hundreds of 2.000 pound bombs, which can cause harm in an 1.000 feet radius, have been dropped in the first few months. These types of bombs are known to cause dire humanitarian consequences in densely populated areas.
- A recent study tried to estimate the number of deaths in the coming six months and concluded that with a ceasefire there will be around 6.500 deaths this is due to reverberating effects of e. g. damaged infrastructure.
- The consequences of explosive weapons go on much longer than just what you can see directly after the bomb has been dropped.
- There are many displaced people right now which are gathering in one small area without a functional infrastructure and less than half as many supply and aid trucks than before the conflict escalated once again.
- If there is an escalation of fighting in Rafah the civilians are even more affected than they have been now.
- A big question should be how to plan a military strategy in order to prevent civilian harmed incidents as much as possible.

Dr. Alexandria Nylen:

Key Protection & Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

Dr. Alexandria J. Nylen offered invaluable insights of how the academic world deals with the current status, how they can contribute to enhance the humanitarian situation, and what her own research is focusing on.

- Introduction to the centre at Brown University, dedicated to Civilian-Military Humanitarian Coordination research.
- Academia and Practitioners need to collaborate since the conflicts get more complex to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
- Academia can provide:
 - rigorous research methodologies
 - data analysis
 - a theoretical frameworks
 - a neutral testing ground for building big ideas

this helps to contextualize and comprehend the complex humanitarian crises

- Humanitarian organizations are busy doing their work, there's not always the capacity to learn, to absorb institutional knowledge. Academia can process the experiences and generate new practices which can also be feed to military actors.
- Academia can be a neutral space where different civil military actors can socialize before coming together in high stress settings additionally it can be a space for underrepresented groups to present their views.
- Knowledge exchange must already be happening before humanitarian disasters occur.