NZZ guest commentary: There is actually no solution

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is systematic, and that is the fundamental problem. Guest commentary by Hussein Aboubakr Mansour.

(Abstract) To speak of “Israelis and Palestinians” in the war over Gaza is “not just a simplification, it is part of a global fiction”, writes Hussein Aboubakr Mansour, Research Fellow at the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy in New York. The widespread formula of “two peoples with two claims to the same land” has become the “basic myth of international discourse” – morally handy, intellectually productive and politically useful.

However, the conflict is no longer a bilateral dispute that can be resolved through “negotiations, international pressure or diplomatic skill”. Rather, it is a “structural feature of regional and global systems” that persists because it reflects the existing balance of power and interests. “The conflict continues to smoulder because it fulfils functions,” says Mansour.

USA: Mirror of internal political struggles

Iran, for example, is instrumentalizing Palestine to weaken Israel and push the US out of the region; Qatar is using the conflict to raise its global profile through media power and soft power; Egypt is managing Gaza as a “pressure valve” that is “regulated, monetized and instrumentalized” depending on the political situation. Western institutions and NGOs are also part of the system: they are not aiming for a solution, but for “management” – not out of malicious intent, but because the crisis secures their “budgets, their self-confidence and their raison d’être”.

In the USA, the conflict now serves as a mirror of domestic political struggles: the Democrats are divided between centrist leadership and the “activist left”, which uses Palestine as a symbolic theater for criticism of American supremacy, racism and capitalism. Republicans turned Israel’s support into a symbol of a “civilizational narrative” of Western identity and anti-woke ideology. “It’s no longer about the Middle East, it’s increasingly about America itself.”

Confusing the stage with the play

Mansour writes: “To describe the conflict as a bilateral dispute is to confuse the stage with the play.” The crucial question is not why it remains unresolved, “but why we continue to pretend that a solution is in sight – even though the non-resolution is its main function”. The conflict is “not maintained by chance”, but

serves the various players – regional powers, institutions, ideologues and bureaucracies – as strategic and symbolic terrain.

The Trump administration briefly attempted to break through this logic with the Abraham Accords by decoupling the conflict from regional politics and promoting Arab normalization with Israel. “The approach was courageous and coherent,” writes Mansour. But the momentum has been lost – the structural constraints have once again prevailed.

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