

Echoes of Nuremberg: “Never Again”

Repeating Itself in the MENA Region

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In his famous opening speech at the Nuremberg trials, US head of the Supreme Court of Justice Judge Robert H. Jackson asserted that the purpose of this trial is to portray to humanity an Incontrovertible Record of the Holocaust.[1] Jackson believed that a mass firing would lead to a re-emergence of a Revanchist regime in Germany, which the allies may not be able to hold this time. However, the Nuremberg trials forced the Nazis to sit in a courtroom, witnessing the consequences of their own actions. He famously said: “The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating, that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated.”[2] However, Jackson’s hope to reintegrate morality within warfare appears to erode, as patterns of “dehumanization” re-emerge in the Israeli-Iran war of 2026. Psychiatrist Dr. Douglas Kelley warned about the risk of an environment that may lead a “sane” population towards a nazi-minded mentality.[3] This article seeks to reiterate the purpose of the Nuremberg Trials within the scope of the current Middle Eastern events. It seeks to dissect the normalization of violence throughout this conflict as well as the exaggeration of leaders’ capabilities. It is not an analysis of which side is right nor an examination of the purpose or nature of this war.

Primary Infiltration and Fueling of Revolutions

The Germans had political ties with various influential figures in the Middle East. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin Al Husseini sought to deepen ties with the SS, meeting with Hitler in 1941 and even recruiting Muslim forces within the Waffen-SS troops of the Balkans.[4] This laid the path to the introduction of Barid Al Sharq, a German radio channel translating Nazi indoctrination in Arabic.[5] The propaganda expanded to Iraq which led to the coup of Rachid Ali Al Gaylani, shortly aligning the country with the Axis before a British Invasion.[6] Nonetheless the major fruit was the economic cooperation between Iran under Reza Shah Pahlavi and the Nazi high command.[7]

German propaganda considered Iranians as part of the Aryan race Hitler deemed superior. Unlike mainstream beliefs, Hitler did not consider Arabs as enemies, but more of brothers in arms as they fought colonial rule in the Middle East, aligning with Germany’s greater plan.[8] Even in Egypt, sympathizers were increasing in numbers, even encompassing the future president Anwar Al Sadat.[9]

In their book *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Rubin & Schwanitz argued that nazi propaganda persisted in the Middle East after the fall of Berlin due to the preservation of a cultural reservoir. [10] They suggest that antisemitic and anti-imperialist narratives seeded by Nazi propaganda were absorbed into Islamist discourse, including rhetoric that surfaced during the Iranian Revolution. The propaganda echoed specific anti-colonial ideologies, enabling rapid internalization and later informing revolutionary movements grounded in anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist principles. The Shah’s desire for economic collaboration and assimilation with the West led to the destruction of the regime, fueling Islamist ideology with Anti-Western thoughts. It is evident that the region remains a cultural reservoir of fascist remainders. It is evident that the region remains a cultural reservoir of fascist remainders.

Nonetheless, the Middle Eastern post-colonial era marked the start of self-administration, which sought the help of expert bureaucrats. The newly independent countries were already in a state of war, whether officially declared or reflected by simple tensions. German expertise was welcomed in the region, and Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser became the most prominent example. In the late 1950s and 1960s, Egypt recruited dozens of German scientists, some with direct Nazi pasts, to develop long-range missiles.[11] This collaboration reflected Nasser's ambition to build an indigenous military capability and assert Egypt's leadership in the Arab world. While Syria and Iraq showed interest in German expertise, Egypt's program was the most ambitious, provoking Israeli countermeasures and highlighting the pragmatic willingness of Arab nationalist regimes to welcome German scientists despite their Nazi backgrounds.

Europe's Most Wanted: A Mossad Asset

The idea of having Ex-Nazis on different sides of conflicts in the Middle East dates back to the 60s after the use of German scientists within the Egyptian missile & military programs. However, one individual would create a brand new paradox. Also known as Europe's most wanted, "Otto Skorzeny" became a Middle Eastern asset following his escape of American prisons in 1947 by working for both the Mossad and Abdel Nasser's administration in Egypt.[12]

Skorzeny was dangerous due to his tactics and the malleability of his allegiances. Within the second world war, he infiltrated the American military at the battle of the Bulge by disguising himself and his men as American soldiers. He was acquitted in a US military trial in 1947 because military infiltration itself is not a 'war crime'. [13] This acquittal allowed him to reestablish himself in postwar Europe, eventually finding refuge under Francisco Franco's regime in Spain. Franco's government, which offered sanctuary to numerous former Nazis, provided Skorzeny with both protection and opportunities to build a new life.

In Madrid, Skorzeny cultivated a network of business ventures and political connections. He became a prominent figure among the community of ex-Nazis who had relocated to Spain, and his reputation as Hitler's favored commando gave him a certain notoriety. Franco's Spain not only shielded him from extradition but also allowed him to operate openly, blending entrepreneurial activity with clandestine political schemes. This environment positioned Skorzeny as a useful intermediary in Cold War intelligence circles, despite his past as an SS officer.

The most striking episode of his postwar career came in the early 1960s, when Skorzeny was recruited by the Mossad.[14] At the time, Israel faced a grave threat from German scientists working in Egypt to develop advanced missile systems. The Mossad sought ways to intimidate or eliminate these scientists, but penetrating their networks proved difficult. Skorzeny's Nazi-era connections and his access to European circles made him uniquely valuable. Accounts suggest that the Mossad approached him in Madrid, offering cooperation in exchange for removing him from their assassination list. Motivated by self-preservation and the chance to leverage his contacts, Skorzeny agreed.

Through his collaboration, Skorzeny provided intelligence on the German scientists and facilitated intimidation campaigns designed to disrupt Egypt's missile program. His involvement illustrates the pragmatic, sometimes paradoxical logic of Cold War espionage: a former SS commando, once a symbol of Nazi daring, became an asset to Israel's intelligence service. This unlikely alliance underscores the fluidity of postwar loyalties and the extent to which geopolitical necessity could override ideological enmity.

Skorzeny was not the one to introduce Nazi propaganda to the region. In fact, he was too late for that, as the Nazi indoctrination had already entered the MENA region in the 1930s. However, he did create the odd paradox within the Mossad.

A Holy Rogue Gallery: Identifying the Leadership Personality Trait

According to Kelley's analysis, out of the major 4 Nazi high command held in custody (Goring, Von Ribbentrop, Hess and Ley), Robert Ley was the only individual that was confirmed to be 'mentally ill', while the remaining portrayed a very sane mind. Kelley quotes: "With the exception of Dr. Ley, there wasn't an insane Joe in the crowd. Specifically while analyzing Hermann Goring, Dr. Kelley started admiring his charm and his comparably "high level of intelligence". The inmates' personality patterns indicate that, while they are not socially desirable individuals, their like could very easily be found in America." [15]

He was so convinced of their "normality" that he famously told audiences after the war that the United States was not immune to a similar rise of authoritarianism. In his lectures and writings, he often expanded on this idea with an even darker warning: "I am quite certain that there are people even in America who would willingly climb over the corpses of half of the American public if they could gain control of the other half." [16]

The idea of the Nazis being 'sane' haunted Kelley to suicide, as his philosophy would claim that the Allies did not eradicate Nazism. He identified three major traits in their leadership which can be discerned in the leaders of the conflict. [17]

Overweening Ambition: The non-clinical trait of ambition within the leader would result in a self-centered approach where the individual would take credit for launching operations. "The ambition is manifested with the leader's lobby or political group striving towards unreasonable end-goals"? Similar to the "Greater Israeli Project" or the Axis of Resistance, two minority groups in the Middle East possessing such expansionist projects may not be overwhelmingly involved in international policies without an overweening ambition. Both the Jewish population and the Shia community do not constitute a majority over the aggregate region and are concentrated in specific spots. From such demography, none of their 'Greater Plans' seem to be achievable anytime soon.

Low Ethical Standards: A low ethical standard is manifested when one undermines morality to achieve a certain goal. A leader would be willing to do whatever it takes to fulfill their general goal. Whether it is dragging a whole nation to war by their proxies to open up a new front, or carpet bombing regions, we have seen it all during the current Israel Iran war. Nonetheless, the operation of eliminating enemies from both sides using damaging endeavors may seem even less ethical than the Nazi night of the long knives,[18] as the assassination series nowadays are public and with negative externalities.

Extreme Nationalism: Unsurprisingly, the Nazis portrayed a high level of nationalism and a lack of empathy towards those they perceived as outside their own group. On a moral standard, the population was put in an us vs them scenario. Nowadays, the Middle East is found in a similar case of securitization absurdism. In the current conflict, within both camps, atrocities are being massively justified as eradications of an existential threat to the nation. The whole war bases itself on a fake axiom that the security of ‘my people’ must be at the cost of the security of the other’. Iranian cleric Khatami claimed that no peace shall be achieved in the Middle East with the existence of Israel.[19] Even coming from the leadership of Iran, its new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamanei claimed that Middle Eastern peace shall only be achieved by the defeat of the US and Israel.[20] On the other hand, Minister of defense of Israel Yezrael Kaatz discussed the carpet bombing of the area on the South of Litani in Lebanon in his speech.[21]. Although it may seem absurd to the eyes of an outsider, it is currently justified by the Defense council as a move to secure the “Galilee” area. Hannah Arendt highlights in the Origins of Totalitarianism that the fuel of such fiction-like scenarios in politics stems from the emphasis on differences and the insistence on the survival of one entity at the cost of the other.[22] Such examples showcase that nationalism is usually strengthened by the pride of one’s community and through the hatred of the other, and if these two were placed in the same region, no peace seems achievable.

Kelley’s nightmare: Nazism as a Consequence

With such a perspective shift within the Nazi mentality, Kelley endeavored to dissect evil within the unique "Nazi pathology", some common brain defect or mental illness that could explain their crime [23]. Yet, with the groundbreaking shift, Kelley adapted sanity into an environmental scheme that separated the population’s logic into two different scenarios.

In a stable environment, people value freedom, academic, and moral ethics. However, in a survival scheme, the people would shift their priorities into order and bread. The Weimar republic failed to mitigate the consequences of the Great Depression of 1929. Accompanied with the national humiliation of the treaty of Versailles and the occupation of the Ruhr by Belgian and French troops, the German population started becoming more responsive to violence.[24] Kelley warned that economic and social despair in any type of society, including the Western one, leads people to “trade their souls” with charismatic strongmen, with the promise of stability.

As of 2025, Tehran University recorded the average depression level among Iranians to be twice as high as the global average, portraying a certain level of social despair in a falling region.[25] Nonetheless, the crippling economy that was forced into autarky seems to agglomerate the persona of the Supreme Leader. The contrast of the population with and against the regime depicts the antagonism that the Islamic republic induced within the situation of social despair. Kelley warned that a population would be extremely prone to unjustified violence, which is now seen in both pro-Islamist and Iranian resistance.

In parallel, the situation in Israel following the adoption of Neo-Zionism does not seem far-fetched amid the context of social despair. The Israelis depicted the 6-day war as “The Holocaust that did not Happen”, constantly reminding their population of the siege they are currently in.[26] Neo-Zionism derived from Jabotinsky’s doctrine of dealing with Arabs. Unlike the Ben-Gurion perspective, Jabotinsky insisted that Arabs will never accept the presence of the state of Israel, which calls on the Jewish population to remain in a constant “war-state”. Yaev Jabotinsky’s idea of the Iron wall called for paramilitarism within the Israeli population, constantly believing that their own survival relies on the constant demotivation of Arabs.[27] The current Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu reasserted this belief by calling on the people of Israel, promoting his constant ideology of “preemptive” military measure. It is also worth mentioning that Netanyahu’s father Benzion was the right hand man of Jabotinsky and the doctrine of Neo-Zionism became deeply entrenched within the family’s political pathway.[28]

For what it may seem to be, social despair is becoming a constant fuel for Middle Eastern violence. The common, never-ending tragedies like the events of Gaza or the massacres against protesters in Iran are unfortunately being defended. Whether through social media “memes” or the justification of violence, the high level of stress and the unstable sociological environment iterates a constant mindset of survival, where violence is easier to justify.

Messianic Call & Dehumanization

Historian Hannah Arendt, famously known for her book “The Origins of Totalitarianism”, insisted on a major system that governments like the Nazi one adopt: The Nazis pointed themselves as serving a higher cause, which is catalyzing the laws of nature and history.[29] According to their own interpretation of the laws of nature, the concept of “Survival of the fittest” aligned with the Aryan race eliminating its external ‘enemies’, which led to the engineering of the “Final Solution”. In fact, the call for such a higher purpose was more paramount to the Nazis than winning the war, as can be concluded from the acceleration of extermination within camps after acknowledging their inevitable loss.

Kelley elaborated that once a man convinces himself he is doing 'God's work' or 'History's work,' he can justify any horror as a necessary sacrifice. This compartment aligns with the different messianic calls used in the conflict in order to overlay reason by faith. The far right messianic Israeli doctrine, proclaiming the Zionist project as “God’s greater plan”, faced itself against the Iranian ‘revolutionary’ ideology, which named the operation “Al Wa’d Al Sadeq”, translating to “The Rightful Promise” of Islamic faith within warfare and justifying bombardment in the name of a messianic mission.[30] A militarized theocracy is expected to adopt such a pattern. However,

the conflict now posed itself as two messianic missions, constantly justifying their moves to fulfill their higher promise.

A war driven by faith constantly becomes tabooed, as there is no need to explain the disaster nor the reason for the commission of such massacres. A higher purpose does not require justification, manufacturing a whole machinery of evildoings. The Nuremberg trials insisted on personal accountability rather than excusing individuals for simply “following orders”, to counterweight the potential damage of messianic indoctrination.[31] However, neither side seems to be taking rationality nor reason into account, as both rely mostly on the faith of their population to justify war goals, which themselves are becoming more and more malleable and shift from one purpose to another.

Arendt elaborated on the concept of Messianic mission implying scapegoatism. As the war constantly needs to be justified, the bloodshed and the reason behind the terror and psychological drainage of the population must be directed somewhere, therefore scapegoating the detriments within their enemy. Reiterating the speeches of the leaders, Netanyahu oftentimes calls the axis of resistance a “curse”, which indirectly implies that non-stability is a consequence of the resistance’s existence.[32] On the other hand, Hezbollah’s former leader Hassan Nasrallah famously pointed to Israel as “Al Aadou al-Sahyuni” or the “Zionist Enemy”. While it is not the article’s mission to point out who is ‘right or wrong’ or if any of the scapegoatism is factual, the direct association of suffering with the other reinforces the us vs them paradox mentioned above.

With the glorification of the war comes the dehumanization of the enemy. As Kelley depicted in “22 cells of Nuremberg”, the Nazis showered those they considered to qualify as humans with empathy, constantly pampering their own civilization implicated in a rewarding social environment. However, any entity that would fall outside of their line would get dehumanized. For instance, Goebbels, the nazi minister of propaganda, constantly depicted the “Jew” as a specimen with specific features that differentiate them from Germans and characterized them as Goblins, Devils, or even their own cartoonish character within Nazi caricature.[33] Such “socially-subhuman” entities become fine to kill within the eyes of the citizenry, as the dehumanization process destroyed the assimilation and empathic environment among them. For the last 3 weeks, social media has turned into the glorification of killings within the so-called enemy, insisting on the blood in the hands of their opponents and ignoring their own leaders.

Dissecting the speeches within the war, Kaatz has often depicted the Axis of resistance as “The Axis of Evil”, framing their war as a fight against demons. This process of dehumanization has also been adopted by depicting Israel and the United States as “Al-Shaytan al-Akbar” (the Mightiest Devil).[34] Civil Societies in both nations adopted the language in many forms and tabooed empathy towards the enemy. Arendt warned of such patterns as some of the most dangerous because the normalization of violence within international relations will lead to the killing of innocent civilians from both sides. Violence becomes normalized as long as we do not empathize with the victim of a certain operation, and once two sides are adopting the exact same technique of war justification, the killing of one individual will cause tears of pain in one region, and tears of joy in another.

Security by Insecurity

State building often involves the creation of a past utopia that we as a population seek to achieve. When it comes to Israel, the utopian past involves the larger kingdom of Jerusalem, while the Iranian vision seeks to spread a sphere of influence in the name of resistance. Both Utopias would seem rather honorable from the point of view of an outsider. Resistance in the end is an honorable characteristic, while the Israeli concept involves the interpretation of Biblical prophecies.

Achieving security within the social despair of the Middle East goes back to the original state of achieving survival. However, survival mode ended up in the escalation trap. Kahn & Schelling developed the theory of the escalation trap as an assertion of dominance.[35] Both camps are now definitely enemies in the eyes of each other, constantly demonizing their opponent and glorifying their mission. The Escalation trap revolves around asserting dominance, which would often include hitting harder than the enemy. The IDF has constantly attempted to assert dominance over Lebanon, especially during the October war of 2024. Also known as Black October, the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel registered 2,800 deaths in Lebanon and 1.2 million cases of displacement according to the Lebanese ministry of Health.[36] Not to be outdone, the current 2026 conflict resulted in a similar massive bloodshed, with around 2,294 death and over a million displaced. On the other hand, Israel's casualties registered 64 military killings and 12 civilians.[37] The massive gap between the numbers already portrays the concept of the assertion of dominance. Jabotinsky himself elaborated the Iron Wall doctrine, emphasizing the need to constantly terrorize the Arabs (Now integrating Iran as an enemy of Israel) to deter any opposition and resistance.[38] Iran on the other hand asserts its dominance with the deployment of a massive number of missiles, creating fire nights in Israel demotivating people through a nonstop in-and-out of shelters.

In the end, during such escalation traps, the insecurity of one nation is oftentimes associated with the insecurity of the other. Each side seeks to demotivate their opponent, in a tit-for-tat procedure: demotivate the enemy to motivate our own people, the enemy strikes back and demotivates their people. Thus, a wave of motivation followed by demotivation comes across as a constant chase of the final word. The fleeting patterns of security on each side result in their own insecurity within this pattern, as the escalation seems far from ending until now.

Conclusion

The parallels between the warnings issued at Nuremberg and the current Israeli-Iran conflict serve as a sobering reminder of the cyclical nature of human violence when morality is stripped from warfare. The leadership pathology identified by Dr. Kelley—defined by overweening ambition, low ethical standards, and extreme nationalism—is clearly mirrored in the contemporary actors who prioritize expansionist projects and existential triumphs over human cost. This leadership finds fertile ground in the social despair of populations pushed into survival mode by economic ruin and constant securitization, transforming once-sane societies into environments prone to authoritarian charms and justified brutality.

Furthermore, the persistent use of messianic calls to bypass rational accountability has fueled a process of dehumanization that mirrors the dark propaganda of the 1940s. By characterizing the opponent as a "devil" or a "curse," both sides have normalized violence, ensuring that empathy is viewed as a betrayal of one's own survival. This ideological rigidity feeds directly into the escalation trap, where the pursuit of security through the insecurity of the other creates a self-perpetuating engine of destruction. Ultimately, as Judge Jackson warned, civilization cannot survive the repetition of such malignant wrongs. The Middle East today stands as a testament to Kelley's nightmare: a region where the lessons of Nuremberg remain unheeded, and the "Never Again" is once again repeating itself through the tragic normalization of the unthinkable. While this trial was the pivot towards international law and human rights conventions, it seems that Judge Jackson's idea of poisoned chalice was not taken in its full sense, as he famously concluded his opening speech, "We must never forget that the record on which we judge these defendants today is the record on which history will judge us tomorrow. To pass these defendants a poisoned chalice is to put it to our own lips as well." [39] For the millions of victims of the dehumanization process and rise of evil, let us learn from their fate.

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[16]: Douglas M. Kelley, *22 Cells in Nuremberg: A Psychiatrist Examines the Nazi Criminals* (New York: Greenberg, 1947).

[17]: Ibid.

[18]: *The Night of the Long Knives* (1934) was a purge in Nazi Germany during which Adolf Hitler ordered a series of political extrajudicial executions intended to consolidate his absolute power.

[19]: Hardline Iranian clerics, such as Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami during his recurring Tehran Friday prayer sermons, have historically asserted that the eradication of Israel is a fundamental prerequisite for any regional peace.

[20]: Arya Mishra, "'Not the time for peace': Iran Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei says US, Israel 'must be defeated'," *Hindustan Times*, March 17, 2026.

[22]: Israeli Defense Minister Yisrael Katz announced in March 2026 that the Israeli military would conduct operations to occupy southern Lebanon up to the Litani River to establish a defensive buffer.

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