

# Professorial Propagandists for Hamas: Part I, Juan Cole



by Andrew E. Harrod

Israelis need “to behave like normal human beings instead of genocidal psychopaths,” proclaimed University of Michigan professor [Juan Cole](#) in a November 21 [webinar](#) on the “The Past, Present and Future of Israel/Palestine.” Such anti-Israel screeds permeated his perverse presentation of Israel’s long history of conflict with hostile Muslim neighbors, including Hamas’s recent [October 7 outrages](#), and further revealed his [apologetical worldviews](#).

Two leftist, anti-Israel organizations hosted the webinar: [Massachusetts Peace Action](#), and [Historians for Peace and Democracy](#), which Cole has endorsed. He did not disappoint his sponsor, as he condemned Israel’s military campaign to eliminate Hamas in the Gaza Strip, although he conceded that Hamas terrorist tactics “are reminiscent” of the Islamic

State. The “Israeli response has broken every law or regulation that any international body has attempted to establish with regard to the prosecution of war since the end of World War II,” he claimed, ignoring the Israel Defense Forces’ historic care to keep civilian casualties to a minimum, a practice that has earned it the moniker “[most moral army on earth.](#)”

In the “Alice and Wonderland view” of President Joe Biden’s administration, Cole decried, “Israelis are just defending themselves” in Gaza. “How are you defending yourselves? You’re bombing hospitals, you’re bombing schools, you’ve killed thousands and thousands of innocent non-combatants,” he claimed. Yet his fulminations overlooked that Hamas’s [internationally-condemned](#) tactics deliberately exploit [hospitals](#), [schools](#), and [other forms](#) of civilian [human shields](#) as protection for Hamas military facilities.

Cole charged that for decades the “United States has attempted to guarantee Israel impunity,” such as by vetoing anti-Israel resolutions in the United Nations Security Council. This support “has undermined the entire thrust of international humanitarian law as it has evolved after World War II,” he claimed.

The 1949 Geneva Conventions’ [provisions](#) against forcible transfer of population into occupied territory loomed large in Cole’s charges against Israel. He noted how these arose following WWII in the aftermath of Nazi Germany’s brutal ethnic cleansing practices in places like Poland. He erroneously compared this totalitarianism to Israeli Jews [voluntarily settling](#) in territories Israel liberated in the 1967 Six Day War from illegal Egyptian and Jordanian land seizures effected during Israel’s 1948 war of independence.

In that war, Egypt and Jordan seized territories of the former British League of Nations Palestine Mandate, respectively the Gaza Strip and Jordan’s [internationally unrecognized](#)

[annexation](#) of the West Bank. However, Cole falsely termed these areas as Israel's "occupied territories," even though under international law Israel has claim to these [historic Jewish territories](#) as the [successor regime](#) to the British mandate. He therefore condemned "Israeli settlers in the West Bank" as "squatters on Palestinian land" who, in "colonizing," have done something "completely illegal according to the Geneva Conventions."

Cole charged that America's pro-Israel position reflected not the justice of Israel's cause or American interest in a [strategic ally](#), but rather crass domestic politics. In the 1948 presidential election year, President Harry Truman recognized Israel. He "made this calculation to get Jewish votes by supporting Israel, which has been a standard operating procedure in Washington ever since," Cole judged.

The self-confident Cole assured his audience that, if only someone with his sensibilities were governing in America's capital, the Middle East would experience peace in our time. Over the past decades, "at any point along the way, Washington, I think, really could have intervened to settle this," he said, overlooking the [implacable jihadist rejection](#) of Zionism throughout history. Notwithstanding in particular the [disastrous thirty years](#) of the Oslo peace process begun in 1993, he proclaimed that America could have acted "to ensure a Palestinian state, to ensure rights for Palestinians, and it would have also helped Israeli security."

Neither the U.S. nor Israel was ever in the right for Cole, who suggested ahistorically that for Israel "there wasn't a strong military reason to seize" Gaza and the West Bank in 1967. "These territories didn't play a significant role in the 1967 war" and their Arab populations "weren't organized as combatants," he claimed of areas from which numerous Arab armies threatened to exterminate Israel. He ignored the indefensible "Auschwitz" [ceasefire lines](#) resulting from the 1948 war, as described by leading Israeli diplomat Abba Eban,

along the lines of the [Jordanian fortifications](#) that ran through Israel's divided capital of Jerusalem.

He whitewashed the 2018 terroristic "[Great Return March](#)" in which Gazan Arabs stormed Israeli border barriers and launched assaults against Israel as Gazan "marches for their freedom." "Most of the people in Gaza are descended from refugees who were pushed out of southern Israel by the Zionist forces" and some "could walk home if they were allowed," he declared about young Arabs who [only know Gaza](#) as home. The laws of war allow for using force against such  [Hamas-led terrorists](#), but Cole complained that the "Israelis brought in snipers" to stem the tide. Israel's military "just shot them down. These were not people who were armed or who were posing a threat to Israeli soldiers," he alleged; "this was completely illegal; this was a war crime."

Straining to separate Islam from the [zealously genocidal](#) Hamas, he declared the terrorist group's references to it merely "a form of propaganda." Keeping with his theme, he claimed that "many Palestinians are secular-minded people," an assertion [unsupported](#) by surveys among a population known for being a [global leader](#) in antisemitism.

Israel's conflict with its neighbors, Cole contended, "is largely an ethnopolitical struggle in which religion is sometimes invoked." "Seeing this conflict through the lens of religion would be an error," he elaborated. His thesis would surprise the iconoclastic leading Israeli historian [Benny Morris](#), who has documented how the motivating ideology against Israel's creation in 1948 and ever since has been [jihad](#).

Regarding Hamas's various atrocities on October 7, Cole decreed that "there's nothing in religion that makes people behave this way," a claim squarely at odds with centuries of [Islamic jihad](#). "I know something serious about Islam and Islamic law," boasted Cole, who "can guarantee you that Hamas's actions on October 7 contravened Islamic law in every

single way. You're not allowed to kill noncombatants" or "launch a sneak attack." To the contrary, Islamic canons [recount](#) Islam's prophet Muhammad leading a surprise massacre of a Jewish tribe in the Arab oasis of Khaybar, a name that forms an [Islamic battle cry](#) against Jews down to the present day.

Thus, Cole exemplifies how professors of Middle East studies long ago exchanged dispassionate research for political advocacy concerning Israel. Such pedigreed charlatans' agenda-driven shibboleths, spilled out over decades to unsuspecting students, set the stage for today's campus-base antisemitic protests and thuggery. It is past time to permanently defund them.

Andrew E. Harrod, a Middle East Forum [Campus Watch Fellow](#), freelance researcher, and writer, is a fellow with the Lawfare Project. Follow him on Twitter: [@AEHarrod](#).