

## Transcript

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Thank you so much, Anthony.

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Set.

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Up for the meeting to.

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This session and thank you so much everyone for coming.

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It's really great to be able to see.

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Here and.

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See our community as well, so I'm really, really excited that you're all here. So what I'll be doing is I'll be talking about religious actors and transnational solidarity.

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Especially the question of Palestine.

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And what I'm hoping to do is to look at how religious actors in the region have responded to Gaza.

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It also aims to look at the different responses by these religious authorities, and perhaps to provide an understanding of why some religious actors show solidarity while others don't. So when we talk about really dis actors, so I'm referring to independent preachers. I'm referring to government sanction.

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I'm looking at oppositional and often they are associated with Islamist group.

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Have to be very careful when you say when you say religious actors. Some are very, very specific about what do you mean by.

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What do you?

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Mean by.

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Actor. What do you mean by a preacher? So I'm just looking at all these actors and I'm not going to go into great details.

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In trying to.

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These.

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Actors on whether or not they're credible. I'll be coming from religious actors who are largely based in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, maybe Egypt, Kuwait, as well as those who are in.

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Exile to understand the varying responses outlined earlier, and this will be done sparingly. After all, it's only a 20 minute talk, so I have to be very careful as well. So these religious actors come from various Muslim religious traditions as well, not necessarily from one religious tradition.

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Some are more respected than others in terms of the religious credentials. Some are more popular than others for their media work, but they are not considered as very often.

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Authoritated by by the appease it would be simplistic as well to argue that the ulama or these religious actors are all the same. So even the group of clerics who can be classified as supportive of the state.

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Can't be seen as a modernist, but some are propagandists and act as mouthpieces for the.

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So while other loyalists are more quiet and will only issue religious rulings in support of the state when needed, and also even though they're more, you know, they're supportive of the state. Often when they issue religious rulings, these rulings are grounded in theological reasoning.

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So it's more complex than you know what? What we understand. You know, we talk about these religious actors.

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So following in October 7, so was seen use of a preacher delivered a monologue against Hamels and praise Israel. So Wasim Yusuf was a Jordanian born preacher who received Emirati's citizenship and is known for his avid support for.

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The Mohammed bin Zayed.

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Spelled the president and, you know Emir of Abu.

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He was the imam. I mean, it was in news. It was also the Imam of Sheikh Zayed Mosque, but was later removed. So he called for Gaza to be rid of Hamas. So this is October 7th. And he said, you know, clearly Israel was spared of every.

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Decision. In fact, he was scathing of Iran and Hezbollah, and he argues that they had destroyed Iraq and Syria.

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We have to understand context, I suppose. I mean the UAE normalised relations with Israel in August 2020, soon after the deal was signed. Wasim use of retweeted a video of Palestinians protesting against normalisation branding them.

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As filthy and undeserving of Jerusalem.

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You can see that twig Yusuf was criticised for this week, so he doubled down on his tweet a day later after he was.

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Know hammered on.

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Are.

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Saying that he was only defending the UAE. Interestingly, Wasim Yusuf had been critical of Israel before normalisation occurred, so you can see there's a massive shift in terms of how we approach.

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None.

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Normalisation, he has spoken of Palestinian rights of their homeland. He spoke out against Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. He spoke about the AL a, a mosque and the.

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Religious obligation to preserve it. He even legitimised jihad in the name of protecting Al Qaza and Palestinian rights. So, According to him, Palestine is the field of jihad in combat. I'm quoting him here. It is a field against the assaults of the Zionist.

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We'll try and understand why perhaps later. So in August 2020, under Rahman as today's the imam of the Grand Mosque of Mecca.

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They live a sermon calling for everyone to converse well with Jews and treat them with respect. So he's well known for his close relations with Mohammed. Again, Salman, the Crown Prince, and many would classify him as a propagandist.

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Which means that he will praise the state, he will praise Mohammed bin Salman, but he had earlier focused on the occupation and the treatment of the Palestinians at the hands of Israel.

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We had also made some anti-Semitic remarks.

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And perhaps saw the 2020 sermon as an indication of religious approval for normalisation. So the sermon just came weeks before Israel normalised, with the UAE. So following the attacks on Gaza by Israel.

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The Saudi or Lima, who were based in Saudi Arabia, were either silent, including the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abdul Aziz Al Ashir, or were critical of Hamas.

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So even when Gaza's death toll increased exponentially, I mean, the Mufti of Saudi Arabia did not utter a word of condemnation or even support for Palestine. He issued a statement just after October 7 stating in an important e-mail.

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Allah bestow. No Allah has bestowed upon this country the blessing of security, stability, unity, harmony and collective agreement. And I suppose you know one would assume that he's actually referring to Saudi Arabia.

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So in November 2023, the grandma Steven called for donations to be made to support the.

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Of Gaza.

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So that was, you know, late 2023 and he made it very clear that the call was made at the behest of the ruler. He has since been silent again and accepted during Ramadan earlier this year, but was, interestingly.

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Preaches including Saeed Binhillan, who was more vocal following October 7, so he condemned Hamas and made the statement that the.

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Group was in the wrong path, so these clerics what's also interesting is that they have said very little, if anything, about the plight and the suffering of the Palestinians, especially in Gaza.

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Occasionally, statements are made to demonstrate sympathy for Gazans while blaming Hamas for their predicament.

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So this reflects Saudi Arabia's position as it shifts from silence to condemnation to cautious statements in dealing with the situation in Gaza, perhaps largely to manage public anger against Israel.

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What's interesting about this royal armour or breaches as well, they discuss BDS. So loyalist clerics who are very supportive of the state and very fond of the state condemn those calling for boycotts.

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So they argue that individuals have no authority to call for boycotts. Who are who?

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Only the ruler has the authority to do so of the wheel. For example, who is again known for his support for rulers in general and preaches obedience to the smock activists for their boycott campaign outside the purview of the state?

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Clearly, the boycott campaign is not supported by the sounding state. In fact, in November 2023, Turkey Alishi forcibly fellow Saudi Arabia's inner Saudi politics and Saudi advisor. I mean, he's responsible for all the.

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Amazing concert.

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Taking place in Saudi Arabia, he announced that McDonald's was a strategic partner of the RIYADS season. Mosa, Maria and he promoted their buy one get.

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On.

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His social media accounts.

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There's a peer ship in the rhetoric of these and features in countries like Saudi Arabia, like Bahrain, like the UAE when it comes to Palestine. What happened?

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The shift in retro can be explained by looking at the nature of state clerical institutions in this country.

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So there's support for the state is 1 explanation as these countries have normalised relations or in the process of normalising relations with Israel.

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2nd regime crackdown on dissent and oppositional voices and elevation, as well as elevation of loyalist interpretations of state clerical relations, so following the Arab uprisings, the UAE has embarked on curbing religious.

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Position only lawyerstarrics who are promoted. Others have faced imprisonment and are operating in exile. The Marathi government, for example, pursues its agenda by employing clerics whose ideology is one of support for the stay in the name of moderate Islam instability.

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So there isn't a theological grounding to the interpretations on loyalty to the state in the case of the UAE, the loyalist was in use of an Apple lobbying barrier.

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Cleric is the head of the UAE Fatwa Council. He issued a statement endorsing the UA ES normalisation with Israel in 2020 and I remember sorry. Then you know, Daniel Milam, I'm going to, I'm going to mention you here because we've had a long discussion about Abdullah bin Baya and some point you make this you know this this argument. And I thought it was really interesting.

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Because the idea is that Vinay changed his views. It's not that he changed his views on loyalty to the state, but it was the state that incorporated him into his structures due to his interpretations of state clerical.

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Relations. So I think that was really, you know, I and I thought I was absolutely fascinating. You see, I'm trying not to plagiarise my studies.

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A wonderful argument that her roommates.

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Did.

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Because I'm like, I'm going to mention that. So he must be noted, I've been biased supports the Emirati government, but I don't think it is actually fair to describe him as, you know, as a propagandist like as today's OSC news. So it's not, you know, you wouldn't go out and go all you actually be quite careful as well.

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So this is.

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Is something that I thought was really interesting in trying, you know, particularly when we're trying to understand why Saudi olema why, you know, breaches or Emirati preachers, can I have changed the way they look at, you know, Palestine or solidarity with Palestine?

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I would say that perhaps most globalism.

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Time to understand the limits of transnational Islam. The scholars largely locate this development of the period of the 20 tens. So they argue that a rise in populist and nationalist movements has led to greater scepticism of global institutions and trade agreements.

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So states assert their own independence and national identity, so it must also be noted that all those colours of Islam have continually questioned the concept of the nation's state.

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Positions by Western colonial powers.

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The state as a defining feature of Muslim societies has become an unacceptable law. Yes, national identity is not necessarily viewed as an unacceptable concept. It is often used to enhance a sense of distinctiveness.

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Even in religious terms and in response to post globalism, many states in the meaner region have embraced a post globalisation fervour that enhances national identity and promotes retention of national traditions.

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While maintaining their role as well as engagement with a globalised world, so countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE then promote promote their national interest in reaction to an increasingly multibillion world as well. So scholars have been writing about the rise of populist nationalism in the MENA region.

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Reading Turkey and Saudi Arabia often it is done in the name of.

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You know Brazilian state security, economic prosperity international, standing in the face of, you know, the tractors and challenges. So it's, it must be noted, as I've said, that populist rhetoric and nationalism are not.

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But scholars argue that post globalism has allowed populism to re manifest itself in different forms. So post globalism has, I would argue, contributed to a gradual process of DE emphasising.

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National Islamic solidar.

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The post globalisation manifestation of increased nationalism propagated by the state has forced, willingly or unwillingly, the ulema to absorb nationalist language. So the language used by the state to describe.

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Detractors and to talk about reform and progress permeates the justification used by the ulema to support the rulers.

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Give you an example.

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The isolation of upper, so that was rationalised in support of the state dullama or these preachers or the preachers of these countries, especially state sanctioned breaches, jumped on board to end their denunciation of.

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One example was the Saudi Alim Mohammed Al Arifi, so he was very vocal in his support of the.

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So is that.

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The Brad Pitt.

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Use this.

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Film I think it's.

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All the time. So for those who'll be doing an option with me, you'll be seeing this again.

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He's he's he's me. Apparently he was so good looking that women fall into his television programme.

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What I'm lost.

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I don't know.

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He was. He was.

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And his eyes.

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All right.

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Maybe. Maybe charisma?

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Can.

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We move on.

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And The thing is, he included.

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The protection, you know, his statement in support of the set was actually imbued with nationalist clever, so he included prayers for the protection of the Saudi state. In his words, our nation. He also urged Paka not to interfere in the domestic affairs of Saudi Arabia. And this is Despite that the fact that.

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He was known for his frequent visits to Tata.

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He was also sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood before the removal of Morsi. Mohammed Morsi in Egypt in 2013. And there's also another prominent cleric that I've mentioned here.

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In a revealing tweet that clearly demonstrates national identity retention, he stated our religion, our nation, our leadership and our citizens are red lines. They cannot be bargained or compromised in lessordia, so that was.

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I had the hash.

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So again another point that I wanted to make is the Syrian conflict also facilitated the process or enhance the process of postglobation. So the transnational Islamic solidarity exhibited by Sunni led countries and populations during the initial stages of the Syrian civil war.

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Actually contributed to realisation of the power of transnational solidarity. The realisation of the power of transnational Islam.

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Foreign fighters from Sunni majority countries became difficult to contain, and it went wrong very quickly as the conflict became a destination for groups like Jabhat Al Ashram and ISIS to assert their brand of struggle.

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And the ulema of various or regions of various political persuasions who spoke out against the Assad regime and encouraged on jihad, mainly for Syrians, face intense scrutiny.

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So they were accused of inciting violence and inspiring.

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The countries to participate in the conflict in Syria under the Republican jihadist will return from Syria, cited Al Arifi as a source of inspiration.

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None.

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So supporting the Palestinian struggle now could potentially be seen as problematic, and so clearly for them they're quite concerned and the elements themselves, or the preachers themselves, quite concerned about being accused of promoting jihad.

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Of encouraging foreign fighters, fighters who travel to various parts of the Muslim world.

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The situation in Gaza highlights that some prominent religious actors in the region show limited interest, and what I can say is that again, the killing of Yahya sinwal. Perhaps, maybe I can talk about that a little bit, cause a recalibration.

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So some Alama who supported state narratives of anti Islamism normalisation and expressions of Islamism, denouncing war, and celebrated his death, others were silent and they did not comment on Sinoad's death. Emiratis, some Saudi and Emirati tabid, the TV personalities, also celebrated some wars there.

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On October 17th of October, the Bahraini region Mohammed is known, known for his anti Hamas and anti MB position, celebrated renewals death, saying that he had brought destruction to Gaza. Other clerics, for example, of men of Hamas, a Kuwaiti preacher known as a propagandist as well very supportive of the Saudi state, very supportive of.

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State fairy call relations. He argued that basically.

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Let me just find the statement that we made. So he praised Synoir, arguing that we might disagree with Hamas, but it was a legitimate resistance. The matter was no longer about Hamas. It was a Palestinian struggle, and Hamas was a part of the struggle. So we're not talking about Hamas anymore. We're talking about the Palestinians.

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So the grand scheme also issued a statement on the day of Simons death, declaring the martyrs of the Palestinian resistance are heroes without making any references to Yahya.

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So clearly, when you were looking at the hulima in the region, in Saudi Arabia and in in other parts of of the countries that I've mentioned earlier, they were very critical of Hamas. But now they're also quite concerned about public anger and how to manage public anger because clearly some of this has been very.

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Criticise for their support or for not supporting the Palestinian concern and finally my final.

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That Gaza has become a source of conflation for transnational Muslim solidarity and clinical authority. I'm happy to talk about this Group A little bit more. One group that has emerged is the Hayat Alama, seen the Palestinian Scholars Association.

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It is an independent scholarly organisation that brings together Islamic jurists of Palestinian origin living outside Palestine. But now it has incorporated preachers and alumni who are based elsewhere as well.

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And they argue that they're providing a Sharia based perspective on Palestinian issues and their developments through systematic and scholarly.

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Methods deactivating the rule of Islamic scholars and they're very supportive of the Palestinian cause. You're organising conferences and some prominent clerics have actually joined this conference as well, including the Deputy Mufti of Amman.

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Arguing that it's time we have to demonstrate support for the Palestinian resistance as well as support for the Palestinian cause. Thank you so much everyone.