

Statement on BSF Grant, the Humanitarian Situation in Gaza, and Scientific Collaboration

The Context of This Statement

A couple of weeks ago, we received notice that our joint research proposal, titled "Firm Growth: Understanding the Role of Skill and Teams," had been awarded the generous financial support of the U.S.-Israel Binational Science Foundation ([BSF](#)). The BSF is a fund established by the U.S. and Israeli governments in the 1970s to promote scientific relations between the U.S. and Israel by supporting collaborative research projects in a wide range of basic and applied scientific fields, for peaceful and non-profit purposes.

On the occasion of receiving this grant, we want to address the context in which this research currently takes place, specifically the war in Gaza and the dire humanitarian crisis there. We believe that an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, and the protection of civilians, humanitarians, and journalists are morally required and are in the best interest of both Israelis and Palestinians. While Hamas committed unspeakable atrocities on October 7th, 2023, Israel now holds the power to alleviate or worsen the humanitarian crisis. Legal accountability and respect for human rights and dignity are the only sustainable foundation for peaceful coexistence for both Palestinians and Israelis.

On the basis of these shared beliefs, the considerations outlined in this document and our commitment to the pursuit of science and dialogue across borders, we have decided to accept this grant. But we want to be clear: Accepting this grant does not imply endorsement of any policy by any government (U.S. or Israel); it represents a personal choice by two researchers and friends to preserve and foster channels of scientific collaboration.

Our Collaboration and the BSF Grant

Our collaboration began over three years ago when we shared an office at the London School of Economics (LSE). What started as mutual feedback on individual projects evolved into a joint research endeavor built on complementary expertise and friendship. Beyond our scientific partnership, we value the fact that our work represents a collaboration between a Jewish-Israeli and a German citizen—a bridge across historical divides.

To advance our research, we applied for and received funding from the United States-Israel Binational Science Foundation (BSF). The BSF is an independent scientific foundation established through an endowment created in 1972 by the United States and Israel. It is governed by a joint U.S.–Israel board, with no direct government oversight, and focused on civilian research. Its grants are derived from the endowment and awarded on a competitive, peer-reviewed basis. We are grateful for this support and the opportunity it provides to pursue research that we hope will be scientifically and societally useful. Our research collaboration is purely scientific in nature, but we recognize that it does not occur in a political vacuum. In recent months, we have been compelled by our differing circumstances to discuss various aspects of this war.

Lukas felt confronted with difficult questions: In light of the humanitarian suffering in Gaza, at levels that are horrifying and entirely avoidable, is it morally permissible to accept this grant? How does one balance commitment to scientific progress, collaboration and support for a friend, on one hand, with moral obligations, on the other? More narrowly, does accepting support from an institution linked to a

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state whose current government U.N. experts and humanitarian organizations have characterized as engaging in grave violations of international humanitarian law risks conferring legitimacy to these actions?

For **Tomer**, a major challenge is how to balance the pursuits of peaceful, academic, civilian goals in an environment torn by the horrors of Hamas' attack on October 7th and the ensuing war. He feels this challenge is exacerbated by boycotts and divestment movements that are harming Israeli academia and, thereby, the strongest oppositional element within Israel that is actively promoting adherence to standards of morality, human rights, and maintaining the country's democratic institutions.

We extensively reflected on and discussed these issues. Sometimes our discussions proved challenging, especially when we discovered there were differences in our respective information environments, but always on the basis of shared moral convictions and a commitment to mutual understanding through communication. We cherish our open dialogue and believe that our scientific collaboration is instrumental in creating an environment where disagreements can be debated in the hope of furthering understanding.

Ethical beliefs

Hamas bears responsibility for the horrific October 7th atrocities and the continued holding of hostages. Israel, like any state, has the right to defend itself. However, like any state, it must operate within the bounds of international law, respecting humanitarian standards and human rights. These principles are not optional; they embody the minimum standards of humanity, including in times of conflict. Specifically:

- Any weaponization of starvation is unconscionable. The humanitarian suffering in Gaza has reached catastrophic levels. Using hunger as a tool of conflict, by any party, violates the most fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. Sufficient provision of food and medical aid must be restored and maintained; all essential humanitarian actors must be allowed to operate without obstruction. Israel is responsible for enabling the flow of humanitarian aid and must act to prevent harm to innocent civilians.
- The systematic destruction of residential areas while preventing return, and any plans to forcibly concentrate Gaza's population, raises serious concerns about forced displacement and population transfer.
- A sustainable ceasefire is urgently needed. All actors must actively and in good faith pursue a ceasefire that improves the humanitarian situation, secures the release of all hostages, and ends the fighting. The cycle of violence serves no one's long-term security or interests.
- We believe that both Palestinians and Israelis have the right to self-determination and statehood, living side by side in peace, security, and dignity within recognized borders.

Conclusion

Academic collaboration across borders, however modest, remains an important channel for engagement when others have failed. We will pursue our research with a commitment to scientific progress and dialogue.

Tomer Ifergane
Lukas Freund

This statement reflects our personal views.