US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin during a meeting in New York City, US on September 20, 2023.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

When will the US gain 'independence' from Israel?

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In a video recorded in 2001, Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly said, "The main thing, first of all, is to hit them [Palestinians]. Not just one blow, but blows that are so painful that the price will be too heavy to be borne." Dismissing the possibility that the United States would be an obstacle to the perpetration of such gruesome crimes, he added, "I know what America is. America is a thing you can move very easily, move it in the right direction. They won't get in the way."

When the above statement was first reported in various media outlets in 2010, Netanyahu's claim of Israeli influence over the US was met with disbelief and, in some quarters, with ridicule. Many thought it was inconceivable. How could Israel exercise such control over a country like the US?

More than a decade on, if we unpack the intricacies of US-Israel relations, we may not characterise Netanyahu's statements as hyperbolic or counterintuitive. Those who have eyes to see and ears to hear understand that the US-Israel relationship is asymmetrical and lopsided in favour of the latter's interests. Successive US governments have been acting against the stated values and principles of their country in order to offer unconditional support for inhuman Israeli policies against Palestinians. US governments—both Democratic and Republican—have been routinely ignoring their own human rights stance by using the veto power at the UN Security Council to protect the Israeli state from criticism of its gross violations of human rights and international laws.

The US's acquiescent submission to Israeli authorities has become more conspicuous, and the magnitude of its catastrophic consequences more evident, since early October 2023 when Israel launched its ongoing genocide against Palestinians. At the expense of its domestic and international interests as well as its global standing, the US has been providing Israel with economic incentives and military munitions, which the latter has been using to slaughter innocent Palestinian children, women, and men and to demolish educational institutions and other critical facilities—all designed to trigger a mass exodus of the surviving Palestinians from their land.

There are instances when the US government treated its own citizens' lives as less valuable than the interests of Israel.

In March 2003, Israelis went on their routine killing and demolition spree in the Palestinian town of Rafah. At that time, Rachel Corrie, the 23-year old US citizen and an alum of Evergreen State College in the state of Washington, was part of a team of peace activists who went to Palestine to prevent Israelis from bulldozing indigenous homes. On March 16, 2003, an Israeli bulldozer was approaching to flatten a house where a Palestinian pharmacist named Samir Nasrallah lived with his wife and three children. It "stood alone in a sea of sand and debris," as Israelis had levelled most other Palestinian houses in the area.

Rachel Corrie stood in the path of the bulldozer, urged the operator to stop, and acted as a human shield to protect the property. Her urgings fell on deaf ears. Manufactured by the US company Caterpillar, Inc, the bulldozer ran over Corrie, fracturing her skull, shattering her ribs, and puncturing her lungs; she was crushed to death on the spot. Later, an Israeli court acquitted the IDF soldier who "deliberately" ran the bulldozer over Corrie, and the US government didn't protest.

Emails that Rachel Corrie sent from Palestine before her death included the following:

"It is most difficult for me to think about what's going on here when I sit down to write back to the United States... I don't know if many of the children here have ever existed without tank-shell holes in their walls and the towers of an occupying army surveying them constantly from the near horizons. I think, although I'm not entirely sure, that even the smallest of these children understand that life is not like this everywhere."

I hope commentators who attempt to insult our intelligence by saying that the problem between Israel and Palestine started on October 7, 2023 take note of Rachel's words and consider the history of Palestine at least since the 1917 Balfour Declaration.

About 21 years after Rachel Corrie's death, 25-year-old US Air Force serviceman Aaron Bushnell couldn't take the mass murder that Israel has been committing in Palestine since October 7. On February 25, 2024, he walked to the Israeli embassy in Washington, DC, "poured a flammable liquid atop his buzz-cut head, [and] lit himself on fire." Before immolating himself, Bushnell declared in a calm and clear voice:

"I'm about to engage in an extreme act of protest but, compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonisers, it's not extreme at all. This is what our ruling class has decided will be normal."

Perhaps in his righteous passion for justice, Bushnell's pure heart anticipated that his "extreme act" would bring the US government to its senses. Sadly, he was wrong. What's more, his statement didn't even receive adequate media coverage.

The seven World Central Kitchen aid workers that Israel killed in Gaza in April 2024 included a US citizen. Unsurprisingly, that didn't shake US loyalty to Israel.

For a very long time, the US has prided itself as a land of freedom, free speech, and freedom of movement. Unfortunately, acting in the interests of Israel, it has flouted such core principles.

Prof Ilan Pappé of the University of Exeter is a British-Israeli citizen of Jewish background. He is the author of The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine (2006) and a known critic of Israeli apartheid and genocidal policies. He was travelling from the UK to the US to deliver a talk in Michigan. Upon his arrival at Detroit airport on May 13, 2024, he was detained and questioned by security personnel for two hours about his views on Israel-Palestine issues. He was allowed to leave the airport only after the agents "copied the contents of his phone."

At the expense of its domestic and international interests as well as its global standing, the US has been providing Israel with economic incentives and military munitions, which the latter has been using to slaughter innocent Palestinian children, women, and men and to demolish educational institutions and other critical facilities—all designed to trigger a mass exodus of the surviving Palestinians from their land.

The US government regularly lectures the rest of the world on intellectual and political freedom and castigates other nations for their lack of free speech. It is very unfortunate that, guided by its loyalty to Israel, it let this incident take place. What's more, we are shocked to have seen university authorities in the US stifle free speech and crack down on peaceful demonstrations and encampments that students set up at campuses to promote justice for Palestinians.

All these suggest that (electoral) democracy is not the only system that is under attack in the US, and Donald Trump is not the only politician to blame. Authorities in the US are eroding long-established principles and values in order to support Israel's apartheid rule. This has harmed US reputation in the world and embarrassed its conscientious citizens. The extent to which the US has contravened its own principles and international laws to show allegiance to Israel does not suggest that it has acted independently.

It is time for the US to realise how it has subverted its own interests and prestige, and follow its own interests as a sovereign country. With students' encampments at US universities, the movement for US "independence" from Israel has started. The sooner it materialises, the better for the US and for the rest of the world. Importantly, the freedom of Palestine from Israeli occupation is dependent on US "independence" from Israel.

Must students learn studentship before they learn to learn?

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Ideally, no teacher thinks of punishing or surveilling his students. Neither do I. I often tell my students that I'm not a police officer or an administrator. I'm an educator, and my job is to help them learn. As well, I believe firmly that the problem with learning is a problem with teaching. If I teach effectively, they learn easily. Their failure is my fault. I'm, ironically, not consumed with a guilty feeling as I notice my students struggling to learn these days. I become more nostalgic than regretful as a teacher. I seem to have become a victim of "illusions of the good-old-days," as Steven Pinker mentions in *The Sense of Style*. I'm tempted to think with every passing year that I was a better teacher in the past, for I used to have better students. However much I want to think that that's a delusion, sometimes I can't help feeling like a dinosaur amid some zombies. Students look confused. Communication seems disrupted. Learning apparently dwindles. These generalisations, unfortunately, are not without a grain of truth in them.

Universities are unlike schools and colleges. Most students don't seem to have intellectual and social capital to cope with the culture in which universities operate, as they enter universities fresh out of colleges. Universities are not teaching entities, per se. Universities are, instead, transformative sanctuaries. Students are meant to be more inspired than taught to discover their intellectual and professional pursuits. Students are not acolytes who listen and learn. They are disciples who think critically to question ideas and ideologies they come across. They no longer need to hone their rote learning skills to ace exams. Nor should they expect their teachers to admonish them for falling short of diligence and discipline. These default virtues of a university education presuppose academic and behavioural traits students hardly acquire while at schools and colleges. Students must first invent the university, as David Bartholomae suggests in his article "Inventing the University," so they learn what it means to be a university student. When they finally invent the university, some of them carry over the consequences of initial disorientation. This is a transitional crisis that universities are ill-equipped to address. Students are the victims. Teachers, sometimes, are the victims of victims.

Such a situation disrupts the rapport between students and teachers. Add technology to this pickle. Technology sceptic Clifford Stoll claims in *Silicon Snake Oil* that the internet and educational technologies lead us away from sound educational practices. Stoll sounds anachronistic these days in that the internet and technologies offer infinite options and opportunities to facilitate education. Nonetheless, a reflective teacher perhaps would regret sometimes that technologies have somewhat compromised his authority as a teacher. Teaching is no longer time- and space-bound. And a particular teacher is disposable, because there's a cadre of better teachers—ahem!—prowling somewhere online, available at any time, from anywhere. Consequently, the separation between teachers and students widens. Students are distracted from learning. Teachers are demotivated to teach. Technologies apparently devour the earnest engagement that teaching and learning ideally warrant. Teachers seem less effective these days, for students have emerged anew worldwide because of technological advances and affordances. As a result, students are missing out on the basics they must embody.

And that's the concern that Emily J Isaacs raises in her pitch, "It's Time to Start Teaching Your Students How to Be a Student," in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. She implies that learning is not altogether a cognitive endeavour. A brilliant individual is not necessarily a successful student, unless s/he has already acquired the "studenting" skills. Learning is largely a behavioural virtue. Students must cultivate some habits, skills, and behaviours to succeed in university-level courses. Students, for example, must learn to attend classes regularly, meet deadlines, pay attention, manage time, resist digital distractions, take care of their health, and seek help. She argues that most students who come to campus are unfamiliar with these basics of studentship. She urges that these skills be taught explicitly to undergraduate students in particular. Such an approach to teaching dislodges a professor from the hallowed pulpit he professes or pontificates from. He initially becomes a coach to help students embark on the long journey to maturity that a university education is. While this role of a teacher relegates him to a lesser light position, nowhere is it mentioned in the teaching manual (if that exists!) that he can't assume such a responsibility. Will it make teaching smooth and unsnagged?

VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

I doubt it! Hyperbole aside, education is apparently a commodity worldwide these days. Whoever can afford to buy it possesses it. And every "human animal" (I'm tempted to borrow this from Roy Scranton's *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*), whoever intends to possess it, is not a student. Some of them are either cuckoos or counts, who are unaffected by the intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic potential of education. Education is a conventional value for them. They are incorrigible for this dangerous misconception of education. They are impervious to instruction. They have false expectations and undue demands about a faculty's teaching, grading, and behaviour. Nothing—and nobody—stops them until they are catered to what they want. However minuscule this group of students is, they exist, and because of them, the Pareto Principle, which posits that for many outcomes, roughly 80 percent of consequences come from 20 percent of causes, appears implausible for a teacher. These days, roughly 99 percent of consequences come from one percent of students for a teacher. While teaching studentship is an excellent idea, unless the system is purged of non-students, it's a problematic option. And the problem is structural, not pedagogical. Teachers yet can be useful agents to turn the tide in their favour.

Teaching is a learned skill. It's not a gift, although we supposedly have gifted teachers. Opportunities for teachers to learn about teaching are inadequate. Graduate programmes, besides the North American ones, mint scholars and researchers, not teachers or educators.

Fixing students might not fix the problem with studentship altogether. Teachers are part of the problem, too. Teaching is a learned skill. It's not a gift, although we supposedly have gifted teachers. Opportunities for teachers to learn about teaching are inadequate. Graduate programmes, besides the North American ones, mint scholars and researchers, not teachers or educators. They are deluded into thinking that teaching is not their work; research is. They apparently excel as researchers following graduate schools. When, however, they embark on teaching, they are often caught flatfooted. John Loughran and Ian Menter claim in the article "The essence of being a teacher educator and why it matters" that the teaching of teaching is sophisticated work, although it is often viewed simplistically. Sceptics might argue that teaching is a heritage profession immune to innovation and intervention. It's stuck in a perennial status quo. The profession totters under its own weight. We must not waffle to confess that some of us lack teachership, too. So, who is going to teach teachers teaching?

Superior teachers, of course! However idealistic I might sound, I would aver that teaching is an inspirational endeavour. Mark Edmundson claims in *Why Teach?* that a "corporate university" has abdicated its mission to inspire passions and talents. Inspiration is in short supply on campus these days, Edmundson reminds us. Teaching has been reduced to dealing with content. Teachers (have to) frantically teach what would make students job-ready. In this dispensation, a successful education provides a return on investment. Education, then, is an economic ticket to a better life.

Unfortunately, that is the end of education, because it's the beginning of egocentrism. Education is altruistic. An ideal education civilises us to think about and work for others. Unless students are inspired to be creative, curious, and reflective, those affective faculties remain untapped. And the teachers who cultivate these faculties are an endangered species in the academic ecosystem, Edmundson bemoans. As well, Edmundson worries that too many professors have lost the courage of their own passions, depriving their students of the fire of inspiration. As long as we strive not to become one of those professors ourselves, we add to the repertoire of teachership. When we find and emulate our colleagues practising the idealistic virtues of teaching, we excel as educators in dealing with the deficiency of studentship.

Teaching is a solemn engagement, as is learning. A commitment to teaching must be complemented with a commitment to learning. If the enterprise of teaching is based on power dynamics that somewhat signal to some students that the whole system is stacked against teachers, they know that falling short of studentship isn't a consequential lapse. Indifference to learning is already endemic. Questioning teachers' authority is alarmingly on the rise. Education seems redefined as it veers away from scholarship and ideals into grades, graduation, jobs, and salaries. I'm not convinced that education has been this way because students are influenced by the insightful sarcasm of Oscar Wilde, who said in his essay "The Critic As Artist," "Nothing that is worth knowing can ever be taught." They apparently slight learning, for learning has become an optional luxury. It's no longer a civic necessity. So, what would place students back on the right track? The acquisition of studentship, I assume. And who can be more effective agents than empowered teachers to help students acquire studentship?