



Tel Aviv University: A Direct Response to Boycott Criticisms

The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement within academia seeks to undermine the standing of Israeli universities as part of its broader political agenda. As a result, Tel Aviv University (TAU) has long been the target of misinformation, with misleading and unfounded claims circulating well before October 7, 2023. In recent months, however, the frequency and intensity of these falsehoods have escalated. While TAU previously outlined its principles in an open letter, [Setting the Record Straight: The Truth About Tel Aviv University](#), we have been reluctant to address the untruths circulated about us. Given the outright cruelty and falsity of many of these claims, we assumed they would not be taken seriously; however, in recent months, we have come to realize that misinformation, when left unchallenged, can take hold.

TAU is, first and foremost, an academic institution committed to the principles of scholarly inquiry, critical thinking, and freedom of expression. This commitment is reflected in TAU's ranking in the top 20% globally for protecting academic freedom, according to the [2024 Academic Freedom Index](#)—placing it ahead of universities in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. With a diverse community of over 30,000 students and 1,200 researchers, TAU fosters an environment that embraces a plurality of perspectives and backgrounds. Notably, 16% of our students are Arab, alongside many faculty members. At present, for example, two of our nine deans are Arab, the Dean of Life Sciences and the Dean of Social Sciences.

TAU maintains full academic independence from both the Israeli government and the military. No student or faculty member has ever been penalized for expressing anti-war or pro-Palestinian views. The university has a well-documented history of advocating for peaceful coexistence and equality, as detailed in our [open letter](#). TAU has never shied away from protesting the government on any matters threatening human rights in Israel, and we never will. Nevertheless, our detractors continue to propagate misleading narratives to suit their agenda. Below are four responses to the most prevalent accusations casting a shadow on TAU.

Attacks on Tel Aviv University

Attack #1. One of Tel Aviv University's research institutes is the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). INSS employs ex-military members as academics and is directly responsible for the Dahiya Doctrine, which advocates for using disproportionate force in conflict.

The assertion that TAU is intrinsically tied to the war effort due to its affiliation with the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) is both misleading and intellectually dishonest. INSS is not part of TAU; it is an independent think tank that maintains an affiliation with the university, much like similar policy institutes associated with leading academic institutions worldwide. Its researchers are not TAU faculty members. For instance, Gadi Eisenkot—the individual frequently cited in discussions of the Dahiya Doctrine—has never held a professorial position at TAU. Any suggestion to the contrary deliberately misrepresents the facts.



Furthermore, criticisms of INSS are based on selective and reductive interpretations of its work, disproportionately focusing on the views of a small, unrepresentative group of contributors. This overlooks the fact that INSS explicitly states in every publication that the opinions expressed are solely those of the individual authors. At the same time, this ignores INSS's extensive contributions to diplomatic and conflict resolution strategies. A recent example is the publication [Time for a New Arab Peace Initiative](#), which explicitly outlines a framework for regional diplomacy, renewed negotiations and stabilization efforts that could facilitate an end to the war in Gaza. The omission of such scholarship reflects a deeply agenda-driven approach to assessing INSS's role.

Attack #2. Tel Aviv University trains soldiers through special programs like its Erez Program, aiming to turn them into highly skilled combat soldiers who will kill many Palestinians.

The claim that TAU “trains soldiers to kill” through specific programs is a gross misrepresentation of both Tel Aviv University and the reality of Israel’s mandatory military service. The Erez Program, for instance, is largely an initiative of TAU’s Faculty of Humanities, designed to equip young soldiers with a broader humanistic education—one that fosters critical thinking, ethical reasoning and an understanding of history.

Unlike in many other countries, military service in Israel is compulsory for nearly all young people. This is not a policy of aggression—it is a national security reality dictated by Israel’s geopolitical circumstances. TAU remains committed to fostering future generations that understand the human cost of conflict and are guided by principles of ethical responsibility. This is the intent behind our [course offerings like Dugri](#) and [other coexistence efforts](#), and this is the spirit with which we teach in all our programs in the Faculty of Humanities and beyond, Erez included.

Attack #3. Tel Aviv University’s departments and faculties are feeder schools for the defense industry and proudly produce war technologies responsible for the deaths of many thousands of Palestinians. The worst is the Faculty of Engineering, which houses a “war room.”

This characterization of TAU’s faculties and departments is distorted on many levels. It is true that, as with many universities around the world, TAU’s researchers do collaborate across a wide range of industries—including defense—just as [Stanford runs its Technology for Defense Program](#) and [MIT partners with the Pentagon on AI research](#) and education. Europe, moreover, is significantly expanding defense-related research in response to the Russia-Ukraine war, with [academics actively applying for funding through the European Defence Fund](#). The reality is that defense research is not unique to Israel, but a sad reflection that we are in an increasingly unstable global landscape.

At the same time, this characterization of TAU ignores the majority of work that happens across the university and the fact that, again, we operate entirely independently of the Israeli government and military. Our researchers enjoy full academic freedom, are 100% committed to upholding academic



values and integrity, and are often recognized globally for their expertise (TAU is ranked third overall for number of ERC grants received).

For instance, the Faculty of Engineering is dedicated to advancing global wellbeing through research in green energy, climate solutions, clean water, food security, medical diagnostics and more. TAU engineers have been at the forefront of regional collaboration, working alongside researchers in Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinian Territories. One engineering faculty member, for example, has actively partnered with Gazans on sewage and waste management solutions, working closely with Palestinian collaborators to improve environmental and public health conditions. To label the Faculty of Engineering as complicit in “war crimes” is not just blatantly untrue but an insult to our many scientists and engineers whose work improves lives across the region and beyond.

Attack #4. TAU is in bed with arms companies Elbit Systems, Rafael and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and even holds summits supporting the defense industry.

Without any defense, Israel would not survive as a state. Israeli universities cannot ignore this reality; at the same time, the key is engaging with the defense industry with clear ethical guidelines, and to bring to the table the rigor of academic integrity. This is TAU’s approach. Defense technology can serve an ethical purpose as we move forward in these unstable geopolitical times (think of the Iron Dome—Israel’s flagship defense technology—and how many lives have been saved through this technology). It was from this perspective—one that was given more urgency due to the war and the continued attacks from Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis since October 7—that TAU hosted a defense-tech summit, a two-day event in 2024, which was attended by Elbit Systems, Rafael and IAI.

It must also be emphasized, again, that universities around the world engage in partnerships with the defense industry. For instance, the US Department of Defense sponsors university affiliated research centers (UARCs) at various universities to conduct essential research in science and technology (see, for instance, the [National Strategic Research Institute](#) at the University of Nebraska; the University of Maryland’s Applied [Research Laboratory for Intelligence and Security](#); the University of Southern California’s [Institute for Creative Technologies](#); and MIT’s and the University of California’s [Institute for Collaborative Biotechnologies](#)).

Attack #5. TAU’s venture capital fund, TAU Ventures, supports startups that are responsible for terrorizing Palestinians.

TAU Ventures is a venture capital firm associated with TAU that was formed in 2018, in the wake of leading American universities such as MIT, Berkeley and Stanford also establishing venture investment arms. Like venture firms at other universities, TAU Ventures invests in a variety of startups (including ones sometimes related to defense) and is focused on helping early-stage companies get off the ground. In doing this work, TAU Ventures also partners with a variety of larger companies, including Nvidia, Barclays, KPMG, Microsoft, AB InBev and Deloitte.



As stated on their website, TAU Ventures is heavily invested in supporting startups that are mission-driven; climate impacts, as well as Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors, are key considerations. For instance, TAU Ventures-supported startup [Cyabra](#) is focused on fighting disinformation and fake news, while [InnerPlant](#) uses sensors to detect fungus and other stress factors affecting agricultural crops.

Attack #6. The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies was created by the military, and its focus is advancing genocide in Gaza and the West Bank.

Claims that the Moshe Dayan Center (MDC) supports genocide or serves as an arm of the military are false and blatantly contradict the center’s mission and proven record. The MDC is a non-partisan, interdisciplinary research center focused on contemporary Middle Eastern and African affairs. Its primary mission is to serve as a resource for decision-makers and the public by publishing and supporting academically rigorous research and analysis. Its guiding principle is that “to understand the region, one must understand its cultures, peoples, languages, religions and history.”

The Center engages in various academic collaborations, both domestically and internationally, which are focused on promoting scholarly exchange and mutual understanding, with a particular focus on peace-building efforts. This can be seen today via the [Program for Regional Cooperation](#). Established after the announcement of the Abraham Accords in 2020, the program is focused on developing joint collaborations and fostering relations with, for instance, academic institutions in the United Arab Emirates and Morocco. Through the program, the MDC also established [Hiwar](#)—a virtual forum for intra-regional dialogue bringing together representatives across the Middle East and Africa and from across civil society, academia and government.

Additionally, the MDC also oversees several efforts to promote coexistence among Palestinians and Jews within Israel. The center, for instance, runs the [Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation](#), which was originally established in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords and which publishes [Bayan](#), which is focused on Arab issues and identity in Israel.

Attack #7. TAU’s Institute of Archaeology conducts digs on occupied lands while expelling Palestinians from their homes—they are in complete violation of international conventions.

Claims that Tel Aviv University’s Institute of Archaeology violates international conventions by conducting excavations on occupied land and displacing Palestinians are unfounded and misleading. TAU’s [archaeological projects](#)—such as those at Megiddo, Ashdod-Yam, Apollonia-Arsuf, the Qesem Cave and Masada—are located well within internationally recognized borders of Israel. These excavations are academic in nature, conducted in accordance with international archaeological standards and under the supervision of Israel’s Antiquities Authority. TAU remains committed to the ethical pursuit of knowledge, cultural preservation and academic independence.



Criticism has emerged regarding archaeological activities at the City of David site, where TAU has previously partnered on archaeological research. This area was designated as part of the international zone of the Holy Basin in 1947. The excavations take place on land legally purchased in the 19th century for archaeological purposes and do not involve the displacement of residents.

The Truth of These Attacks

The accusations leveled against TAU are not just distortions; they are deliberate attempts to undermine academic freedom and intellectual inquiry. TAU is, and has always been, a bastion of rigorous scholarship, pluralism and open debate—qualities that stand in stark contrast to the one-dimensional narratives imposed by our detractors. Attempts to delegitimize us will not change the reality of our values, our contributions or our dedication to building a better future through education and knowledge. As we move forward, we remain committed to working with our partners—across disciplines, institutions, and borders—to advance shared goals and create a better world.