

Steadfast Knowledge: The Systematic Destruction and Strategic Rebuilding of the Palestinian Research System (2026–2030)

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Abstract

The Palestinian research ecosystem is confronting an existential crisis defined by “epistemicide”—the systematic destruction of academic institutions, research archives, and intellectual capital. While global narratives predominantly emphasize the humanitarian dimensions of conflict, this paper provides a data-driven, multidisciplinary assessment of both the collapse and resilience of Palestine’s knowledge economy, integrating management, legal, and social science perspectives. It advances a strategic roadmap toward “Knowledge Sovereignty” for 2026–2030.

Prior to October 2023, Palestinian universities reflected a vibrant culture of innovation. The Islamic University of Gaza, for example, produced more than 125 internationally indexed publications annually and secured international patents in renewable energy and water purification. Palestinian scholars gained global recognition across pharmaceutical sciences, engineering, and applied technologies. The current conflict, however, has inflicted catastrophic damage. Direct losses to higher education are estimated at \$825 million, with nearly 94% of Gaza’s research centers rendered non-operational and widespread destruction of university infrastructure. Up to 90% of research data and more than 255,000 books have been lost—an erasure not only of financial assets but of cumulative scholarly memory and institutional continuity.

Employing qualitative and multidisciplinary methods, the study examines “Resilience Under Fire.” Grassroots innovation, improvised renewable energy systems, student-developed AI-assisted rescue tools, and virtual instruction from displacement contexts demonstrate how “Sumud” (steadfastness) has transformed into adaptive knowledge preservation and creative resistance.

The paper further analyzes the Palestinian National Reconstruction Plan (2026–2030), a \$730 million framework focused on infrastructure restoration, advanced laboratories, research revitalisation through centres of excellence, and human capital development. Sustainable recovery, it argues, requires transitioning from relief-based assistance to a sovereign developmental model reinforced by global academic partnerships and strengthened legal protections under International Humanitarian Law.

Keywords: Epistemicide, Knowledge Resilience, Innovation Ecosystem, Reconstruction Plan, Intellectual Property, Crisis Management, Academic Sovereignty.

Introduction: The Theory of Epistemicide

The Palestinian higher education sector is facing a deliberate process of “Epistemicide” [1]. Drawing on the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) [2], this term refers to the destruction of the knowledge systems that define a people’s capacity for self-determination.

The academic system in Palestine evolved through three historical stages: Establishment (1967-1993), Renaissance (1993-2000), and Resilience (2000-2023). Prior to 2023, the system served 250,000 students across 22 universities and 15 colleges. However, the current systematic targeting—often termed “Scholasticide” [3]—has rendered 95% of university buildings in Gaza unusable and destroyed 88% of scientific laboratories. This paper argues that rebuilding this infrastructure is not just a physical project but a fundamental requirement for national identity and state-building.

Methodology and Analytical Framework

To capture the complexity of the destruction, this study employs a Qualitative Multi-Disciplinary Analysis (QMA). The analysis is viewed through three critical lenses:

- **Management Lens:** Focusing on organizational resilience and decentralized crisis management in extreme conflict environments.
- **Legal Lens:** Assessing accountability for the destruction of academic sanctity under the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property.
- **Social Sciences Lens:** Investigating the sociology of Sumud (Steadfastness) and community-led knowledge preservation [4].

The Scale of the Catastrophe: Data of Destruction

The financial and intellectual loss is unprecedented. According to the MOEHE (2025) and World Bank (2025) [5], the higher education sector has incurred \$825 million in direct losses.

Table 1: Damage Assessment of Higher Education Institutions (Gaza).

Degree of Damage	No. of Institutions	Percentage (%)	Estimated Losses (M USD)	Affected Individuals
Total Destruction	8	32%	\$350–\$400	65,000
Severe Damage	7	28%	\$250–\$300	22,000
Slight Damage	5	20%	\$65–\$85	2,000
Total	25	100%	\$785–\$935	94,000

The data in Table 1 reveals an unprecedented scale of institutional paralysis. The fact that 60% of institutions suffer from "Total" or "Severe" destruction indicates a non-random, systematic targeting of the higher education infrastructure. From a management perspective, this translates into the loss of decades of institutional development. The 94,000 affected

individuals represent more than a third of the Palestinian student population, suggesting that the long-term impact is a structural "generational delay" in professional development. This empirical evidence supports the argument that the damage enters the domain of Scholasticide.

The Erasure of Intellectual Heritage

Table 2: Loss of Library Archives and Rare Manuscripts.

Library Name	Books Lost	Manuscripts	Rare References	Loss Rate
IUG Central Library	125,000	350	650	98%
Al-Azhar University	75,000	120	450	85%
Gaza University	55,000	-	280	100%
Total	255,000	470	1,380	94%

Table 2 quantifies the "Cognitive Erasure" aspect of Epistemicide. The loss of 94% of library materials is a deliberate severance of the Palestinian people from their historical and scientific DNA. The destruction of 470 rare manuscripts—irreplaceable historical assets—constitutes a "historical lobotomy." Legally, under the 1954 Hague Convention, this loss provides grounds for international litigation regarding the protection of cultural and intellectual heritage during conflict.

Innovation Under Fire: Resilience (Sumud)

Despite "Educide" [6], resilience is manifested through "Innovation by Necessity."

- **Legacy:** Before 2023, Gaza institutions were regional leaders in solar energy and AI.
- **The Virtual Shift:** Transitioning to "Cloud Learning" from displacement tents using community Wi-Fi nodes.
- **Grassroots Inventions:** Examples include Hussam Al-Attar's electricity generation and the Akl siblings' AI-driven "Rescue Robot" built from salvaged electronic components.

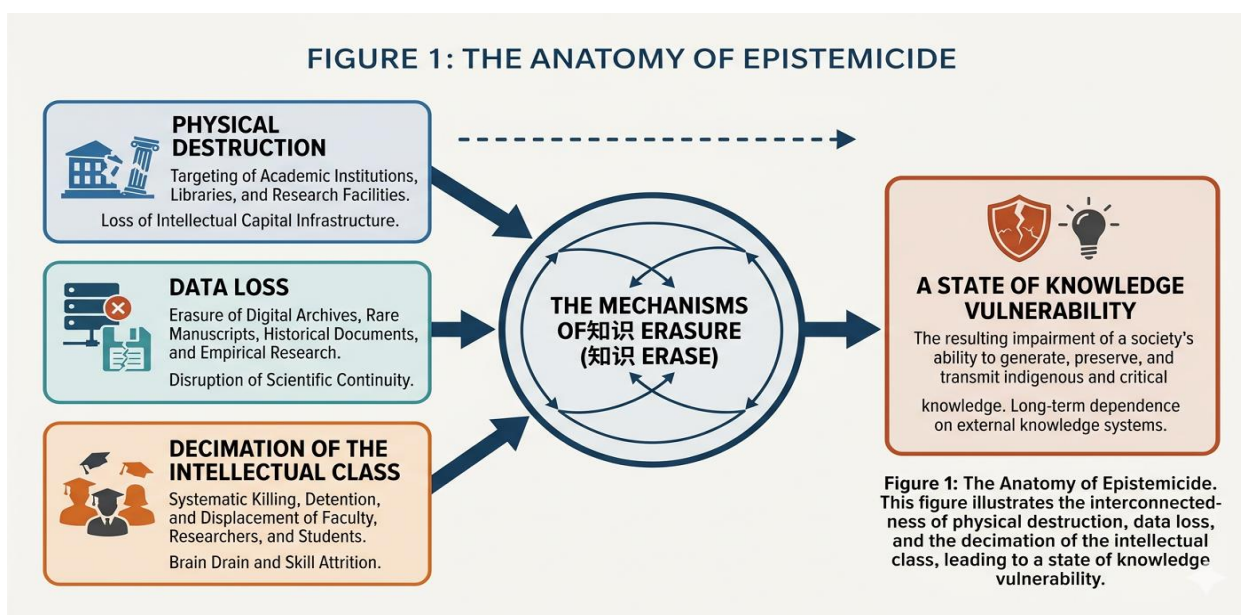


Figure 1: The Knowledge Sovereignty Triangle (2026–2030).

This conceptual model illustrates the strategic pivot of the Palestinian research ecosystem from a vulnerable physical infrastructure to a decentralized, digital-first sovereignty model. By securing intellectual assets via blockchain and maintaining human capital through cloud fellowships for 2,500 researchers, the framework ensures that knowledge production remains

immutable and continuous, effectively neutralizing physical "Epistemicide."

This model illustrates the strategic shift of the Palestinian research ecosystem from a centralized physical infrastructure to a decentralized, digital-first sovereignty model.

1. **Digital Sovereignty:** By utilizing blockchain technology, the Ministry ensures that intellectual property and academic certifications are immutable and geographically independent, effectively neutralizing the impact of physical "Epistemicide".
2. **Global Twinning:** This vertex represents a diplomatic and academic bridge, allowing 2,500 displaced scholars to maintain their research output through "Cloud Fellowships," thus sustaining the nation's intellectual capital during the reconstruction phase.
3. **Grassroots Innovation:** Reflecting the sociology of *Sumud*, this pillar transitions the R&D model from high-cost, centralized facilities to agile, distributed networks that leverage community resources and local ingenuity to solve immediate national challenges.

Strategic Reconstruction Plan

The roadmap to Knowledge Sovereignty requires a \$730 Million budget [7].

Table 3: Strategic Reconstruction Budget (2026–2030).

Program	Components	Budget (M \$)	Expected Outcome
Infrastructure	15 Campuses, 45 Buildings	\$385	100% Capacity restoration
Equipment	235 Labs, Digital Libraries	\$185	90% Modern tech integration
Research	680 Projects, Centers of Excellence	\$95	80% Increase in output
Human Capital	4,200 Academics, Fellowships	\$65	95% Qualification rate

The \$730 million budget is structured as a Strategic Investment in Sovereignty. While infrastructure takes 53%, the Human Capital (\$65M) pillar is critical for preventing "Brain Drain."

The distribution suggests a transition from Dependency to Autonomy, leapfrogging into a modern, digitally-integrated research ecosystem.

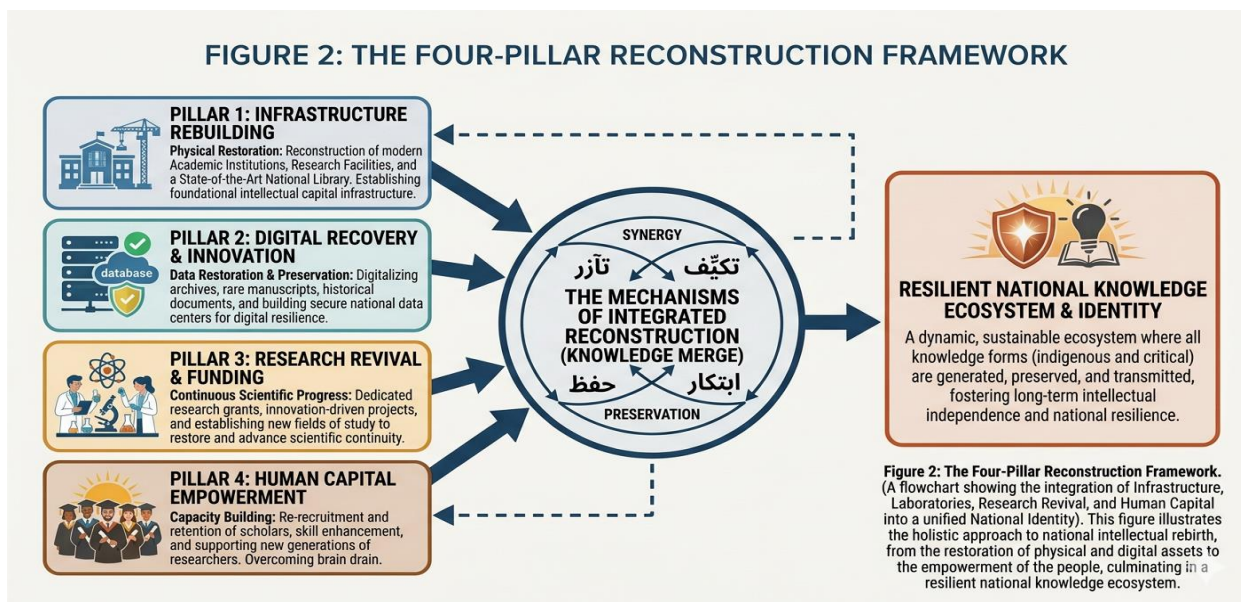


Figure 2: The Four-Pillar Reconstruction Framework.

This flowchart visualizes the operational synergy of the proposed plan. It moves beyond linear rebuilding to a holistic integration where Infrastructure, Digital Recovery, Research Funding, and Human Capital converge. The central core highlights the mechanisms of Synergy and Adaptation, culminating in a Resilient National Knowledge Ecosystem & Identity.

This flowchart visualizes the operational synergy of the proposed \$730 million National Reconstruction Plan. It moves beyond linear rebuilding to a holistic integration of four critical pillars:

- Infrastructure Rebuilding: Restoring the physical foundations of research.
- Digital Recovery & Innovation: Digitalizing rare archives and building secure national data centers.
- Research Revival & Funding: Ensuring scientific continuity through dedicated grants.

- Human Capital Empowerment: Addressing the "brain drain" by empowering new generations of researchers.
- The central core of this model highlights the internal mechanisms of Synergy, Adaptation, Preservation, and Innovation. This process culminates in the ultimate goal of the 2026–2030 strategy: a Resilient National Knowledge Ecosystem & Identity that fosters long-term intellectual independence and national resilience.

Emerging Trends: Digital Sovereignty

The future of Palestinian higher education lies in Digital Sovereignty, ensuring research data survival through blockchain decentralized global nodes and creating legal frameworks for "Academic Sanctuary" via global twinning and remote fellowships.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Synthesis of Findings

The systematic destruction of the Palestinian research system confirms a state of "Epistemicide"—a deliberate attempt to induce a "historical lobotomy." The loss of 94% of archives creates a profound "Accountability Gap." However, the response has shifted from traditional survival to a sophisticated, digital-first resilience.

Key Policy Recommendations

1. Fund the Plan: Secure the \$730M budget as "Intellectual Reparations."
2. Enforce International Law: Prosecute educational destruction under the 1954 Hague Convention.
3. Institutionalize Digital Asylum: Establish permanent "Cloud Asylum" and 5,000 emergency scholarships for researchers.
4. Knowledge as Liberation: Treat "Knowledge Sovereignty" as the cornerstone of the Palestinian state and national resilience.

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