

ASOR Board of Trustees Meeting November 2025 White Paper

Current Situation within ASOR Committees re: Policies about Occupied Territories

There are several overlapping issues that the ASOR Board needs to consider in the coming year, in part because of partial and ambiguous policies that apply to specific situations and in part because ASOR membership is strongly asking for guidance on these complex and delicate issues. Many of these issues deal with contested or occupied territory, as commonly understood, within the areas of ASOR's scholarship and research. These areas could include:

the Hatay (potentially?)

Sudan

northern Cyprus

Kurdistan

Areas of Libya under non-recognized governmental control

West Bank

East Jerusalem

Over the course of the last year, ASOR committee chairs have given us examples of specific situations where Board guidance is sought:

1. The October 7 statement on our website which came from the ASOR EC has become problematic without further statements and contextualization. Should this be contextualized? Should a policy (and procedure) be developed concerning statements that come from the Board?
2. Affiliation on the program for the Annual Meeting. Note the Board Resolution, passed at the 5/25 meeting, specifically at the request for clarification from the Program Committee:

ASOR is committed to the dissemination of scholarly knowledge about the broad geographic and chronological parameters of the regions in which ASOR members work and these include occupied territories. These areas include territories in which there may be at any given moment a dispute about which national entity or population properly has political control. Scholars affiliated with institutions established in these territories without the cooperation of the competent national authority can produce work that would be of interest to ASOR members or the wider public. If ASOR accepts (based on its scholarly review), sessions, papers, posters, or other presentation formats for the Annual Meeting from scholars associated with these institutions, it will not publish in the program those institutional affiliation(s) of the presenters or organizers whose proposals it accepts. Presenters may not include any such references to those institutional affiliation(s) in their visual, oral, or written materials.

This policy has ambiguities that are still being addressed on an ad hoc basis: e.g. whether the Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria should be considered one of those institutional affiliations that are not permitted to be shown on slides or in the ASOR program.

3. CAP affiliation and university affiliation: CAP is responsible for indicating which archaeological programs conform to the ASOR Policy on Professional Conduct (amended by the Board in 2019) and the Statement of General Standards for Projects Affiliated with ASOR, thereby allowing scholarships and grants to be provided by ASOR to the affiliated excavation. The relevant clause of the Professional Conduct code is that by agreeing to ASOR affiliation, archaeologists will “co-operate with competent national authorities of any occupied territory in which research is planned... they may consider for inclusion in ASOR publications and presentation venues research that has been undertaken in occupied territory and its contiguous waters as defined by customary international law when that research is required strictly to safeguard, record or preserve the archaeological heritage of the occupied territory, or when permission of the competent national authorities of the occupied territory has been obtained by the researcher.” According to the General Standards statement, “The Principal Investigator (PI) of a field project applying for ASOR affiliation is required to appear on the excavation or survey license issued by the host country.”

The Chair of CAP recently informed us of discussions within the committee concerning “the ethical, reputational, and policy implications of maintaining affiliations with institutions located in occupied territories... Continued affiliation [with these institutions] can be interpreted as tacit endorsement of the political status quo, which contradicts ASOR’s stated commitment to neutrality and ethical responsibility in international research.” The committee is troubled by the legality of an institution founded by the occupiers within what is understood as occupied territories as partners on archaeological permits, including salvage permits. They make the point that ASOR “cannot guarantee that materials excavated or analyzed with ASOR-supported funding would not be transferred to Ariel University or another institution in an occupied territory for analysis,” noting that ASOR has not permitted universities founded by the occupiers in northern Cyprus to have CAP affiliation and conclude that “in the interest of fairness and consistency, the same principle should be applied to Ariel University.”

4. The Committee on Publications has asked for similar clarification, especially as regards to BASOR and the publication of materials from the territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. ASOR’s current policy is: the editors “may consider for inclusion in ASOR publications and presentation venues research that has been undertaken in occupied territory and its contiguous waters as defined by customary international law when that research is required strictly to safeguard, record or preserve the archaeological heritage of the occupied territory, or when permission of the competent national authorities of the occupied territory has been obtained by the researcher.”

Recently, the editors of BASOR objected to this policy noting several problems with its ambiguities: where the permission of the competent national authorities of the occupied territories had not been obtained, does having salvage permits for projects lasting 12 years satisfy the first condition of the exception? Does it matter that the project has funding from organizations other than the national government, such as private organizations with goals inimical to ASOR's mission?

Moving Beyond the Specific Issues

So that committees are not making decisions either on an ad-hoc basis through an unclear channel of consultation or making decisions that contravene or contradict Board policy, and so that there is a consistency to the policies across the organization, we would like to have the Board initiate the discussion of what might be the overarching goals of the policies concerning contested or occupied territories, and how to achieve the formulation of these policies.

While ASOR does have in place a Mission Statement, which the Strategic Plan Task Force decided not to address, the Mission Statement leaves some ambiguities about ASOR's values. Members of the Board, speaking on behalf of non-board members, have suggested adopting a set of institutional values which may help clarify ASOR policies and practices within ASOR committees.

These values would provide over-arching goals which will help ASOR build (and refine) policies that are both aspirational and practical. The members who suggested that ASOR would be strengthened by the inclusion of institutional values have suggested some, as an example of initiating discussion:

- **Learning:** We learn from research and from ongoing dialogue with one another.
- **Collaboration:** We work together and share resources for better outcomes.
- **Openness:** We see the world differently and all are welcome.
- **Accountability:** We are dedicated to our community, and trust requires acknowledging when change is necessary.

Next Steps

The complexity of the issues facing ASOR is not to be underestimated. As ASOR's membership has grown, both in numbers and in interests, various constituencies have called for clarity on ASOR's stances on issues that are tied to ethics and values, as they relate to the study of antiquities in the broader Mediterranean world. Much of this call has come from members of younger generation(s) and/or from members beyond the traditional 'core' of ASOR interests, all of whom are important to the future health of the organization. Yet given the nature of these difficult topics, we understand that there are no quick nor easy 'fixes'. We also understand that these fixes are also going to result in policies that will need constant scrutiny and refining in the face of changing world events and archaeological practice.

1. We would suggest that the Board consider if they wish to adopt a values statement, a statement which will help members of ASOR understand what ASOR deems important as we form useful policies for ASOR committees to adhere to. If the Board decides this is a good step forward, we would suggest that a small group of Board members continue to work with the President and Chair of the Board to form a values statement.
2. Secondly, Jane would like to form a taskforce in the coming months to holistically examine policies around occupied/contested territories. I envision that the taskforce would have conversations with committees and overseas centers that are directly affected by these policies, along with other stakeholders within ASOR, perhaps through roundtable discussions or workshops at the Annual Meeting. Since the issues are complex, I expect that the work of the taskforce to extend through 2026, with a proposed set of policies to come to the Board in the May 2027 meeting.