

A contextualized understanding of the recent attacks in Israel and Palestine

guest column

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At the time of writing this article (Oct. 22), the death toll from recent devastation in Palestine has [increased to 4,651](#) — including [1,750 children](#).

Following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack and the intensification of Israel's military campaign against Palestine, President Price — like countless other institutional leaders — condemned Hamas and [expressed](#) unequivocal support of Israel, never uttering the word Palestine.

Without any acknowledgment of Israel's actions in the last week — siege, bombardment campaigns, settler violence and forced displacement — Price's [second statement](#) continued to attribute sole responsibility for civilian death to Hamas. He reiterates, "It has now been more than a week since the horrific Hamas terror attacks in Israel." He then continues, "In that time, thousands of innocent Israeli and Palestinian people have lost their lives." Price fails to describe *how* Palestinian lives were lost as if their deaths weren't caused by Israeli airstrikes, which have now [destroyed](#) the third oldest church in the world.

Widespread public response to recent events has erased the 75-year history of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. As such, in this article, we provide heavily-sourced and well-evidenced historical, political and humanitarian context that should preclude any understanding of the current turmoil.

The so-called Israel-Palestine 'conflict'

The narrative often painted of Israel and Palestine is one of a "two-sided conflict." However, history illustrates a military superpower illegally occupying and perpetuating violence on an indigenous Palestinian people, with the unwavering support of Western powers.

In 1947, in opposition to the native Palestinians, the [United Nations General Assembly](#) partitioned Palestine into two independent states, one Palestinian-Arab and the other Jewish. A year later, the new Israeli state violently [expelled](#) more than 750,000 Palestinians, ethnically cleansing [approximately](#) 530 communities. This would be referred to as Al Nakba, "catastrophe" in Arabic.

In 1967, Israel, backed by the United States, defeated Egypt, Jordan and Syria in the June War. Israel consequently [expelled](#) 300,000 Palestinians and seized East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. In resolutions [242](#) and [338](#), the United Nations [recognized](#) Israel's presence in these territories as an illegal occupation of Palestinian land.

Although the U.N. has repeatedly called for the withdrawal of Israel, the state [continues to expand](#) its illegal settlements by demolishing and raiding Palestinian homes and [encouraging](#) its citizens to settle in internationally recognized Palestinian land. Since 2004, the Israeli government has [demolished](#) 7,802 structures, leaving 23,618

Palestinians homeless. The state often justifies this by claiming that “the structures lacked building permits — permits which the Israeli army systematically refuses to grant to Palestinians.”

The Israeli occupying state has [sought to control](#) every aspect of Palestinian life, inflicting deep “silent harm and psychological trauma... resulting from the erosion of economic, social, and cultural rights,” and leading to severe short and long-term consequences.

In the West Bank, Israel has [illegally built](#) hundreds of military closures, such as checkpoints, roadblocks and Jewish-only roads, intentionally making “simple daily tasks for Palestinians who are trying to get to work, school or hospital a constant struggle.” In occupied land, Israel has [unjustly detained, imprisoned and tortured](#) Palestinians, with over 800,000 arrests and detainments since 1967. They are often “presumed guilty without evidence” and “brutalized in Israeli custody.”

Israel’s occupation has also prevented Palestine from establishing any formal army. Israel is [ranked](#) as the fourth strongest military in the world, behind only the U.S., China, and Russia. The [settler state](#) receives roughly [\\$3.8 billion](#) every year from the U.S., the majority of which is for military assistance. Meanwhile, the U.S. sends Palestinians [\\$500 million](#), almost all of which goes directly to humanitarian organizations, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

The [power imbalance](#) is most grimly reflected in the disproportionate death tolls of Palestinian and Israeli civilians. Between 2008 and September of this year, Palestinians [suffered](#) 6,407 fatalities and 152,560 injuries in comparison to Israel’s 308 and 6,307, respectively. The dehumanization of the Palestinian people makes their deaths a normal function of occupation. Israeli death is the exception.

In a [280-page report](#), Amnesty International assessed these conditions and concluded, “The totality of the regime of laws, policies and practices described in this report demonstrates that Israel has established and maintained an institutionalized regime of oppression and domination of the Palestinian population for the benefit of Jewish Israelis — a system of apartheid — wherever it has exercised control over Palestinians’ lives since 1948.”

To be clear, apartheid is a legal and technical term in international criminal law, as [outlined](#) by the U.N. Apartheid Convention. It is perpetrated when “inhumane acts are committed within the context of a systematic attack directed at a civilian population with the intention of creating a system of domination by one racial group over any other.”

[Human Rights Watch](#), [B’Tselem](#), and other organizations have reached the same conclusion in their investigations. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories [called it](#) “apartheid by default.”

Israel-Palestine as a hyphenated notion fails to recognize the severe power imbalance that is a settler-colonial state occupying stolen land and imposing a system of violent apartheid.

Any condemnation of violence against civilians that does not in the same breath condemn Israeli occupation, colonization, settler violence, indiscriminate airstrikes, apartheid and the murder of Palestinian civilians remains hypocritical.

Duke Students for Justice in Palestine

A growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza

The history of violence against Gaza traces back many years, to a time before Hamas even existed.

Leading up to 2005, 8,500 Israeli settlers [illegally lived](#) in the Gaza Strip, which is internationally recognized as Palestinian land.

Additional readings on this topic:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/19/opinion/sunday/martin-luther-king-palestine-israel.html>

<https://jacobin.com/2019/02/martin-luther-king-israel-palestine-occupation>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/obama-warns-some-israels-actions-gaza-may-backfire-2023-10-23/>

<https://www.vox.com/2023/10/17/23918689/black-palestinian-solidarity-jewish-alliance-israel>

https://www.chronicleonline.com/news/national/florida-orders-state-universities-to-disband-pro-palestinian-student-group-saying-it-backs-hamas/article_35468def-f495-50fe-81c6-4ca8df86c21c.html