

# Ongoing Israeli Aggression: More than a conflict with Hamas or Gaza

Arab Forum for Alternatives (Beirut)



**On this earth what makes life worth living  
On this earth is the mistress of earth, the mother of beginnings, the mother of endings, it  
was known as Palestine, it became known as Palestine!**

Mahmoud Darwish

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This paper is part of the ongoing efforts by the Arab Forum for Alternatives to engage in current affairs and is a manifestation of its team's faith in the role scientific research plays in examining pertinent issues, analyzing different narratives, and expressing its stand on the Israeli aggression on occupied Palestine.

This paper was collectively written by the Arab Forum for Alternatives team. Feedback was provided by members of the forum's consultative council.

Translated into English by: Sonia Farid

Special thanks to Sally Samir for agreeing to include her drawing in this paper.

Quotations in the Drawings are taken from words spoken by the people of Gaza.



“Yes, that’s my mother... I recognize her by the hair.”

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## Introduction: A new round of the conflict:

The conflict between Israeli occupation forces and Palestinian resistance in Gaza constitutes a major phase in the Arab-Israeli conflict and provides striking evidence that the occupation of Palestine has not ended with the Oslo Agreement as many had claimed. In fact, what Oslo did was securing “a deluxe occupation” for Israel as several Zionist analysts put it at the time.<sup>1</sup> This meant that the Palestinian Authority would repress the Palestinian people as Israel besieges them while invading their lands when deemed necessary and otherwise expanding the construction of settlements.<sup>2</sup> Operation Al Aqsa Deluge, which started on October 7, 2023, marked a new phase in the conflict as it included a land, air, and sea attack and the infiltration of several settlements around Gaza. This operation, seen as the biggest in decades, came in response to Israeli aggression against El Aqsa Mosque.<sup>3</sup> The land operation started with breaching the wall separating Gaza and Israeli settlements while the air operation included missile attacks on different Israeli cities and the deployment of parachute-equipped gliders in settlements using Al Qassam Brigades’ Saqr paratroopers, and the sea operation was carried out by Hamas combat divers. In its first hours, the operation resulted in the death of hundreds of Israelis, both military personnel and settlers. Israeli forces announced that 222 people were taken hostage while Palestinian resistance announced in a statement on October 16, 2023 that the number of hostages is between 200 and 250, 50 of whom were killed in an Israeli air strike, and that the number of foreigners is still not confirmed.<sup>4</sup> According to a statement by the Israeli army on October 30, 2023, 1,538 people were killed, 5,431 injured, and 250,000 displaced.<sup>5</sup> The operation led to the closure of local airports in central and southern Israel for commercial flights and dozens of flights to Tel Aviv Ben Gurion airport were cancelled.<sup>6</sup>

Israel responded to Operation Al Aqsa Deluge with Operation Iron Swords and vowed to launch a brutal war against Gaza. Throughout that war Israel waged not only Gaza but also the West Bank, Southern Lebanon, and the Syrian capital Damascus, Israeli forces have been committing multiple atrocities including forced displacement, targeting civilian establishments, and the violation of the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants in addition to launching a military campaign that is entirely disproportionate to the attack it comes in response to. Those atrocities were exposed through different media platforms and several regional and international organizations worked on documenting them such as an Amnesty International report that was released on October 20, 2023 and covers the interval between October 7 and 12, 2023.<sup>7</sup> The report highlighted Israel’s violation of international humanitarian law.<sup>8</sup> Violations of international humanitarian law committed by Israel include:

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<sup>1</sup> Salamah Kilah. *The Palestinian Question: From the Illusion of the Two-State Solution to One Secular State* [Arabic].” Cairo: Dar Al Hilal, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Marwan Bishara. *Palestine/Israel Peace or Apartheid*. London: Zed Book, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> “Al Aqsa Deluge: The Biggest Attack by Palestinian Resistance on Israel [Arabic].” Al Jazeera, Oct. 27, 2023: <https://cutt.ly/zwEzKV5H>

For more on Operation Al Aqsa Deluge see Al Mayadeen: <https://cutt.ly/nwEWKSPb>

<sup>4</sup> “What We Know about Captives and Hostages? [Arabic]?” BBC, Oct. 24, 2023: <https://bbc.in/3seZB3V>

<sup>5</sup> Abu Marzouk Gives Info on Al Aqsa Deluge Hostages [Arabic].” *Al Jazeera*, Oct. 28, 2023: <https://bit.ly/3tK7TkE>

<sup>6</sup> Heba Salama and Basma Mohamed. “The Outcome of Israel’s Aggression on Gaza: The Bloodiest [Arabic].” *Al Masry Al Youm*, Oct. 30, 2023: <https://rb.gy/cfvfay>

<sup>7</sup> “Al Aqsa Deluge: The Biggest Attack by Palestinian Resistance on Israel [Arabic].” Op. Cit.

<sup>8</sup> Amnesty International’s report was based eyewitnesses who survived Israeli strikes, satellite images, and videos. Israel bans Amnesty International staff from entering the West Bank and Gaza.

<sup>8</sup> “Damning evidence of war crimes as Israeli attacks wipe out entire families in Gaza.” *Amnesty International*, Oct. 20, 2023: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-as-israeli-attacks-wipe-out-entire-families-in-gaza/>

- Failing to take precautions to spare civilians and carrying out indiscriminate attacks that failed to distinguish between civilians and military targets
- Targeting residential blocks and wiping out entire families such as when Israeli forces struck a three-storey residential building in the Al Zeitoun neighbourhood in Gaza City, where three generations of the Al Dos family lived. Fifteen family members were killed in the attack, seven of them children.<sup>9</sup>
- Targeting establishments that are protected by international law during war times, including hospitals, schools, and places of worship. Several reports documented attacks that targeted medical staff even though they wore medical badges.
- Targeting segments of the population that are protected by the Four Geneva Conventions such as women, children, and the elderly. Based on reports, a Palestinian child is killed every 10-15 minutes<sup>10</sup> and according to the spokesman of the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the number of deaths until October 29, 2023 is estimated at 8,005 including 3,342 children, 2,026 women, and 460 seniors.<sup>11</sup>

In a development seen by many as historic, Craig Mokhiber, director of the New York office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, submitted his resignation in protest to the failure of the United Nations and its organizations to stop atrocities in Gaza. The resignation was not the only remarkable development; what was even more remarkable was the text of the resignation, in which Mokhiber referred to the current situation in Gaza as a “textbook case of genocide.”<sup>12</sup> This resignation served to refute the narrative promoted by Israel and supported by its allies that Israel’s actions in Gaza are categorized under “self-defense.” In fact, Israel’s actions in Gaza are fall under collective punishment, which is criminalized by the Rome Statute and article 33 of the Geneva Conventions. Collective punishment is mainly manifested in blocking fuel, food, and water to Gaza in addition to the fact that the siege under which Gaza has been placed since 2007 is in itself a form of collective punishment.<sup>13</sup>

There are also multiple cases of collective killings and detentions which led the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to express on October 28 its concern over war crimes committed by Israel in Gaza, including forced displacement, collective punishment, taking hostages, and targeting civilians. For example, Israeli authorities dropped leaflets asking people to flee northern Gaza and warned that whoever chooses to stay will be seen as collaborating with Hamas. This is categorized as forced mass displacement.<sup>14</sup> On October 27, Israel cut off communication in the

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Video: Moustafa Al Barghouthi. “Israel committed three war crimes in Gaza [Arabic].” *Sky News*, Oct. 23, 2023: <https://rb.gy/3hx3y>

<sup>11</sup> “The war on Gaza... 8,000 martyrs, Al Qassam landing, and disputes with Netanyahu government [Arabic].” *AlJazeera.net*, Oct. 29, 2023: <https://bit.ly/46MX5kl>

<sup>12</sup> “Top UN Official in New York Steps down Citing ‘genocide’ of Palestinian Civilians.” *The Guardian*. Oct 31, 2023: <https://tinyurl.com/yne8l4n4>

<sup>13</sup> Video: Amnesty International: “Damning evidence of war crimes by Israel in Gaza [Arabic].” *France 24*: <https://rb.gy/ucw10>

<sup>14</sup> “UN expresses concern over war crimes in Gaza [Arabic].” *Sky News*, Oct. 28, 2023: <https://cutt.ly/VwEWMSFa>

For me see:  
 “Commission of Inquiry collecting evidence of war crimes committed by all sides in Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories since 7 October 2023.” *ONHCR*, Oct. 10, 2023: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/commission-inquiry-collecting-evidence-war-crimes-committed-all-sides-israel>

entire strip, leaving more than two million people out of coverage. Deborah Brown, senior technology researcher at Human Rights Watch, stated that “prolonged and complete communications blackouts, like those experienced in Gaza, can provide cover for atrocities and breed impunity while further undermining humanitarian efforts and putting lives at risk.”<sup>15</sup>

Israeli violence against Palestinians is not new, for it began with the onset of the Zionist project and the migration of Jews to Palestine starting 1882 in response to increased persecution of Jews in East Europe, especially Russia. Migration waves increased in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to a number of international and regional developments, including the Balfour Declaration, the British mandate for Palestine, and the White Paper of 1939. In the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zionist attacks on Palestinian cities intensified with the creation of paramilitary groups, the first in the region, whose aim was to kill and/or displace Palestinians.<sup>16</sup>



**“Uncle, I am very sad. I am worried about mom. I want to see mom and grandma.”**

<sup>15</sup> “War on Gaza Live... Occupation cuts off all communication and expands ground incursions [Arabic].” *AlJazeera.net*, Oct. 27, 2023: <https://rb.gy/77n7p>

“Gaza: Communications Blackout Imminent Due to Fuel Shortage.” *Human Rights Watch*: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/15/gaza-communications-blackout-imminent-due-fuel-shortage>

<sup>16</sup> For more on the history of the Arab Israeli conflict:

- Walid Al Khalidi. *Deir Yassin, Friday 9/4/1949* [Arabic]. Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1999.
- Shehta Al Aloul. *Milestones in the ancient and modern history of Palestine* [Arabic]. Irbid: Dar Al Mishkat, 2019.
- Walid Al Khalidi. *Before the diaspora: Photographic history of the Palestinian people 1876-1948* [Arabic]. Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1987.
- Walid Al Khalidi. *The partition of Palestine from the Great Revolution to the Nakba* [Arabic]. Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2021.
- Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: <https://www.palquest.org/en/home>

### **First: Terminology war:**

The current war in Palestine is not restricted to the military conflict but also extends to a terminology war on the academic and media levels. This is demonstrated in the way concepts and terms are manipulated to promote a certain narrative or used in the wrong context so that they turn from a source of knowledge and a channel of awareness into a propaganda tool and a means of misleading public opinion. Since it will not be possible to examine all relevant terms, the paper will focus on three of the most crucial terms that represent the three levels of the conflict in Gaza: rights, values, and the nature of the cause. The importance of looking into these terms and the way they are used in different contexts derives from the argument presented by thinker Salamah Kilah about restructuring as a means of changing the balance of power.<sup>17</sup>

Since Palestinian resistance is currently being restructured and so is its vision and strategies in a way that brings the Palestinian cause back to the forefront and raises awareness about it for younger generations, it is important to examine the concepts that constitute the foundation to this new structure as well as the concepts employed to undermine it.

One of the most common concepts used in the context of Israeli aggression against Palestinians is that of “self-defense,” which is also extensively cited at the present moment to justify the war on Gaza. According to the Israeli narrative, the operation against Gaza comes in response to the October 7 attacks, which are labelled “terrorist.” This narrative focuses on the recent attacks while totally overlooking the fact they were preceded by years of siege and repression. In this case, the action is the occupation, and the October 7 attacks are the reaction. Also, it is worth noting that resistance is, by definition, comprised of limited operations that inflict minor damages on the occupying forces yet drain them and affect them politically on the long run. Such operations, therefore, have a cumulative effect and the more they happen the less capable the occupier becomes to deal with the subsequent losses. In order to justify the “self-defense” argument, Israeli statements ignored the breaching of at least three military establishments at the Eretz crossing, Zikim base, and Re'im base (the headquarters of the Gaza Division)<sup>18</sup> and focused instead on the infiltration of Israeli settlements to portray the operations as targeting civilians. This leads to another importance concept, which is “civilians” and the question of whether armed Israeli settlers can be categorized as civilians or should be treated as part of occupation forces. Another question poses itself in this regard: If settlements are ordinary residential establishments and if their residents are civilians, why then are there calls across the world to boycott them? In fact, the Rome Statute “criminalizes the transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”<sup>19</sup> That is why describing settlers as civilians whether by Western governments or international organizations is extremely problematic.

On the other hand, Israeli forces justify targeting civilians in Gaza by arguing that they are used by Hamas as “human shields.” Several questions need to be asked in this regard: does this mean killing civilians is justifiable in case they are used as human shields?<sup>20</sup> And if this claim has any truth to it, then how come over 15 years Hamas has never changed this strategy especially at a time when it is witnessing a major strategic development? Also, can residents of entire cities be seen as human shields? In this case, why are settlers not considered human shields for occupation forces, hence dealing with them like Israel deals with Gazans? Using the term “human shields” in a selected manner, especially in the West, shows obvious bias by former colonial powers towards the current colonial power as well as an inherent longing to colonial practices.

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<sup>17</sup> Salamah Kilah. Op. Cit,

<sup>18</sup> Sky News Arabia Oct. 7, 2023: <https://rb.gy/supxc>

<sup>19</sup> Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8(2)(b)(viii)

<sup>20</sup>“Caught in Cross-fire: The ICC and the Challenges of Assessing Human Shields Allegations in the Case of Palestinian Armed Factions.” *Law for Palestine*, Feb. 3, 2022: <https://rb.gy/z8vi2>

The concept of “democracy” is another one that is closely related to the current conflict. Israel claims to be the only democracy in the region and this claim is also supported by its allies. In this context, it is important to distinguish between the “democratic role model” and democratic procedures. The first means equality between citizens regardless of race, religion, or gender as well as equality before the law. This role model is, therefore, based on faith in common humanity. On the other hand, democratic procedures mean the right to vote, secret ballot, separation of powers, the rule of law, freedom of expression... etc. The democratic role model cannot be achieved without democratic procedures yet there are many cases in which democratic procedures are not linked to a democratic role model.<sup>21</sup>

Citizenship is the main pillar of democracy, yet in a Jewish state that is founded on religious homogeneity, citizenship is based on religious affiliation and not applied to all citizens. In Israel, national belonging has never been separated from religion since the Zionist forefathers, including for seculars. Since its establishment, Israel defined citizenship through the law of return, which states that Jews everywhere are Israeli citizens by right. This means that being Israeli is equivalent to being Jewish, which is a direct violation of the principle of citizenship.<sup>22</sup> Ironically, Western discourse always accuses the Arab region of adopting anti-democratic ideologies that are contrary to Western democratic ones, yet this same discourse supports an ultra-right religious state like Israel, which is based on religious texts<sup>23</sup>. Separation between democratic values and procedures has been ongoing in Israel on several levels that include the foundation of the state, the constitution, the legislature (such as Jewish National Fund laws), and discrimination against Arab Israelis. This confirms that Israel is “a racist democracy” as Abdel Wahab El Messiri sarcastically puts it.<sup>24</sup>

Terminology used to describe the conflict in Western media is similarly problematic since the ongoing genocide is referred to as “the Israel-Gaza crisis.” After reducing the “Arab-Israeli conflict” to the “Palestinian-Israeli conflict,” it has now become a conflict between Israel and Gaza as if Israeli attacks on the West Bank, southern Lebanon, and Syria and the Egyptian role in the west are not also part of the conflict. This “dwarfing” of the conflict does not only lead to undermining the resistance and strengthening the Zionist project, but also opens the door for imperialist hegemony on the entire Arab region.<sup>25</sup> This was already demonstrated in the failure of the peace summit held in Cairo and which was unable to conclude with any form of initiative or even a joint statement. This stands in stark contrast to the outcome of previous summits in similar circumstances and even though those summits were criticized back then for not yielding effective results, they were at least capable of bringing 22 countries together in a way that gave them negotiating leverage with Israel or the West. This kind of leverage was seen on October 27 in the United Nations General Assembly when the ceasefire resolution was endorsed.

Systematic scaling down of the Palestinian cause facilitates reducing the conflict to a religious one in the pro-Israeli narrative. For example, the National Baptist Hospital is referred to in the media as the National Hospital, attacks against Palestinian churches are not covered, and protests by anti-Israeli Jews in the West are violently repressed. This serves the pro-Israeli narrative in the way it renders resistance to the occupation an attack against Jews and not against a racist state and an apartheid regime and Zionist violations that are no different from the Holocaust.<sup>26</sup> This discourse also serves the agenda of radical Islamist movements and even terrorist groups that launch operations in the name of religion in different parts of the world and have

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<sup>21</sup> Abdel El Wahab Messiri. “Racist Democracy [Arabic].” *Elaph*, May 13, 2005: <https://rb.gy/uk9s4>.

<sup>22</sup> Azmi Bishara. *From state Jewishness till Sharon* [Arabic]. Cairo: Dar El Shorouk, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Alain Gresh. *Israël Palestine vérités sur un conflit*. Paris : Fayard, Paris, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Abdel Wahab El Messiri. Op. Cit.

<sup>25</sup> Salamah Kilah. Op. Cit.

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert Achcar. *The Arabs and the Holocaust* [Arabic]. Beirut: Dar Al Saqi, 2010.

nothing to do with resistance. All this supports the argument promoted by Israel and the West that the war in Gaza is a war on terrorism.



### Second: Deconstructing the Israeli “war on terrorism” narrative:

Since the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023, Israel has been adopting the “war on terrorism” narrative to justify its operation in Gaza. According to this narrative, Israel was subjected to a terrorist attack similar to 9/11 and Hamas is equivalent to Al Qaeda and will soon develop into another ISIS. Israel, therefore, has the right to mobilize all its forces to eliminate Hamas like the United States did with Al Qaeda after 2011 and the international coalition did with ISIS after creating the Islamic state in 2014.<sup>27</sup> This narrative was supported by several international powers, on top of which are the United States, Germany, and France. In fact, French president Emmanuel Macron called in his visit to Israel for expanding the international coalition that fights ISIS in Iraq and Syria to also fight Hamas in Gaza.<sup>28</sup>

This argument is faulty on many levels. First of all, Hamas is not ISIS. In fact, the two parties have for years been engaged in a fierce conflict. Jihadi Salafism emerged in Palestine at a later time compared to

<sup>27</sup> “Netanyahu says Hamas atrocities mirror ISIS.” *Reuters*, Oct. 9, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Stacy Meichtry. “Macron Calls for Anti-ISIS Military Coalition to Target Hamas.” *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 25, 2023.

other parts of the Arab region, specifically with the second Palestinian Intifada, and gained popularity in Gaza after US invasion of Iraq in 2003.<sup>29</sup> Jihadi movements took advantage of Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 and the subsequent power struggle between Fatah and Hamas to wield influence in the strip. In 2005, several Jihadi Salafist groups were established, the most prominent of which were Soldiers of the Supporters of God (Jun Ansar Allah) and Army of Islam (Jaish Al Islam). Those groups had two main objectives. The first is attacking Israel and the second is Islamizing the Palestinian society. Even though those two objectives seem similar to Hamas's, they are in fact substantially different. While Hamas defines itself as "a Palestinian national and Islamic liberation and resistance movement that aims at liberating Palestine and fighting the Zionist project,"<sup>30</sup> Jihadi Salafist movements reject any national discourse and see themselves as part of a global entity that wages war on the "enemies of Islam." True, Israel falls under this category according to those groups, but so do Palestinians who do not follow the groups' ideologies such as nationalists and communists and, at a later stage, Hamas when it started clamping down on Jihadi Salafism in Gaza. The Islamization of society is indeed part of Hamas's agenda, yet it is done in a gradual manner that rarely involves violence. Jihadi Salafist groups, on the other hand, see that their mission is to eliminate all forms of "un-Islamic" practices through all possible means, including violence.<sup>31</sup>

Tension between Hamas and Jihadi Salafist groups intensified when Soldiers of the Supporters of God declared in a Friday prayer sermon the creation of an Islamic state in the city of Rafah in August 2009 as an initial step towards expanding in all Gaza. Hamas responded with besieging Ibn Taimia Mosque in Rafah, where the sermon took place, and clashing with members of the group. The clashes resulted in the death of 22 people, six of which were from Hamas.<sup>32</sup> Tension between Hamas and Salafi groups returned with the emergence of ISIS and in April 2015, Hamas arrested several ISIS members in Gaza and escalated when ISIS killed several Hamas figures at El Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria. ISIS also posted in June 2015 a video threatening to topple Hamas in Gaza. This was followed by a series of attacks ISIS launched against Hamas. In August 2017, a suicide bomber blew himself up in Gaza close to the border with Egypt, killing a Hamas security officer and injuring several others. In 2019, suicide bombings targeted two Hamas checkpoints next to Gaza city and killed three Hamas officers.<sup>33</sup>

Another inaccuracy commonly used by the Israeli narrative is reducing Palestinian resistance to religious groups while overlooking nationalist and leftist groups. In fact, Palestinian armed resistance is diverse for it does include religious groups such as Al Qassam Brigades, Hamas's armed wing created in 1987, and Al Quds Brigades, the Islamic Jihad's armed wing created in 1987 and the second military power in the Gaza Strip, yet they are not the only ones. Palestinian resistance is also comprised of nationalist and leftist movements such as Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, affiliated to Fatah, Jihad Jibril Brigades, the armed wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command, Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, the armed wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (established in 2000 and previously called Popular Resistance Brigade then renamed after Israel assassinated its general secretary in Ramallah in 2011), and the National Resistance Brigades, the military wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (established in 2000 and active in the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem).

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<sup>29</sup> Akl Salah. "Hamas and Salafis in Gaza: 2007-2017 [Arabic]." *Al Mostaqbal Al Arabi*, vol. 40, issue 466, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Hamas Charter, Palestinian Information Center, May 1, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Y. Schweitzer. "Salafi Jihadism in Gaza as Opposition to Hamas Rule." Kurz, Dekel, and Berti (eds.), *The Crisis of the Gaza Strip*, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> "Deaths and injuries in clashes in Gaza between Hamas and Islamist fundamentalists [Arabic]." *BBC*, Aug. 14, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> "Gaza bombings: Large-scale security campaign in Gaza after killing of three Hamas operatives [Arabic]." *BBC*, Aug. 27, 2019: <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-49492076>

While Islamic armed resistance has for the past few years been at the forefront, the role played by secular groups before that demonstrate how diverse Palestinian resistance is. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was the main resistance group on the 1960s and 1970s through a series of operations that exceeded Palestine and the Arab region and reached Europe. For example, in August 1969, Leila Khalid hijacked a TWA plane and redirected it to Syria to lobby for the release of Palestinian prisoners and alert the world to the Palestinian cause. In September 1970, PFLP operatives hijacked an El Al plane, but the operations failed when the plane landed in London, where Leila Khalid got arrested. The Israeli narrative excludes this part of the resistance to make its incursions in Palestine part of the war on Islamist terrorism endorsed by the West. This narrative intentionally overlooks the fact that the distinction between resistance and terrorism springs from the context. This should be taken into consideration when looking into international laws that can be interpreted in different ways. That does not mean that human rights violations committed by resistance groups, whether Islamic or secular, are acceptable, but it rather means that understanding those groups is not possible without placing them within the context of occupation.

The Israeli narrative avoids at all costs looking into the reason for violence by Palestinians, which is Israeli occupation. In fact, the concept of occupation is never part of Israeli discourse since it does not admit it in the first place and refuses to link the current situation to Israeli practices since 1948. The current discourse, instead, only focuses on the October 7 attacks while totally ignoring what those attacks were a reaction to. UN Secretary General António Guterres pointed that out in his address on October 24: “It is important to also recognize the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum. The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation. They have seen their land steadily devoured by settlements and plagued by violence; their economy stifled; their people displaced and their homes demolished. Their hopes for a political solution to their plight have been vanishing.”<sup>34</sup> After this address, Israel called upon Guterres to apologize or resign since his statement dealt a major blow to the discourse Israel wants to promote in Western political circles and media.

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<sup>34</sup> Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council on the Middle East, Oct. 24, 2023: <https://tinyurl.com/ylrqq6cl>



“It needs a little patience. Keep the spirits high.”

Shereen Abu Akleh

### Third: Al Aqsa Deluge: Bringing back Palestine:

In the midst of the dire economic, social, and political conditions from which the Arab region is suffering, Operation Al Aqsa Deluge restored hope in resistance to imperialism and Western hegemony. This was demonstrated in the way Arab people in several cities across the region declared solidarity with the Palestinian resistance and supported the Oct. 7 operation. Israel responded to the operation with an unprecedented onslaught on Gaza that targeted women and children in houses, hospitals, UNRWA schools, and even funerals. Since the start of the Israeli aggression, massive protests were staged across the Arab region to support the Palestinian people, hence bringing the Palestinian cause, the issue of normalization, and the relationship between Arab countries and Western colonialism back to the forefront.

Amman, Beirut, Baghdad, Cairo, Tunis, and Rabat among others witnessed massive protests against Israeli aggression and the hashtag of Al Aqsa Deluge took over social media. Thousands of Jordanians organized a march under the slogan “Sweeping Deluge” in the capital Amman to support Palestinian resistance and call for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador following the attack on the National Baptist Hospital in Gaza, the bloodiest since the beginning of the aggression, which killed 500 people.<sup>35</sup> The hospital attack led to protests in different parts of Lebanon, especially Beirut where protestors rallied in front of the

<sup>35</sup> “Al Aqsa Deluge triggers waves of solidarity with Palestinians [Arabic].” *AlJazeera.net*: <https://shorturl.at/citz3>

American Embassy and called for expelling the ambassador and ending Israeli aggression. Lebanese resistance also launched attacks on Israeli settlements and Palestinian refugees in Lebanese camps declared solidarity with Gaza. In Tunisia, protestors took to the streets from the first days and several parties and organizations announced the establishment of the National Committee for the Support of Palestinian resistance. Tunisians protested in front of the American and French embassies and called upon President Qais Saied to expel both ambassadors for their countries' support of Israel. Donations were also collected by the Tunisian Red Crescent.<sup>36</sup> Tunisian students saluted the Palestinian flags in schools across the country in response to an initiative by the Ministry of Education. In Egypt and despite restrictions imposed on protests, students from several universities protested against the Israeli aggression, including private universities with no history of student activism. A protest was also staged in Cairo on October 20, defying the protest law and many protestors were arrested. In Iraq, hundreds of Iraqis rallied at the border with Jordan and called upon the Jordanian government to allow them to send aid to Gaza. In Morocco, and despite normalization with Israel, protestors took to the streets in different cities. Other Arab countries such as Algeria, Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain witnessed protests in support of the Palestinian people. In addition to condemning the war on Gaza, those protests also demonstrated people's rejection of normalization in countries that normalized relations with Israel.<sup>37</sup>

Solidarity with Palestine was not confined to protests but also extended to donating medicine, generators, and food through different associations. An initiative to boycott products of countries that support Israel gained momentum all over the region and unprecedented numbers responded. Activists and influencers spread awareness on social media through posts and videos that list the companies which need to be boycotted and explained the impact of boycotting. The Palestinian BDS National Committee called through its website for boycotting Israel on all fronts—economic, academic, cultural, artistic, and sports.<sup>38</sup> In football games across the region, fans chanted slogans that supported Palestine and players who scored stood like Handala while doing the victory sign.<sup>39</sup> This development demonstrates growing awareness of the Palestinian cause where expressions of solidarity are no longer confined to slogans about Al Aqsa mosque or banners about sympathizing with Gaza. Several celebrities who were not generally politicized in the past also declared their solidarity with Palestine.<sup>40</sup>

Social networking websites witnessed massive waves of solidarity with Palestine despite restrictions imposed by Meta on Facebook and Instagram. This led activists to move to Telegram and X (formerly Twitter), where there is more freedom of expression, to share the Palestinian narrative and refute the Western one that supports Israel and labels Hamas's resistance as terrorism. Several hashtags were launched including one that wrote the question "do you condemn Hamas?" which was asked to all pro-Palestinian

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<sup>36</sup> "Al Aqsa Deluge unites Tunisians: A devastating blow for Israeli occupation and normalizations treaties [Arabic]." *Al Quds Al Arabic*: <https://shorturl.at/erBGI>

<sup>37</sup> Derrière le soutien à la Palestine, la colère des peuples arabes contre leurs dirigeants : courrier international, <https://tinyurl.com/yr72ywtv>

<sup>38</sup> The Palestinian BDS National Committee: <https://bdsmovement.net/ar>

<sup>39</sup> Handala is a character created by cartoonist Naji Al Ali who said about him, "Handala was born 10 years old and he will always be 10 years old. It was at that age that I left my homeland. When Handala returns, he will still be 10 years old, and then he will start growing up." About Handala's famous posture, with his back turned and his hands clasped, Al Ali said that he chose it for him after the October 1973 war when the Arab region was witnessing a wave of normalization and subjugation. The posture, therefore, symbolizes Handala's "rejection at a time when solutions are presented to us the American way" and as "a symbol of rejection of all the present negative tides in our region."

<sup>40</sup> Iman Mohamed. "Celebrities declare solidarity with the Palestinian people in the aftermath of Al Aqsa Deluge [Arabic]." *AlJazeera.net*: <https://shorturl.at/ovFZ4>

figures hosted in Western TV channels, in Arabic letters to make fun of the Western discourse that totally overlooks the suffering of the Palestinian people over 75 years. Social media played a major role in exposing the double standards of the West and its hypocrisy in dealing with the victims of Israeli aggression as opposed to their stand on other forms of resistance such as the Ukrainian case. Through posts on social media, it was made obvious that the West does not apply human rights equally since it does not condemn war crimes committed in Palestine. Those posts also exposed the absurdity of universal values, which are applied selectively, and the ineffectiveness of international humanitarian laws and international organizations, including the Security Council.

Those different forms of support underlined a major development in awareness of the Palestinian cause, which had for a long time been confined to the collective unconscious and proved that fighting for it is not restricted to a particular group or political ideology, for it is and will remain the cause of all Arab people.



“Where are the children? They died hungry.”

#### **Fourth: Action and reaction in Western solidarity with Palestine:**

The past few years witnessed a shift in international public opinion about the Palestinian cause. Global voices that condemned Israeli aggression and supported the Palestinian people emerged powerfully and counter-narratives that refuted Israel’s claims and exposed falsities promoted by Western media started spreading. Israeli aggression on Al Aqsa Mosque in 2021 and the plan to expel Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem played a major role in this shift that did not only happen on the level of the public since at the time several Western diplomats visited Sheikh Jarrah to support its Palestinian residents and condemn Israeli practices. Arab communities in Europe raised awareness on the Palestinian

cause in their respective societies and influenced public opinion together with pro-Palestinian European organizations that launched campaigns to tell the truth about Palestine and make Palestinian voices heard in the West as well as take part in boycotting initiatives. The rise of alternative media, mainly through social networking websites, contributed to exposing the violations committed by Israel and exposing the lies of pro-Israeli media outlets in which Israel invested large sums of money to make sure its narrative prevails.<sup>41</sup>

The 2022 World Cup provided a suitable context for supporting the Palestinian cause and exposing Israeli falsities. Arab football fans and players raised Palestinian flags during games and chanted slogans supporting Palestine. This declaration of solidarity also extended to non-Arab fans, who got the chance to see the other side of the story as opposed to most championships, where there is support for Israel or where supporting a political cause is banned.<sup>42</sup>

This change in the balance of power on the media level triggered a substantial change in European and international public opinion, which was manifested in unprecedented protests supporting Palestinians both in 2021 and now. Several European politicians also declared their solidarity with the Palestinian people. In France, in a protest that included more than 30,000 people, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of La France Insoumise (France Unbowed), criticized the French government for its unconditional support of Israel and he and his party were accused of antisemitism like other French journalists, sports players, and politicians who voiced the same opinions.<sup>43</sup> Several European cities witnessed massive protests declaring solidarity with Palestine.

Despite the fact that most supporters of the Palestinian cause in Europe and the United States belong to the opposition, this was not the case in Spain where the left-wing political party Podemos, which is part of the government, declared solidarity with the Palestinian people. This was demonstrated in statements by Minister of Social Rights Ione Belarra and Minister of Equality Irene Montero. Belarra openly accused the United States and the European Union of taking part in the war crimes committed by Israel against Palestinians and called for trying Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the International Criminal Court. Irish politician and member of the European Parliament Clare Daly condemned the European Union for its bias to Israel.<sup>44</sup>

Growing support for the Palestinian cause in Europe drove several European countries in the past few years to impose restrictions on activities that declare solidarity for Palestinians. In June 2023, Britain's Parliament approved a bill that bans local councils and other public bodies from boycotting Israeli goods and in May 2019 the German parliament approved an unbinding law that condemns movements for boycotting Israel, which were labelled "antisemitic."<sup>45</sup> Pro-Palestinian were banned in Berlin and those who defied the ban were violently repressed and 170-200 protestors. This, however, was not implemented across the board since the ban was not strictly enforced by the authorities, which is also the case in France. Refugees were also threatened with deportation, which was the case with the Palestinian coordinator of the Steadfast (Samedoom) movement Zaid Abdel Nasser and others who work or study in European countries were faced

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<sup>41</sup> "International public opinion shifts towards Palestine [Arabic]." *Al Quds Al Arabi*, June 7, 2021: <https://tinyurl.com/ytbpu5xt>

<sup>42</sup> See Mohamed Watad. "Qatar 2022 World Cup: Did Palestine defeat Israel? [Arabic] *AlJazeera.net*, Nov. 30, 2022: <https://tinyurl.com/2paajhyk> and Abdel Rahim Al Tourani, "Abraham Accords and the World Cup [Arabic]." *Al Hurrah*: <https://tinyurl.com/ypwexc86>

<sup>43</sup> Zuhair Hamdani. "Who stands with Palestine in Europe?" *AlJazeera.net*, Oct. 24, 2023: <https://tinyurl.com/yvdjf5fv>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> "Criminalizing solidarity with Palestine on the rise in Europe [Arabic]." *Al Ghad*, Aug. 4, 2023: <https://tinyurl.com/yqle6pcp>

with similar threats.<sup>46</sup> Britain criminalized raising Palestinian flags or chanting slogans that support Palestinians. This was followed by the criminalization in Germany of the Palestinian scarf, Palestinian flags, and pro-Palestinian slogans in schools, citing threats to peace. In the United States, hundreds of Jews protested in New York and Washington DC against Israeli aggression, and many stormed the Capitol and called upon President Biden to put pressure on Israel for a ceasefire in Gaza. More than 300 protestors were arrested.<sup>47</sup>

The European Union also put a lot of pressure on social networking websites to block pro-Palestinian content. For example, the European Union “scolded” Meta for not supervising content that included “misleading” information even though the company has already been imposing restrictions on pro-Palestinian posts for years. This had a negative impact on the Palestinian cause, especially during the 2021 aggression on Sheikh Jarrah. Meta gave in to European pressure through deleting around 800,000 posts, both in Arabic and Hebrew, until October 14, 2023, that is in the first week of the war. Later, Meta announced the creation of a special unit that included Arabic and Hebrew speakers to close accounts and block content that supports the Palestinian cause. This led to closing the pages of several journalists inside and outside Gaza. TikTok and Alphabet (the owner of Google and YouTube) were similarly “scolded” by the European Union.<sup>48</sup> X (formerly Twitter) also deleted hundreds of accounts linked to Hamas after the European Commission threatened to impose sanctions on the platform.<sup>49</sup>

The current war on Gaza runs parallel to the ongoing Russian war on Ukraine. In the latter, Western countries declared their full support for Ukraine, put pressure on Russia using political, diplomatic, and economic means, and condemned the killing of innocent civilians. In addition, European politicians and officials visited Kiev to declare solidarity with the Ukrainian government and people and to support Ukraine’s right to defend itself against Russian aggression. The same governments adopted the contrary stance as far as the Palestinian case is concerned, overlooking the Palestinian people’s right to defend themselves and labelling resistance in Gaza which has been under siege for 16 as terrorism while justifying the killing of thousands of civilians, mostly women and children, blocking humanitarian aid, and cutting off communication under the pretext of self-defense. This stance infuriated large segments of European societies, especially activists and human rights organizations that accused Western governments of adopting double standards.

Pro-Palestinian protests staged in European cities defied the ban imposed by European governments on supporting the Palestinian cause and raising the Palestinian flag<sup>50</sup>, which indicates a remarkable change in global public opinion as well as a decline in the credibility of conventional media outlets that show obvious bias to the Israeli narrative. This shift also re-opened the debate about the distinction between the terms “anti-Israeli” and “anti-Semitic.” This distinction was at the core of the mass resignation by members of the Labor Party in the United Kingdom citing the party’s support for Israel. It is noteworthy that the party’s former leader Jeremy Corbyn and his team were suspended from the party for their pro-Palestinian views

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<sup>46</sup> Karim Eid Sabbagh. “Supporters of the Palestinian cause in German: Arbitrary arrests and deportation threats [Arabic].” *Al Akhbar*, Oct. 28, 2023: <https://al-akhbar.com/Lebanon/372174>

<sup>47</sup> “Jewish protestors storm the Congress to demand an end to war [Arabic].” *BBC*: <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/articles/cn03gkp44epo>.

<sup>48</sup> “Following European scolding, social media wages war on Palestinian content [Arabic].” *Al Arabi TV*: <https://tinyurl.com/yr7tmbs5>

<sup>49</sup> “Weekly bulletin: Major violations against Palestinians [Arabic].” *SMEX*, Oct. 13, 2023: <https://tinyurl.com/ywndmx52>

<sup>50</sup> “Massive protests sweep Arab, Islamic, and Western cities [Arabic].” *Al Jazeera.net*, Oct. 28, 2023: <https://tinyurl.com/ytcppx5y>

and were accused of anti-Semitism.<sup>51</sup> All those developments highlight a shift towards the humanitarian side of the Palestinian cause, hence bringing it back to the forefront as one of the most important global issues whose resolution is the only way to achieve peace in the region.



“My name is Youssef. I have curly hair, white complexion, and a pretty face.”

#### **Conclusion: International organizations: Role and resources:**

The preamble to the United Nations charter states that the purpose of establishing the organization is “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.” The same idea is echoed in Article 1 of the charter, and which stresses the importance of peace and security.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, the main aim of the United Nations is maintaining global peace and security. However, since October 8, 2023, Palestinian people have been subjected to genocide.<sup>53</sup> This necessitates looking at the definition of genocide in international law. The term “genocide” was first recognized as a crime in international law in 1946 by the UN General Assembly and was defined as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”<sup>54</sup> Why, then, did the UN, being

<sup>51</sup> “Mass Opposition Emerges to Sir Keir Starmer’s Support for Israeli War Crimes as UK Muslims Desert Labour Party.” 2023. World Socialist Web Site: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/10/18/mtob-o18.html>.

<sup>52</sup> UN Charter, full text: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>

<sup>53</sup> “UN expert warns of new instance of mass ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, calls for immediate ceasefire.” UNOHCR, Oct. 14, 2023: <https://tinyurl.com/yoquasgl>

<sup>54</sup> “United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.” United Nations, <https://tinyurl.com/yxrz3k2>

one of the world's most important international organizations, not intervene to stop the genocide against Palestinian people?

Several studies tackled the challenges facing the UN and the reasons why it failed to achieve international peace and security. Some of those reasons are related to the organizational structure of the UN, which is seen by many as extremely bureaucratic. Another important factor is the context of establishing the UN, which is the balance of power that tipped in favor of countries that won World War Two, hence leading to the veto power at the UN Security Council. Issues related to financial challenges, lack of resources, and unfair distribution of financial contribution among member states also need to be taken into consideration. Studies conducted on this issue offer a detailed account of those challenges.<sup>55</sup>

In the same vein, the United Nations failed to deal with continuous Israeli aggression against Palestine. Since 1948, Israel has not abided by any of the UN resolutions about Palestine. Since that time, the Security Council issued several resolutions about Palestine, the last of which was resolution number 2334 on December 23, 2016 when the Security Council endorsed a resolution that condemned Israeli settlements and called for stopping the construction of settlements in Palestinian territories. However, Israel continued its aggression against Palestinians. Added to that are hundreds of resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as the International Court of Justice deeming the separation wall illegal.<sup>56</sup> Several of those resolutions were also described by Israel and its allies as “disgraceful.”<sup>57</sup>

All those resolutions, however, did not earn the UN any credibility since none of them were implemented on the ground. Even Guterres' pro-Palestinian statements cannot be translated into actual actions.<sup>58</sup> This can be attributed to the fact that UN actions are to a great extent influenced by members states, especially

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<sup>55</sup> For more see:

- Adam Roberts (1993) The United Nations and international security, *Survival*, 35:2, 3-30, DOI: 10.1080/00396339308442683
- Makinda, Samuel M. “Sovereignty and International Security: Challenges for the United Nations.” *Global Governance* 2, no. 2 (1996): 149–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27800134>.
- RAMESH THAKUR (2004) United Nations Security Council Reform, *African Security Review*, 13:3, 66-74, DOI: 10.1080/10246029.2004.9627305
- Ola, T. P. (2023). United Nations Security Council and global stability. *Medzinárodné vzťahy – Slovak Journal of International Relations*, 21(2), 135 – 154. <https://doi.org/10.53465/SJIR.1339-2751.2023.2.135-154>
- Mingst, Karen A., Margaret P. Karns, and Alynna J. Lyon. 2022. “The United Nations in the 21st Century.” Routledge & CRC Press.
- (JAUNS), T.J.A.F.U.N.S. (Ed.). (2023). *Evolution of the United Nations System: An East Asian Perspective* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003369615>

<sup>56</sup> “International resolutions on Palestine.” *Palestinian News & Info Agency*: <https://tinyurl.com/ynh9mcwe>

<sup>57</sup> “In an unbinding decision condemned by Israel: UN General Assembly calls for instant humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza [Arabic].” *France 24*, Oct. 28, 2023: <https://tinyurl.com/yr7cowvs>  
Israeli delegate's statement on X (Twitter): <https://twitter.com/giladerdan1/status/1718024766106309061>

<sup>58</sup> For more on the UN Secretary General see:

- “Gaza: ‘Thousands of children killed’ within a few weeks, says UN’s Guterres. *UN News*: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143772>
- “‘This must stop,’ UN chief says as deaths, displacement ripple across Gaza”: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143762>

powerful ones that prioritize protecting their interests. In addition, the UN Charter is defective and has not been modified since it was drafted despite major changes in the international order.<sup>59</sup>

The same five permanent members in the Security Council have been controlling all resolutions and have veto right. This right is constantly used by the United States to block resolutions that support Palestine. In the interval between 1973 and 2018, the United States blocked 44 resolutions, according to the Palestinian Information Center.<sup>60</sup> This pattern continued till the current aggression when on October 25, 2023 the United States used the veto to block two resolutions, one proposed by Russia and the other by Brazil for a humanitarian ceasefire.<sup>61</sup> On the theoretical level, Security Council resolutions are binding while General Assembly resolutions are not and are rather seen as a reflection of the perspective of the International Community, and its double standards for that matter. The comparison between reactions to the Russian war on Ukraine and the Israeli war on Palestine offer the most striking example.<sup>62</sup> This is particularly demonstrated by resolutions that describe the Russian war as an “invasion”<sup>63</sup> while describing Israeli actions as “hostilities.”



“This is Marah... she used to love drawing.”

<sup>59</sup> Magdi Eissa. “UN resolutions and the Palestinian cause [Arabic].” *Palestinian Research Center*: <https://tinyurl.com/27o5kjjw>

<sup>60</sup> “Draft resolution vetoed by the United States [Arabic].” *Palestinian News & Info Agency*: [https://info.wafa.ps/ar\\_page.aspx?id=20182](https://info.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=20182)

<sup>61</sup> “Gaza crisis: Deadlock deepens as Security Council rejects competing resolutions by US and Russia.” *UN News*, Oct. 25, 2023: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142817>

<sup>62</sup> “UN General Assembly adopts Gaza resolution calling for immediate and sustained ‘humanitarian truce.’” *UN News*, Oct. 26, 2023: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142847>

<sup>63</sup> “UN General Assembly calls for immediate end to war in Ukraine.” *UN News*, Feb. 23, 2023: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/02/1133847>