

The slow but systematic ethnic cleansing of Palestine

By Rashad Seedeem

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The Israeli/Palestinian conflict has escalated recently with humanitarian groups worldwide calling for amnesty (Screenshot via YouTube)

Across the world, there has been deep shock over the actions of the Israeli Government's military aggression towards the Occupied Territories of Palestine, in particular the Gaza Strip. But these actions are part of a deliberate and systematic ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people writes [Dr Rashad Seedeem](#).

AS AIRSTRIKES CONTINUE to [rain down upon Gaza](#), it is quite apparent that the ultimate endgame for Israel is the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.

The latest conflict was sparked by two episodes that demonstrate the true intentions of the Israeli State. First, an [Israeli High Court ruling](#) gave the green light to expand Israeli settlements into the

East Jerusalem neighbourhood of [Sheikh Jarrah](#), authorising the eviction of local Palestinians from their own homes. [Nightly protests](#) in defence of Sheikh Jarrah intensified as far-right Israeli activists and politicians antagonised and [attacked Palestinians](#) with counter-protests in East Jerusalem chanting "death to Arabs".

Second, at the same time, as the month of Ramadan was coming to a close, the Israeli military repeatedly attacked Palestinian worshippers as they left [Al Aqsa Mosque](#), considered the third holiest site in Islam. On Friday 7 May, Palestinian worshippers [were attacked](#) by Israeli security forces [injuring over 200](#) and again on the Monday where morning prayers ended with a barrage of rubber-coated steel rounds, stun grenades and tear gas while security forces assaulted others with batons. The [raid lasted](#) over four hours and injured over 300.

[Hamas](#), the ruling party in Gaza with a history of terrorism, [demanded](#) that the Israeli security forces vacate the Al Aqsa compound and Sheikh Jarrah with an ultimatum set for 6 PM. Minutes after the passing of the ultimatum, with no substantive change from the Israeli security forces, Hamas launched rockets into Israel from Gaza. Most, but not all missiles, were intercepted by Israel's [Iron Dome](#) defence system. Israel responded with airstrikes targeting residential buildings that, by the end of the first night, 24 were killed (including nine children), injuring hundreds more.

Israel [escalated](#) airstrikes along with ground assaults from the Israeli border of Gaza while Hamas continued their missile counterstrikes. By 14 May, the [United Nations reported](#) that 119

Palestinians had been killed (including at least 31 children) and 869 injured. The report also noted that over 200 housing units were destroyed by these assaults with over 10,000 Gazans fleeing their homes in the desperate hope of reaching some form of safety. Conversely, at the same time, nine Israelis had been killed.

Within the mixed cities, Israeli mob violence [exploded upon the streets](#) where Arab residents and businesses were attacked. One harrowing incident [included](#) a Tel Aviv Jewish resident, mistaken as an Arab, being pulled from his car and brutally beaten by a mob until he was heavily injured and unconscious.

Most recently, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) deliberately [levelled a Gazan building](#) housing media organisations including [Associated Press](#) and [Al Jazeera](#) with the direct intention of limiting reporting within Gaza.

Most international media continue to [present a false equivalence](#) between Hamas missile strikes and the repressive acts of the IDF. “Both sides” narratives are misleading and undermine the legitimacy of Palestine’s victimhood against the overwhelming military dominance and aggression of the IDF.

This latest conflict would not have been triggered without the repressive and provocative acts of the Israeli security forces and the Israeli far-Right.

From the raw numbers, the disproportionate asymmetrical nature of the ongoing occupation becomes apparent. Palestinian deaths [since 2008](#) have amounted to 5,733 including 1,010 boys and 244 girls compared to 251 Israeli fatalities with 32 being civilians.

Further, this latest eruption of violence has once again been reported in isolation. For instance, [The New York Times](#) characterised relations as ‘years of quiet’ before the latest outbreak.

Palestinian writer and activist [Budour Hassan](#) has instead described the situation as a result of “*state-sponsored, decades-long discrimination, isolation*

and erasure”.

Military repression from Israeli security forces is a [daily occurrence](#) for Palestinian and Arab residents. The IDF is emboldened by legislation like [Military Order 1651](#) which includes a ten-year sentence for those who ‘*attempts, orally or otherwise, to influence public opinion... which may harm public peace or public order*’ or ‘*publishes words of praise, sympathy or support for a hostile organisation*’. Such authoritarian laws facilitate the violent suppression of protests and activists with impunity.

Since 2007, Gaza has become the [largest open-air prison](#) in the world. The Israeli Government has imposed a steel ring around the strip through a blockade that stops all but the bare essentials entering Gaza either by air, land or sea. Israeli authorities control all routes leaving Gaza, severely restricting the movement of people. Many of Gaza’s younger residents have never left the small strip of land. The [U.N. has reported](#) that Gaza has lost U.S.\$16.7 billion (AU\$21.4 billion) since the blockade.

[Michael Lynk](#), the U.N. Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory, [described the enforcement](#) of this blockade as “*the collective punishment of the two million residents of Gaza, which is strictly prohibited under the Fourth Geneva Convention*”.

Electricity is so poor that access is only limited to about two to four hours a day. Food and drinkable water are scarce with over 80% of Gazans dependent upon humanitarian aid. More than half of the population lives in poverty while 45% have been denied access to medical attention outside of Gaza. The [COVID-19 pandemic](#) has swept through Gaza where cases have risen by 21% to over 100,000 and 819 deaths by 22 April.

Human Rights Watch ([HRW](#)) [reported](#) that since 1967, the Israeli State has systematically dispossessed Palestinian residents in the Occupied Territories through the colonial expansion of Jewish settlements. United Nations’ [research](#) has found that since 2009, 7,591 Palestinian structures have

been demolished, displacing 11,000 people. Israeli humanitarian group [Peace Now](#) has [reported](#) by the end of 2020, the Israeli Higher Planning Council approved 12,159 settlement housing units in the West Bank and has increased settlements by 28% since the beginning of the Trump Administration.

Further, HRW has described Israel's authority over Palestinians as a form of apartheid where residents of the West Bank endure '*draconian military law and enforces segregation*' while Gaza is under a '*generalised closure*'.

As such, the slow but systematic erasure of the Palestinian people appears to be the primary objective of the Israeli State with the escalation of violence barely restrained only by the weight of world public opinion.

In March 2021, the International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)) [formally launched](#) an investigation into potential war crimes in Palestine.

The ICC has little chance of success, though, as the United States continues to shield Israel diplomatically. On Friday, the U.S. [blocked](#) the U.N. Security Council ([UNSC](#)) from releasing any statements calling for restraint, continuing a [long history](#) of vetoing UNSC sanctions against Israel. U.S. President Joe Biden's entire political career contains an [extensive history](#) of defending and enabling Israel. Most recently, Biden [publicly declared](#) that Israel has the "*right to defend itself*" whilst disregarding the rights and humanity of the Palestinian people.

Western governments have enabled the militarisation of the Israeli State by providing military trade and aid. According to the [U.S. Congressional Report Services](#), Israel is the '*largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign assistance since World War II*' with it almost exclusively being in military assistance. In 2016, a new ten-year foreign aid deal was signed worth U.S.\$38 billion (AU\$48.8 billion). In 2018, the [Campaign Against Arms Trade](#) noted \$400 million worth of export licences from the UK to Israel were approved. Even Australia has a multi-million dollar [defence contract](#) with Israeli military

contractor [Elbit](#) and both major parties have provided [unambiguous support](#) for Israel.

Since [Nakba](#), the "Day of Catastrophe" in 1948, the people of Palestine have resisted this political project of settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing. This latest flashpoint has sparked pro-Palestine protests around the world, collectively attended by hundreds of thousands. Hopefully, a worldwide movement in support of the Palestinian struggle will be the first step in dismantling this apartheid regime.

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