

Palestine - Beyond October 7

From Ottoman Rule to Present Day's Occupation



Contextualizing the Current Conflict Within
Its Broader Historical Framework

Introduction

Palestine. There may be hardly any other word today that triggers as much emotion, debate, and misunderstanding around the world. Yet those who immediately think of October 7, 2023, are not doing so by chance, but are following the headlines of a media-constructed narrative that presents the conflict as a sudden escalation, deliberately stripping it of its historical context.

This perspective shifts focus: away from decades-long occupation and structural violence, toward a seemingly isolated “incident” that supposedly came “out of nowhere.” But what we witness today in Gaza and the West Bank is not an exception, but the logical consequence of a persistent policy of land seizure and control.

Western media often reduces the conflict to occasional outbreaks of violence. Palestinian resistance then is no longer portrayed as a response, but as the cause itself. Even the so-called “Palestine question” suggests neutrality – as though there’s some sort of open, legitimate debate at hand, rather than a centuries-long record of dispossession, oppression, and erasure. After October 7, however, this distortion reached new heights: the rapid framing of events as a “new 9/11” created a climate in which massive violence against Palestinian civilians was swiftly justified.

This deliberate separation of history and present not only weakens global awareness of the conflict’s roots, but also undermines the Muslim Ummah’s self-perception as a connected body¹.

And yet, the history of Palestine as part of the Muslim world reaches far back. Under the second Caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (634-644), Jerusalem became part of the Islamic world – a city that, even during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, held a special place alongside Mecca and Medina. The Dome of the Rock as well as Al-Aqsa Mosque still testify to this deep connection. At the end of the 11th century, however, Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Crusaders and remained under their rule for nearly a century. During their conquest in 1099, they carried out one of the largest massacres of the Middle Ages: up to 70,000 people - Muslims and Jews alike - were killed during their violent invasion.² When Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Ayyūbī reconquered the city in late 1200, it marked a turning point that engraved itself deeply into the collective memory of the Muslim world.

Until World War I, Palestine remained an integral part of Islamic empires for centuries, most recently the Ottoman Caliphate. Given this long and vast history, it would be impossible for this whitepaper to cover every aspect in detail. What truly should be said about Palestine simply exceeds the scope of this document and deserves treatment beyond these boundaries. For that reason, our focus will be on the key developments of the 20th century onward: the role of Zionism, colonialism, and Western powers, and how they led to a system that continues to deprive millions of Palestinians of their rights to this day.

Our aim is to equip young Muslims - and just anyone sincerely seeking to understand the situation around Palestine - with a clear historical overview. A framework that offers orientation and serves as a foundation for a confident and well-informed position, insha’Allah.

This whitepaper sheds light on four key questions:

- What historical claims to Palestine exist and what's really behind the Zionist narrative of "return"?
- How has Israel's expansionist policy evolved since 1948?
- What role have Western governments played in supporting Israel?
- And finally: What does October 7 reveal about the true nature of the conflict?

In an era shaped by social media and Hollywood, history is often taken out of context and reinterpreted, whether through ignorance or calculated political intent. This whitepaper confronts that rewriting of history head-on and replaces the so-called "Palestine question" with a decisive exclamation mark. For there is no complicated question here, but only a clear, if uncomfortable, truth: Palestine is not a recent issue but an ancient stage of human history – one that continues to expose our repeated collective failure.

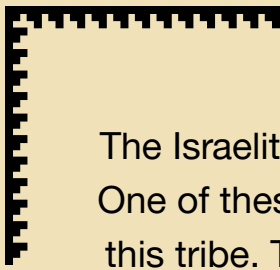
The Roots of the Conflict

To properly contextualize the current events unfolding in Gaza and the West Bank, we really must go back to the roots of the conflict. The horrific images circulating worldwide from this region today are merely the overflow of a vessel that has been filling for well over a century – a history that has been systematically downplayed and reaches far back to the late 19th century. It was then that the groundwork was laid for an injustice that continues to shape the lives of millions, yet is still portrayed in much of Western media as nothing more than a dispute between two equal parties.

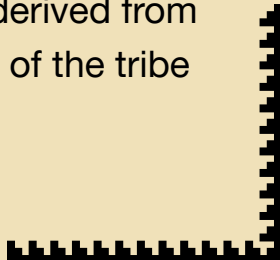
Historical Claims and the Question of Indigeneity

Although today's conflict is largely political in nature, the debate often begins with a more fundamental question, that is: Who historically “owns” the land? Or, to put it differently: Who is truly considered indigenous, meaning who was originally living in Palestine? A central argument in many justifications is that Jews are simply “returning” to their ancestral homeland – after all, their ancestors had lived there more than 2,000 years ago. But does this narrative hold up under closer scrutiny?

Historical sources paint a very different picture: The area now known as Palestine was originally called Canaan and was inhabited by the so-called “Canaanites” before being conquered around 1200 BCE by Israelite tribes. The Bible speaks of violent confrontations and even the annihilation of the native population.³ The early Israelites therefore did not appear as returnees, but as conquerors – which obviously casts the debate in a completely different light and is therefore often omitted from discussions.



The Israelites consisted of twelve tribes, known as the “Twelve Tribes of Israel.” One of these tribes was the tribe of Judah. The term “Jew” is later derived from this tribe. The word “Jew” therefore originally stems from the name of the tribe of Judah.



Genetic research further confirms that around 60-70% of today's Palestinians carry Canaanite genetic markers; among Lebanese, the figure even rises to nearly 90%⁴. These findings directly contradict the widespread notion that the Palestinian population only emerged through Arab migration in the 7th century. In reality, most Palestinians are descendants of the region’s original inhabitants who adopted Arab language and culture over the course of time.

A look at the timeline makes the indigeneity claim even more absurd: In 70 CE, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem, the most important religious center for Jews at the time. As a result, many were expelled from the land or fled, marking the beginning of the so-called “Jewish diaspora.”⁵ Up to that point, the Israelites had lived in Palestine for about 1,300 years. However, many of the European Jews who returned in the 19th century had already spent around 1,800 years outside the region, thus longer than their ancestors had ever lived there.

These connections form the backdrop against which we must now examine a decisive chapter in Palestine's history: the emergence of Zionism.

Zionism as a European Political Movement

In the late 19th century, a political idea emerged in Europe that would continue to shape the Middle East to this day: the establishment of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine. Under the impression of growing antisemitism and nationalist movements, the Jewish-Austrian journalist Theodor Herzl developed a vision that initially seemed plausible: to create a safe haven for persecuted Jews. However, protection from persecution would soon prove to be a cover for a much more far-reaching goal – the founding of a state in which Jews would permanently form the majority. This idea became a concrete political project known as *Zionism*. The name derives from the biblical Mount Zion in Jerusalem, which symbolically represents the Jewish return.

Important: Not all Jews are Zionists. Many reject Zionism for religious or political reasons – sometimes even representing a majority. Zionism therefore does not represent the entire Jewish people.

Early on, it became clear that the Zionist movement was prepared to pursue this goal with political and financial pressure. In 1901, Theodor Herzl himself approached Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II directly, offering to have European banks settle the Ottoman Empire's high national debts – in exchange for Jewish settlement rights in Palestine. The Sultan firmly rejected the proposal outright, making it clear: as long as he lived, not a single piece of that land would be given away.

What many don't realize is that the Zionist movement initially wasn't focused on Palestine exclusively. At the time, European powers like Britain controlled vast territories worldwide, and they offered remote areas in East Africa (present-day Uganda) or South America (like Argentina) as potential locations for a Jewish state. But Zionist leadership insisted on Palestine – despite the land being densely populated. The deciding factors weren't geographical advantages or practical considerations, but Palestine's deep religious and symbolic significance in Judaism. Thus, this wasn't about finding just any piece of land, but about claiming a territory loaded with ideological meaning.

It was around this time that Zionist writer Max Nordau coined the famous phrase: “a land without a people for a people without a land.” This slogan deliberately ignored the existence of the Palestinian population, revealing the true colonial nature of the project: establishing a state in an inhabited land inevitably meant displacement, whether through mass immigration, land seizure, or both.

After World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the movement gained further momentum. In 1917, Britain declared its support for the establishment of a “national home” for the Jewish people in Palestine through the so-called Balfour Declaration, without even consulting the population living there. It was a political promise made on foreign soil – which later became the foundation of a conflict that continues to this day.

But how did people actually live in Palestine before European powers and Zionist organizations began interfering and reshaping the region according to their interests?

Palestine Under Ottoman Rule

Before European powers began exerting direct influence, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire, embedded in a broader Islamic caliphate.

Under Ottoman administration, the region was considered a multi-religious space where Muslims, Christians, and Jews mostly lived together peacefully. The so-called *Millet* system granted religious minorities like the Jews a high degree of autonomy in their own affairs. Jewish communities had been part of a predominantly Arab-Muslim society for generations. Some of them came from families who had arrived in the region over centuries, but not as “returnees” with ownership claims, but as a minority that integrated into an existing social fabric.

It was only with the rise of political Zionism that this balance began to falter. Particularly painful was the arson attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969, during which the wooden pulpit was also destroyed – a pulpit that Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Ayyūbī had installed after the reconquest of Jerusalem as a symbol of Muslim return and which had been preserved for over seven centuries.

When it became clear this wasn't about integration but establishing a Jewish nation-state, resistance grew within the Ottoman administration as well as among the population. Tensions escalated further after the Ottoman Empire collapsed following World War I and Britain took control of Palestine under the British Mandate.

This new constellation fundamentally changed the course of the region – and it is precisely this shift that the next section will examine, insha'Allah.

From British Mandate to State Formation (1917-1948)

The British Mandate for Palestine

The British mandate rule over Palestine, which began in 1920, was more than just an administrative change: It marked the beginning of a phase in which the political foundation for a Jewish state was prepared – at the expense of the Arab majority.

The basis of this development was the aforementioned Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which Britain pledged its support for a “national home” for the Jewish people, without even involving the Palestinian population, which made up around 90% of the inhabitants. In the official mandate document, their rights were mentioned, but only in vague terms as “civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities.”

In practice, this imbalance quickly became apparent: Between 1922 and 1935, the Jewish share of the population rose from 11% to 27%, promoted through targeted immigration policies and state support, while Palestinian farmers were simultaneously disenfranchised and displaced. Access to land and property also created a systematic imbalance in favor of Jewish settlers.

The Arab Revolt (1936-1939) and British Reactions

Growing marginalization of the Palestinian population sparked the Arab Revolt in 1936 – one of the most pivotal chapters in early resistance against colonial rule and settlement expansion. This uprising reveals that Palestinian resistance didn't just start with groups like Hamas, but actually has deep roots in the colonial realities of the 1930s.

Yet this historical context is deliberately erased from official Israeli narratives, as if the land had been empty and free of organized resistance. The revolt itself was a direct response to British policies that systematically favored the Zionist project – and not, as is often claimed, an expression of irrational anti-Semitism.

What began as a nationwide general strike quickly escalated into armed resistance. The movement drew support across Palestinian society – from rural farmers to urban political elites. Their core demands were straightforward: halt Jewish immigration immediately, ban land sales to Zionist organizations, and establish a national government representing the Arab majority.

Britain's response was brutal. Around 5,000 Palestinians were killed, tens of thousands imprisoned, and hundreds of homes demolished. The crackdown systematically dismantled Palestinian political leadership, forcing many into exile or prison cells. This devastating blow to Palestinian institutions created a power vacuum that would prove catastrophic in 1948, when no unified leadership remained to effectively resist the looming loss of their homeland.

While Britain did reverse course politically in 1939 – as we'll explore next – the damage was already done, and the power imbalance had become irreversible.

Zionist Terrorism Against the British and Palestinians

The 1940s were marked by a wave of strategic violence: Zionist underground organizations intensified their attacks, initially against the British Mandate authorities, later increasingly against the Palestinian population. What Western history books often label as the “Israeli war of independence” was actually a coordinated terror campaign.

Three groups dominated this period: the Haganah, which would later form the core of the Israeli army, along with the more radical Irgun and Lehi (also known as the Stern Gang). Israel thus emerged from armed groups that used violence to achieve their political goals.

The double standard is glaring: Israel today claims the exclusive right to use force while almost reflexively branding Palestinian resistance as terrorism. This victim-perpetrator reversal is exactly what's used to justify the ongoing genocide today. Israel's founding was based on organized violence, yet this same principle continues to serve as the template for dealing with resistance. The fact that a state with such origins now claims moral authority to judge legitimate protest reveals the entire hypocrisy of Western narratives.

Initially, the terror targeted the very colonial power that had previously supported the Zionist project. The break came in 1939 with the so-called White Paper⁶: Britain limited Jewish immigration, banned land sales, and for the first time proposed a majority Arab state – what many Zionists saw as obvious betrayal. As a result, violence increasingly shifted toward the Palestinian population in order to make room for the planned state of Israel.

One of the most notorious attacks was the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in July 1946. The Irgun, led by Menachem Begin, planted explosives in the British administrative center. 91 people died, including British, Arabs, and Jews alike. The operation became a symbol of the movement's growing radicalization.

An even darker chapter was the Deir Yassin massacre in April 1948, just weeks before the founding of the Israeli state. Fighters from Irgun and Lehi attacked the Palestinian village near Jerusalem, killing up to 250 people, including many women and children. Survivors reported acts of rape, mutilation and public display of victims. This massacre wasn't isolated but part of a deliberate strategy to drive entire village communities into flight through terror and hence depopulate the territories. As we'll see shortly, this approach would soon lead to one of the most dramatic turning points in Palestinian history.

The link between these armed groups and the later State of Israel is undeniable: The Haganah became the official army. Members of Irgun and Lehi rose to top political offices, including Menachem Begin - known for the King David Hotel attack - who literally went from terrorist group commander to Prime Minister and was later even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. That such figures, once branded as terrorists, would not only co-found and lead the state but be honored internationally as statesmen once again exposes the double standard of Western narratives: While every Palestinian act of resistance gets immediately criminalized, Zionist violence is retrospectively seen as a patriotic duty or necessary step toward statehood. It also shows how deeply this violence is embedded in Israel's national identity – and how little of it really has ever been reckoned with.

The violence didn't end with statehood though, on the contrary: It reached its peak in 1948 with a long-planned expulsion of the Palestinian population – the Nakba.

The Nakba: Displacement and Ethnic Cleansing

The Nakba (Arabic for “catastrophe”) refers to the systematic displacement and dispossession of around 750,000 Palestinians during Israel's founding in 1948. It was one of the largest cases of ethnic cleansing in the 20th century and remains the central historical trauma of the Palestinian people. Its impact is comparable to the Holocaust for Jews or slavery for African Americans. Yet Western media and textbooks continue to downplay, deny, or completely erase the Nakba from the discussion.

The starting point was UN Resolution 181 from 1947, which proposed partitioning Palestine into Jewish and Arab states – even though Jews made up barely a third of the population. Nevertheless, they were to receive a full 55% of the land. Palestinian leadership understandably rejected the plan, while the Zionist side officially accepted it, however internal documents⁷ reveal it was merely seen as the first step toward further expansion.

Between the UN resolution and Israel's independence declaration in May 1948, the organized expulsion of Palestinians finally began. The so-called *Plan Dalet*, adopted by the Haganah in March 1948, explicitly called for “cleansing” strategically important areas. Contrary to the widespread myth that Palestinians left voluntarily or fled at the urging of Arab leaders, numerous historical studies – including by Israeli “New Historians” like Ilan Pappé and Benny Morris – show the expulsion wasn't spontaneous but methodically prepared and executed⁸: through direct violence, massacres, psychological warfare, and destroying entire villages.

The displacement didn't end with Israel's founding either. Around 500 Palestinian villages were destroyed to make return completely impossible. The so-called *Absentees' Property Law* of 1950 legalized the largest land grab in modern history: Even Palestinians who had only fled to neighboring villages lost all their property to the Israeli state.

The Nakba continues to have effects to this day. More than 5 million registered Palestinian refugees live in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, often for generations in camps. Although UN Resolution 194 affirmed refugees' right of return, Israel continues denying them that right. More than that: With the 2011 Nakba Law, even public commemorative events in Israel are restricted or banned. The goal here is clear: suppress memory of the Nakba and push the Palestinian narrative out of public discourse.

Expansion and Conflict (1948-1978)

Following the establishment of the State of Israel and the Nakba, a period of military expansion began. Through wars, Israel enlarged its territory and brought additional Palestinian areas under occupation. At the same time, Palestinian resistance movements that had emerged earlier gained strength, including the movement around Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, who had already fought against British colonial rule and Zionist expansion in the 1930s. Arab states also attempted to reclaim lost land but failed due to massive Western backing for Israel.

The Wars of 1956 and 1967

Just a few years after its founding, Israel launched its first military operation – not out of self-defense, but from strategic interest. In 1956, the so-called Suez War happened: when Egypt's President Nasser placed the Suez Canal - one of the world's most important trade routes - under Egyptian control, Israel surprisingly allied with Britain and France and attacked the Sinai Peninsula. Although it had been at odds with Britain just years earlier over the White Paper, they were united in this moment by a common goal: weakening Egypt. The attack occurred without acute threat and made clear that Israel was increasingly taking on the role of a Western bridgehead⁹ in the region.

Eleven years later came the Six-Day War of 1967. It is still frequently portrayed as an Israeli preemptive strike against an imminent attack by neighboring Arab states. However, even Israeli intelligence had confirmed before the war that no attack was immediately imminent¹⁰. In fact, Israel exploited the tense situation to strike militarily. The result was the occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula – a far-reaching territorial expansion that clearly violated international law.

Occupation of Palestinian Territories

With the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, repression against the Palestinian population reached a new level. Israel established a permanent system of military control that persists to this day. Freedom of movement, political participation, and basic rights were severely restricted. At the same time, construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories began. This was meant to deliberately create structures that would make returning these territories increasingly impossible.

Settlement policy pursued multiple purposes: it was meant to change the demographic structure in the occupied territories, secure access to water and other resources, and fragment Palestinian territories so that a contiguous state could no longer emerge. From 1977, after the government change to the right-wing nationalist Likud party, this policy was significantly intensified.

Under international law, settling one's own civilians in occupied territory is prohibited. The Fourth Geneva Convention¹¹ explicitly forbids an occupying power from relocating parts of its own population into occupied territory. Nevertheless, settlement construction has been promoted by the state for decades, secured by military force, and advanced through the expropriation of Palestinian land.

The emergence of Palestinian Resistance

In response to the ongoing occupation, Palestinian groups founded the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 – long before the founding of Hamas. Under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, the PLO became the most important political representation of the Palestinians. After the defeat of the Arab states in the Six-Day War of 1967, it became clear to many: the liberation of Palestine would not come from outside – they would have to become active themselves.

Without a regular army, air force, or tanks, however, Palestinians were left with only guerrilla warfare against a militarily superior occupying power. The PLO combined this with political diplomacy and, despite many setbacks, managed to gain international recognition: In 1974, it was officially recognized by the United Nations as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The Yom Kippur War and the Camp David Accords

In 1973, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel to reconquer the territories lost in the Six-Day War of 1967. The war began on the highest Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur, which is why it's known by that name today. Many Western accounts suggest that Egypt wanted to destroy Israel. However, President Anwar al-Sadat was primarily concerned with regaining the Sinai. After initial military successes by the Arab side, the tide turned. Massive military support from the United States secured Israel's victory.

After the war, it became clear in Egypt that a military victory over Israel was hardly possible anymore. President Anwar al-Sadat therefore decided on diplomacy: In 1978, he signed the Camp David¹² Accords with Israel. Egypt regained control of the Sinai and, in return, officially recognized Israel – therefore becoming the first Arab state to do so. For Israel, this was a strategic breakthrough: Egypt - until then one of the most important opponents - dropped out as an ally of the Palestinians, the so-called Arab front was split. This allowed Israel to continue its control over the West Bank and Gaza undisturbed.

Intifadas and the Failed Peace Process (1987–2005)

By the end of 1987, the ongoing occupation led to the first major Palestinian uprising: the first Intifada – Arabic for “uprising” or “rebellion.” The years that followed were marked by mass protests, supposed peace initiatives, and broken promises. It became increasingly clear: without genuine justice, lasting peace was impossible.

The First Intifada and the Oslo Accords

In December 1987, a spontaneous popular uprising broke out in the occupied territories. The First Intifada was a predominantly nonviolent mass movement, organized through local committees and carried by youth, women, and workers. The iconic image of Palestinian youth fighting Israeli tanks with stones became a symbol of an unequal struggle – like David versus Goliath.

Israel responded with extreme brutality. Then-defense minister Yitzhak Rabin ordered a so-called “bone-breaking policy”: soldiers were to deliberately break demonstrators' arms and legs. Over 1,100 Palestinians were killed, including many children. But the Intifada made it impossible for the occupation to continue unnoticed on the international stage.

In 1993, under international pressure, Israel and the PLO signed what became known as the Oslo Accords¹³ – a peace plan that for the first time provided for direct negotiations and Palestinian self-governance. To this end, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established to take over basic administrative tasks in certain parts of the West Bank, such as education, health, and local government. However, the agreement had serious flaws: the central conflict issues – refugee return, Jerusalem, borders, settlements – were deliberately circumvented. Instead of a contiguous state territory, the West Bank was divided into three zones, with the PA receiving actual control only in Zone A (around 18%).

Zionist Settlement Policy Despite Peace Negotiations

Despite ongoing negotiations, Israel - as it had done after 1967 - continued the progressive expansion of its settlements, this time however under the pretext of a peace process. The Oslo Accords were intentionally crafted in such a way that there were no effective mechanisms to prevent Israel from settlement construction. In fact, this actually increased massively after 1993: By the early 2000s, the number of settlers in the West Bank had nearly doubled. Every new settlement undermined the remaining hope for a contiguous Palestinian state – and thus also the credibility of the so-called “peace process.”

This policy has been pursued by all Israeli governments, regardless of whether they appeared willing to negotiate or confrontational. The settlements served not only as a means of territorial expansion or demographic shift, but also as a strategic tool: they were intended to consolidate Israel's control and undermine the peace process by creating a fait accompli on the ground – right from the start.

In reality, Oslo did not lead to a withdrawal, but rather to a restructuring of the occupation. Israel retained actual power and merely shifted many costs and responsibilities to the PA – which had no control over borders, resources, or security. From the perspective of many Palestinians, this did not mean greater self-determination, but rather a more efficient form of control, all in the name of “peace.”

The Second Intifada

After the failure of the 2000 Camp David peace talks the situation escalated again. The immediate trigger was a provocative visit by Israeli politician Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif – a site sacred to both Muslims and Jews. Shortly after, the Second Intifada began, also called the “al-Aqsa Intifada.”

Unlike the First Intifada, it was significantly more violent. There were attacks in Israeli cities with numerous civilian casualties, while Israel responded with major military operations in the occupied territories. Around 3,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis were killed in the following years, including many civilians on both sides. Israel deployed fighter jets, tanks, and combat helicopters, even in densely populated residential areas. The military operation “Defensive Shield” in 2002 was particularly devastating, leaving entire neighborhoods in ruins and killing numerous people.

Israel’s Strategy of “Disengagement”

After the end of the Second Intifada, Israel under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon pursued a new strategy: unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, officially known as the “Disengagement Plan.” All Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip were evacuated and the military withdrew from the area.

Here the familiar pattern repeated: What was internationally celebrated as a peace step was nothing but a tactical deception. Sharon openly declared that the withdrawal primarily served to consolidate Israel's control over the West Bank and defuse international pressure. Gaza remained under complete Israeli control: Israel continued to determine who could enter or leave the territory, and controlled the airspace, coastal waters, and movement of goods. The Gaza Strip thus effectively became a sealed-off area – often described as the “world's largest open-air prison.”¹⁴

Meanwhile, the political situation within Palestine continued to deteriorate. In 2006, Hamas – a religiously oriented resistance movement from the Gaza Strip – surprisingly won the parliamentary elections. It positioned itself as an alternative force to Fatah, one of the leading factions within the PLO that had dominated political life until then. Many Palestinians accused Fatah of corruption and political failure, while Hamas scored points with its social engagement and resistance rhetoric. As a result of the growing power conflict, a split occurred in summer 2007: Hamas violently took control of the Gaza Strip, while Fatah continued to lead the PA in the West Bank.

Israel responded with regular military attacks on Gaza, which later became known under the cynical term “mowing the lawn.” While Gaza remained sealed off, settlement construction in the West Bank continued unabated.

The Current Situation

The current situation in Palestine is the result of decades of occupation, a policy of territorial expansion, and so-called peace processes that ultimately only served to entrench the status quo. This has given rise to two parallel realities: the isolated Gaza Strip, which is under permanent blockade, and the fragmented West Bank, where an apartheid system determines the daily lives of the Palestinian population.

The Blockade of the Gaza Strip

Since 2007, the Gaza Strip has been almost completely cut off from the outside world. Particularly severe is the restriction on freedom of movement: only in rare exceptional cases are people allowed to leave the territory – even urgent medical emergencies are often blocked. The supply of goods is also subject to strict control. At times, even products like coriander, chocolate, or school materials were banned. Human rights organizations therefore speak of collective punishment: An entire population is held accountable for the behavior of individual groups.

The consequences are devastating. Over two million people live in cramped conditions in an area smaller than Munich. Ninety-five percent of the drinking water is considered undrinkable, electricity is often only available for a few hours a day, and unemployment stands at over 50 percent. Back in 2012, the United Nations warned that Gaza could become “uninhabitable” by 2020 – a scenario that has now become reality in many places.

Israel justifies the blockade with alleged “security interests.” But the duration and cruelty of the measures prove that there's a long-term strategy behind it: the humiliation of the civilian population and the attempt to break their will to resist. Calls for an end to the blockade have so far been met with silence. At the same time, Israel still receives political backing and military support – even from states that officially invoke human rights.

Israel's “Mowing the Lawn” Strategy

As mentioned earlier, Israel has pursued a military practice for years that is called “mowing the lawn.” This means that Palestinian resistance should be pushed back at regular intervals through massive violence – not to end it permanently, but to keep it “in check.”

In practice, this means: Every few years, the Israeli military launches large-scale attacks on the Gaza Strip, killing thousands of civilians and destroying central infrastructure. Among the largest of these attacks before the current war are Operations Cast Lead (2008/09), Pillar of Defense (2012), Protective Edge (2014), and Guardian of the Walls (2021). Particularly devastating was the operation in 2014: Over 2,200 Palestinians were killed, including more than 500 children. Entire neighborhoods were literally wiped out.

These attacks follow a well-rehearsed pattern of escalation: Israel begins with targeted killings or other provocations. Palestinian groups then respond with rockets, whereupon Israel strikes back with superior military force – officially always under the pretext of “self-defense.” In Western media, the narrative often begins with the Palestinian response; the Israeli harassment that preceded it is rarely mentioned or is portrayed as irrelevant.

Apartheid as an Organized System

Since the second Intifada, a clearly structured system of oppression has developed in occupied Palestine: an apartheid system that denies Palestinians basic rights. This fact is not only cited by Palestinian voices, but is also confirmed by renowned organizations such as B'Tselem, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International¹⁵. Even within Israel itself, critics speak openly of institutionalized discrimination.

This system manifests in several ways:

- **Physical separation:** The barrier erected in 2002 cuts deep into Palestinian territory, separates families, isolates villages, and effectively expropriates around 10% of the West Bank. Although the International Court of Justice declared it illegal under international law in 2004, construction nevertheless continued.
- **Legal system:** Palestinians are subject to Israeli military law, while Israeli settlers in the same territory are treated under civil law¹⁶. Hundreds of checkpoints and separate road networks also systematically restrict freedom of movement.
- **Resource control:** Palestinian land is deliberately expropriated – for Israeli settlements, military restricted zones, or supposed “nature reserves.” There is also extreme inequality in access to water: an Israeli settler consumes on average five times as much water as a Palestinian resident.

Under the current Israeli government, this policy has been intensified even further. Settlement expansion continues unabated, accompanied by openly expressed plans to annex large parts of the West Bank. At the same time, attacks by radical settlers on Palestinians are increasing significantly. This often happens with the acquiescence, sometimes even with the support, of the Israeli army.

October 7 and Its Consequences

The attacks on October 7, 2023, in which armed units from the Gaza Strip attacked Israeli military posts and settlements near the border, marked a dramatic turning point in the conflict. As in previous escalations, the portrayal here was also heavily watered down: In Western media, the attack appeared as a sudden terrorist act – without context, without background, without a single word on siege, occupation, and systematic disenfranchisement.

For many Palestinians, however, this day marked not the beginning, but the escalation of a never-ending state of emergency. From the perspective of the resistance groups, the attack was the result of months of planning and not an arbitrary outbreak. The operation was meant to be a strategic turning point – a desperate wake-up call to a global public that had long forgotten about Palestine. In a situation increasingly perceived as an existential threat, the conviction arose that without a clear signal, the project of ethnic cleansing would silently continue.

Central components of the operation like penetrating Israeli territory and taking hostages aimed to temporarily neutralize Israel's military superiority and redirect international attention back to Palestine. They apparently assumed that Israel would show restraint at least in dealing with hostages.

However, this hope proved illusory: Israel responded with unprecedented harshness – even in situations where the lives of its own hostages were endangered. Since October 2023, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, at least 53,901 Palestinians have been killed, including more than 15,600 children (as of May 2025). Entire neighborhoods have been wiped out, hospitals bombed, aid deliveries blocked. The death toll rises daily, no end is in sight. UN experts and international jurists now speak of genocide. Even the application for an international arrest warrant against Prime Minister Netanyahu has so far led to no noticeable political reaction.

A global outcry failed to materialize: The US continued to deliver weapons worth billions, many Western states limited themselves to inconsequential declarations. Even from the Muslim world came little more than symbolic protest. Although the International Court of Justice decided on provisional measures, nothing has been enforced so far. Instead, it became clear once again how selectively principles like human rights and international law are applied – especially when it comes to Israel. Strategically, October 7 was thus also a turning point that revealed how limited the options to the Palestinian side really are.

Conclusion

This whitepaper has demonstrated that what is happening in Palestine is not an isolated event, but the result of a long history that has been swept under the rug for far too long. The conflict didn't begin in 2023, but is the direct result of political decisions from the 20th century – from the Balfour Declaration through the Nakba to the ongoing occupation. It has revealed how narratives continue to be created to this day to push this history out of public consciousness.

The goal was not to contribute another voice to the discussion, but to debunk common myths – with documented facts, with context, and with language that clearly states what has been concealed for too long. Many connections were only touched upon, and that's exactly part of the concept: This whitepaper doesn't see itself as an endpoint, but as a starting point – an initial orientation that you can use to gain a deeper understanding and take a well-founded position, insha'Allah. Historical consciousness is not an end in itself, but the foundation for clarity, steadfastness, and willingness to take responsibility.

This is precisely where the work of One Ummah Forum comes in: this white paper is part of a broader project that aims to reestablish Islamic awareness and strengthen the spiritual heritage of our Ummah. It is not about nostalgically evoking the golden age of Islam with empty platitudes, but really about reviving it intellectually, spiritually, and practically. To this end, we provide educational resources in the form of series, books, and courses that pick up where this white paper leaves off.

If this whitepaper has moved you, then do use it as a starting point: for your own continued learning, for a clear stance, and for participating in change that begins with you. Because solidarity is more than empathy. It only comes to life through action. And that is precisely the point: the ummah needs people who do not merely inform themselves, but who take action themselves.

May this white paper serve as an impetus for greater awareness, deeper insight, and a firm place in the history that we are writing with Allah's permission.

Further Reading

For a deeper understanding of the topics covered in this whitepaper, the One Ummah Forum recommends the following works:

Historical Foundations:

- Ilan Pappé: “The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine”
- Rashid Khalidi: “The Hundred Years' War on Palestine”
- Nur Masalha: “Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History”
- Edward Said: “The Question of Palestine”

Understanding the Occupation:

- Noam Chomsky & Ilan Pappé: “Gaza in Crisis”
- B'Tselem: “A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is Apartheid”
- Louis Theroux: “The Settlers”

Palestinian Resistance:

- Ramzy Baroud: “The Last Earth: A Palestinian Story”
- Norman Finkelstein: “Gaza: An Inquest into Its Martyrdom”

The Role of Western Powers:

- Stephen Walt & John Mearsheimer: “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy”
- Noam Chomsky: “Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians”

Ideological Critique and Narratives:

- Abdul Wahab El-Messiri: “Zionism, Nazism and the End of History”
- Abdul Wahab El-Messiri: “The Encyclopaedia of Jews, Judaism and Zionism” (excerpts)
- Sapience Institute: “Unveiling Tyranny: The Genocide In Gaza & False Zionist Narratives On Palestine”
- Sapience Institute: “The Double Standard: Media Reactions to Zionist Terror”

Online Resources:

- Electronic Intifada (electronicintifada.net)
- Middle East Monitor (middleeastmonitor.com)
- B'Tselem (btselem.org)
- Institute for Palestine Studies (palestine-studies.org)

Footnotes

1. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized this feeling of common solidarity in a well-known hadith: “The believers, in their mutual love, compassion, and mercy, are like one body. If one part suffers, the whole body responds with sleeplessness and fever.” (Sahih Muslim 2586) It is precisely this natural bond that is being weakened deliberately – not only by viewing the suffering of other Muslims in isolation, but also by tearing history itself out of its context. What appears to be a single conflict is thus separated from its larger context – and along with it, the consciousness of the Ummah.
2. Cf. “Muslim Accounts of the Conquest of Jerusalem (1099)”, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, <https://sites.uwm.edu/carlin/muslim-accounts-of-the-conquest-of-jerusalem/> and <https://cojs.org/1099-2/>
3. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Canaan-historical-region-Middle-East>
4. Cf. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/genetic-study-suggests-present-day-lebanese-descend-from-biblical-canaanites> ; [https://www.cell.com/ajhg/fulltext/S0002-9297\(17\)30276-8](https://www.cell.com/ajhg/fulltext/S0002-9297(17)30276-8) ;
5. “Diaspora” refers to the life of an ethnic or religious community outside their original homeland. In Judaism, the beginning of the diaspora is often connected with Roman expulsion – yet the classification of this area as the original Jewish homeland is historically disputed.
6. A “White Paper” is an official policy document issued by a government to outline its intentions or strategic direction. In the British colonial context, such papers often defined political measures toward specific regions. The 1939 White Paper, for instance, severely limited Jewish immigration to Palestine and proposed the establishment of a future Arab-majority administration.
7. Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*, Pantheon Books, 1987; Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–2001*, Vintage Books, 2001.
8. Numerous historical studies document the systematic expulsion of the Palestinian population by Zionist forces. Cf. among others Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oneworld Publications, 2006); Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–2001* (Vintage Books, 2001); Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of “Transfer” in Zionist Political Thought, 1882–1948* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).
9. A “bridgehead” refers to a military or political stronghold in a foreign region to extend or secure influence.
10. John Quigley, *The Six-Day War and Israeli Self-Defense: Questioning the Legal Basis for Preventive War*, Cambridge University Press, 2013; Norman G. Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, Verso Books, 2003.
11. The Fourth Geneva Convention was adopted in 1949 and establishes the protection of civilians in war and occupation situations.
12. Camp David is the official country residence of the US President in the mountains of Maryland. It is frequently used for secret or confidential talks, as in the case of the agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1978.
13. The agreement was named after the Norwegian capital Oslo, where secret preliminary talks between Israel and the PLO took place in 1992/93.
14. Pappé, Ilan: *The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories*, Oneworld Publications, 2017.
15. See e.g. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/27/abusive-israeli-policies-constitute-crimes-apartheid-persecution> and <https://www.amnestyusa.org/campaigns/end-apartheid>
16. In the West Bank, Israeli military law applies to Palestinians: They can be arrested without charges, appear before military courts, and often end up in prison even as minors. For Israeli settlers, however, normal Israeli state laws apply – with more rights and better legal protections.

This whitepaper is published by One Ummah Forum and may be freely shared and distributed in its original, unaltered form.

The content within this document may be copied, quoted, or repurposed for non-commercial purposes only, including educational or research-related use, provided that proper attribution is given to One Ummah Forum as the original source.

Commercial use, redistribution for profit, or any modification of the content is strictly prohibited.

© One Ummah Forum. All rights reserved.



The author of this whitepaper - **Y. L. Essaoudi** - has thoroughly engaged with the subject matter through independent study and in-depth research. Great care was taken to verify sources and ensure the accuracy of the information presented. After completion, the content was reviewed and approved by the Quality Management Team to ensure that it meets our standards for clarity, reliability, and scholarly rigor.