# Israel and the Palestinians: A state founded on dispossession and ethnic cleansing—Part Two

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*This is the second of a two-part article. The first part was published on October 23, 2023.*

**The Greater Israel policy**

The 1967 war was a turning point in the development of a Greater Israel policy of permanently annexing the land seized.

The war extended Israel's de facto boundaries and created new waves of refugees and internally displaced people. The national unity government, headed by Labour Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, established colonial-style settlements in the newly conquered territories in defiance of international conventions. The settlements in turn created a social layer that had a vested interest in Israel's expansionary policy, providing a pole of attraction for some of the most reactionary forces, whose fascist heirs are in government today, dictating policy. These forces moved Israeli politics rapidly to the right in the 1970s, increasing social instability and ending Labour's grip on government.

Repression to enforce the occupation of Palestinian land in the West Bank and Gaza was ramped up through the imposition of military rule, collective punishment, house demolitions, forced deportations and detentions without trial, while the Palestinians became a pool of cheap labour to be brutally exploited by Israeli employers. The Palestinian leadership moved first to Jordan, until it was driven out in a savage war by Jordan in 1970, and then to Lebanon.

Following the 1977 election victory of Likud leader Menachem Begin, Israel launched a murderous expansionist policy in Lebanon, with a series of raids, incursions and covert operations in alliance with Lebanese fascist forces against the Palestinians and their allies during the country's 15-year-long civil war. These wars and covert activities were to continue for 30 years.

An estimated 32,000 Palestinians and an untold number of Lebanese were killed at a cost of around 1,500 Israeli lives during operations that included the massacre of 3,000 Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila, the Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut, by Israel's Phalangist allies under the protection of the IDF in September 1982.

**The Fraud of Oslo**

Israel's attacks on Palestinians in Lebanon and its growing violation of human rights in the Occupied Territories gave rise to the first Intifada, the spontaneous Palestinian uprising of 1987-93 that erupted outside the control of the PLO. It was brutally suppressed by Israel at a cost of more 1,000 Palestinian lives, more than 6 times the number of Jewish Israelis killed.

This led to the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 by Israel's Labor Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Arafat on the lawns of the White House, with Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) agreeing to recognise Israel and renounce terrorism.

The Accords were supposed to usher in a Palestinian statelet with its capital in Abu Dis, a suburb in East Jerusalem the so-called two-state solution. Arafat and the Palestinian Authority would take over Israel's role in controlling the Palestinian masses in a bifurcated state, composed of non-contiguous Bantustans, that would be separate from but contained by Israel. This precluded any possibility of democracy for the Palestinians.

Israel's ultranationalists and their political representatives in Likud and other far-right and religious parties rejected even this mockery of a Palestinian state on land they coveted. Just two years later, in October 1995, right-wing religious nationalists, egged on by war-mongering opposition leaders Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu, denounced Rabin as a traitor at an angry demonstration in Jerusalem. One month later, a religious zealot assassinated Rabin.

Israel used the Oslo Accords to expand the settlements in the West Bank faster than ever, take control of water and other resources, build roads and install more than 600 checkpoints, disrupting movement throughout the region and wrecking its economy. The settlements, now home to at least 500,000 Israelis, or nearly 20 percent of the population, control a far greater percentage of the land, including the most fertile and productive.

Israel annexed East Jerusalem, part of the West Bank, in breach of international law, with its Palestinian residents now only a bare majority following the building of some 200,000 settler homes. In recent years, there have been repeated clashes between the Palestinians and the police over the threatened eviction of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods at the behest of far-right and religious groups led by Ben-Gvir.

These conditions gave rise to the second Intifada in September 2000, after Ariel Sharon's provocative march through the Al Aqsa mosque compound under military escort to assert Israel's control over Islam's third most holy site. The Intifada was as much an uprising against the PLO leadership that had sanctioned the disastrous Oslo Accords. Between 2000 and 2008, Israeli security forces killed nearly 5,000 Palestinians, around five times the number of Israelis killed by the Palestinians.

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**The Separation Wall and the Gaza blockade**

Sharon then ordered the building of the infamous Separation Barrier that stole a further 10 percent of Palestinian land to wall off Israel from the Palestinians and cut off thousands of Palestinians from their families and workplaces. Targeted assassinations of Palestinian leaders became routine, amid far-right demands for "population transfers" and measures aimed at effecting ethnic cleansing to counter the "demographic timebomb." The number of Palestinians now exceeds the number of Jews within Israel's internationally recognised borders and the Occupied Territories.

In 2005, Sharon closed 14 Israeli settlements and withdrew the army from the Gaza Strip, while maintaining control of entry by land, sea and air. This masked a far more significant land grab in the West Bank that was given the green light by the Bush administration.

Two years later, following Hamas' defeat of an attempted coup by Fatah forces, Israel imposed a suffocating blockade that has turned Gaza into an impoverished ghetto, devastating the lives of its residents. It denies Gaza any independence, providing only the bare minimum of essential services such as water and electricity—after destroying much of its public infrastructure and residential buildings, hospitals, schools and mosques following murderous assaults on the enclave, which it characterises as "mowing the grass". These include Operation Cast Lead (2008-09), Operation Pillar of Defence (November 2012) and Operation Protective Edge (2014). The combined toll of Palestinian deaths in more than seven major assaults on Gaza by the mightiest air force in the Middle East was at least 4,164—with a loss of just 102 Israeli lives.

Unable to carry out any reconstruction, Gaza's economic situation was dire well before the present assault. About three quarters of Gazan households are dependent upon some form of aid from the United Nations and other agencies, that the European Union has said is now "under review." In 2012, the UN predicted that the besieged enclave would be uninhabitable by 2020, only to revise it in 2017 to warn that "de-development" was happening even faster than predicted.

The situation within Israel for Palestinian citizens, who form 20 percent of the population, is precarious. Home to some of the poorest people in the country, their communities face official neglect and budgetary discrimination. Such are the levels of poverty and unemployment that rival criminal gangs have taken control of the Arab towns and villages, leading to more than 180 killings since the start of the year.

In May 2021, Israel's Palestinian citizens took to the streets in strikes, protests and riots that were triggered by the violent police storming of the Al Aqsa Mosque and brutal acts of ethnic cleansing in East Jerusalem. This was the first time they had joined in a general strike with Palestinians in the occupied territories to protest the assault on Gaza and against Israel's apartheid-style constitution. Netanyahu's far-right coalition plans to disqualify Palestinian Knesset members from serving in the Israeli parliament and to ban their parties from standing in elections.

**A revolt of the oppressed**

It is this immense suffering that led to the Palestinians' action of October 7-9. Tantamount to a mass suicide mission, it was the revolt of an oppressed people determined to escape the concentration camp in which Israel, with the support of all the major powers, has confined them.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) has explained, a state founded on the "basis and the ongoing repression of the Palestinians was always incapable of developing a genuinely democratic society. Its evolution as a garrison state for US imperialism, repeatedly at war with its Arab neighbours and in perpetual war with the Palestinians; pursuing an expansionist 'Greater Israel' policy; resting ever more firmly on the right-wing settler population in the Occupied Territories and US military subventions to offset the destabilising impact of acute levels of social inequality among the highest in the world, is what has paved the way for the Frankenstein monster of Netanyahu's government."

Israel's genocidal war on Gaza is the ultimate demonstration of the reactionary essence of Zionism. A capitalist state claimed to provide a safe haven for Jews has instead produced decades of death, ethnic cleansing and dispossession of the Palestinians living there, setting Israeli Jews in permanent conflict with their Arab neighbours.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) argued on October 9:

> "The Israel ruling class is now at the point where the reactionary perspective of securing an exclusivist Jewish state through the forcible expulsion of the Palestinians can only be maintained by mass murder and ethnic cleansing. Jewish workers are being told to wage this war under the leadership of a government of fascist criminals. It is a war that is a prelude to a far wider conflagration alongside the US/NATO-led war against Russia in Ukraine and Iran and its allies in Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon that threatens death on an unimaginable scale."

Israel's filthy war can only be ended through the independent political action of the working class throughout the Middle East and internationally, including those Israeli workers who are ready to take a stand against the nationalist xenophobia of all their rulers and their parties.

Throughout the nine-month long movement that opposed Netanyahu's judicial coup and efforts to assume dictatorial powers, the WSWS warned that the self-proclaimed leaders of the protests all shared Netanyahu's expansionist policy at the expense of the Palestinians—as the willingness of National Unity leaders, former IDF Chiefs of Staff Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot, to join his fascistic government to prosecute the war now demonstrates. After claiming support for mass demonstrations against Netanyahu, Ben Gvir and Smotrich, they now call on hundreds of thousands of reservists to kill innocent civilians and to die for them. They will forever be associated in the eyes of the world with one of the greatest crimes of the 21st century.

The ICFI insists that the enemy of workers and youth in Israel is not the Palestinians, but the Netanyahu government and the Israeli ruling class:

> "The great historical and political paradox of the present situation is this: The Israeli working class cannot defend its own democratic rights without fighting for the democratic rights of the Palestinian people against Zionist oppression. And the Palestinians cannot achieve their aspirations for democratic rights and social equality without forging a fighting alliance with the Israeli working class. The only viable perspective is not a mythical 'two-state solution,' but a unified socialist state of Jewish and Arab workers…
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> "The uprising in Palestine is itself part of a developing eruption of anger and opposition in the form of mass strikes and protests throughout the world. It is this social movement, guided by a consciously socialist and revolutionary program and perspective, that must be mobilized to put an end to imperialist war, inequality and all forms of oppression. This is the perspective and program of the Trotskyist Fourth International, led by the International Committee."

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