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## From Johannesburg to Jerusalem: Is Modern-Day Apartheid Manifesting in Israel and Palestine?


De Johannesburg à Jérusalem : L'apartheid moderne se manifeste-t-il en Israël et en Palestine?

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### Abstract

This study critically examines the Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories to determine whether they constitute a system of apartheid similar to that of South Africa. Through a comparative analysis, the research investigates historical, legal, and geopolitical factors that sustain systemic segregation and oppression. Central to this inquiry is the question: To what extent do Israeli policies towards Palestinians align with the internationally recognized definition of apartheid? To address this question, the study establishes a theoretical framework based upon international legal frameworks, particularly the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. The research also incorporates comparative historical analyses of South African apartheid, which provide valuable insight into the mechanisms and institutional structures that sustain racial segregation and oppression. By examining mechanisms such as land expropriation, settlement expansion, restrictions on movement, and economic marginalization, the study identifies key elements that reinforce the comparison between the Israeli occupation and apartheid. Moreover, the study contextualizes these practices within the ideological and historical foundations of both Zionism and apartheid, illustrating how each system has historically legitimized racial or ethnic supremacy through legal and institutional structures. The Israeli legal framework provides differential rights and privileges based on ethnic and religious identity, reinforcing systemic segregation and exclusion. The study's core offers a detailed examination of laws and policies that perpetuate this segregation. It examines measures such as the construction of the Israeli West Bank barrier, the imposition of restricted movement zones, the widespread use of administrative detention, and the stark legal disparities between Jewish settlers and Palestinian residents. Furthermore, the research explores the geopolitical dynamics that have contributed to the slow international response to the Palestinian issue, contrasting this inertia with the more rapid global opposition to apartheid in South Africa. The study argues that entrenched economic and political interests have obstructed meaningful international intervention, particularly among influential Western states. The findings reveal striking parallels between the structures of apartheid in South Africa and the systematic segregation imposed on Palestinians. The study concludes that dismantling apartheid-like conditions requires sustained international efforts, including economic sanctions, judicial accountability, and grassroots advocacy. In doing so, the study underscores the importance of international legal mechanisms in protecting human rights and preventing the recurrence of systemic violations in conflict-affected regions.

**Keywords:** Apartheid, occupation, human rights violations, displacement

## Résumé

Cette étude examine de manière critique si les politiques israéliennes dans les territoires palestiniens occupés relèvent d'un système d'apartheid comparable à celui de l'Afrique du Sud. Par une analyse comparative, la recherche explore les facteurs historiques, juridiques et géopolitiques qui soutiennent la ségrégation et l'oppression systémiques. Au cœur de cette enquête se pose la question suivante: dans quelle mesure les politiques israéliennes envers les Palestiniens correspondent-elles à la définition internationalement reconnue de l'apartheid? L'étude établit un cadre théorique fondé sur les instruments juridiques internationaux, en particulier la Convention internationale de 1973 sur l'élimination et la répression du crime d'apartheid. La recherche intègre également des analyses historiques comparatives de l'apartheid sud-africain, offrant un aperçu précieux des mécanismes et structures institutionnelles qui perpétuent la ségrégation raciale et l'oppression. En examinant des mécanismes tels que l'expropriation des terres, l'expansion des colonies, les restrictions de mouvement et la marginalisation économique, l'étude identifie des éléments clés renforçant la comparaison entre l'occupation israélienne et l'apartheid. De plus, l'étude replace ces pratiques dans les fondements idéologiques et historiques du sionisme et de l'apartheid, illustrant comment chaque système a historiquement légitimé une suprématie raciale ou ethnique à travers des structures juridiques et institutionnelles. Le cadre juridique israélien, qui accorde des droits et privilèges différenciés selon l'identité ethnique et religieuse, renforce davantage la ségrégation et l'exclusion systémiques. Le cœur de l'étude offre une analyse détaillée des lois et politiques qui perpétuent cette ségrégation systémique. Elle examine des mesures telles que la construction de la barrière de séparation en Cisjordanie, l'imposition de zones à circulation restreinte, l'utilisation généralisée de la détention administrative et les disparités juridiques marquées entre les colons juifs et les résidents palestiniens. En outre, la recherche explore les dynamiques géopolitiques qui ont contribué à la lenteur de la réponse internationale face à la question palestinienne, mettant en contraste cette inertie avec l'opposition mondiale plus rapide à l'apartheid en Afrique du Sud. L'étude soutient que des intérêts économiques et politiques profondément ancrés, en particulier parmi les États occidentaux influents, ont entravé une intervention internationale significative. Les résultats révèlent des parallèles frappants entre les structures de l'apartheid en Afrique du Sud et la ségrégation systématique imposée aux Palestiniens. L'étude conclut que le démantèlement de ces conditions assimilables à l'apartheid nécessite des efforts internationaux juridiques et diplomatiques soutenus. Ces efforts devraient inclure des sanctions économiques, des mécanismes de responsabilisation via les instances judiciaires internationales et une mobilisation à l'échelle populaire. Ce faisant, l'étude souligne l'importance des mécanismes juridiques internationaux dans la protection des droits humains et la prévention de la récurrence de violations systémiques dans les régions en proie aux conflits.

**Mots-clés:** Apartheid, occupation, violations des droits humains, déplacement

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## Introduction

*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.* These timeless words by Martin Luther King Jr. underscore the universal struggle against systemic oppression, a struggle epitomized by the crime of apartheid. While historically associated with South Africa's institutionalized racial segregation, apartheid has since been recognized under international law as a broader framework of systemic discrimination. The comparison between South African apartheid and Israel's policies in the occupied Palestinian territories has sparked significant debate among scholars, human rights organizations, and legal experts, raising urgent ethical and legal questions. As Desmond Tutu aptly stated, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor" (Tutu, 1999).

The South African apartheid regime (1948–1994) was characterized by legislation enforcing racial segregation, restricting movement, and denying fundamental rights to non-white citizens. Its legacy endures, shaping contemporary inequalities and psychological trauma. However, apartheid is not confined to South African history. The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid defines it as inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group... and systematically oppressing them (United Nations General Assembly, 1973). This legal definition has been instrumental in assessing cases beyond South Africa, including *Palestine*.

In the occupied Palestinian territories, policies such as land confiscation, forced displacement, and movement restrictions have created a segregated reality. Scholars such as John Dugard argue that these measures meet the legal definition of apartheid, asserting, "Israel's laws and practices in the occupied Palestinian territories meet the definition of apartheid under international law" (Dugard, 2007: 4). Virginia Tilley further contends that Israel's policies bear *strikingly similar* characteristics to South African apartheid, particularly in land appropriation and socio-economic discrimination (Tilley, 2009). These analyses highlight the necessity of examining apartheid as a global phenomenon, rather than a historical relic.

Building on previous studies, this paper applies a legal and ethical framework to analyze the systemic discrimination in both cases. The study draws from international law, human rights discourse, and trauma theory to explore the implications of apartheid practices on marginalized populations. Nelson Mandela's speech *No Easy Walk to Freedom* captures the enduring trauma of living under oppressive regimes, framing apartheid not as a past injustice but as an ongoing condition of systemic subjugation (Bekkai, 2023: 158). By engaging with historical and contemporary contexts, and through a comparative study of South Africa and Palestine, it aims to elucidate the systemic nature of human rights violations inherent in such regimes and to emphasize the necessity of international accountability and intervention in addressing racial discrimination and oppression. In doing so, it acknowledges the resilience of those subjected to these systems and underscores the imperative of global commitment to justice and equality.

### 1. The Significance of the South African and Palestinian Experiences

The experiences of South Africans under apartheid and Palestinians under Israeli occupation present a compelling case for examining systemic oppression and its implications on human dignity and rights. Both scenarios involve extensive policies of segregation, land dispossession, and socio-political marginalization. According to Nelson Mandela, South Africans have suffered racial discrimination for many years and we have come to recognize its many faces and manifestations. This recognition of diverse forms of discrimination resonates deeply with the experiences of Palestinians who face various forms of exclusion and marginalization.

In South Africa, apartheid laws institutionalized racial segregation and economic disparity, creating a society where the majority Black population was systematically disenfranchised. The Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 and the Soweto Uprising of 1976 are stark reminders of the brutal enforcement of apartheid policies. Mandela's speeches often highlight the collective trauma and

enduring spirit of the South African people (Bekkai, 2023: 159). This collective trauma is not only historical but continues to influence the socio-political landscape of South Africa today.

Similarly, in the Palestinian territories, the construction of the Israeli West Bank barrier, settlement expansions, and the imposition of movement restrictions have been criticized as mechanisms of apartheid. Dugard emphasises, "The measures implemented by Israel in the occupied territories are reminiscent of the racial policies of apartheid South Africa"(Dugard, 2007: 11). This comparison draws attention to the structural similarities between the two regimes, particularly in their use of legal and physical barriers to enforce segregation and control.

The psychological impact of such systemic oppression cannot be overstated. Mandela's reflections on trauma provide a framework for understanding the emotional and psychological toll of living under such regimes. His articulation of trauma serves as a testament to the resilience of oppressed populations and their relentless pursuit of justice and freedom, reflecting both the psychological cost and the unyielding determination of those suffering under oppressive regimes, also underscoring the immense strength required to endure and resist in the face of sustained violence. Mandela's words serve as a reminder of the strength required to maintain hope and fight for equality despite systemic violence and long-standing injustice, and that trauma while debilitating, can inspire resilience and hope for future liberation (Bekkai, 2023: 157). This resilience is also evident in the Palestinian struggle, where despite decades of conflict and displacement, the pursuit of self-determination and human rights remains steadfast.

Moreover, the international community's response to these situations has been varied, often influenced by geopolitical interests. The global anti-apartheid movement played a crucial role in isolating the South African regime, leading to significant political and economic pressure that contributed to the eventual dismantling of apartheid. In contrast, the Palestinian plight has seen intermittent support, with calls for boycotts, divestments, and sanctions (BDS) reflecting similar strategies used against South Africa. According to Tilley, the global response to Israeli policies in the occupied territories has been fragmented, yet there is growing recognition of the parallels with apartheid (Tilley, 2009).

Understanding the significance of these experiences involves not only a recognition of the legal and structural dimensions of apartheid but also an acknowledgment of the profound human suffering and the resilience of those who resist. This interconnectedness of freedom and oppression is a crucial theme that underscores the collective nature of oppression and the shared burden of fighting for justice, highlighting that the liberation of one is inseparable from the liberation of all, which is significant for both the South African and Palestinian experiences.

## **2. The Legacy of Apartheid: Systemic Oppression and the Struggle for Justice in South Africa**

The apartheid system in South Africa, formally established in 1948 by the National Party, was rooted in colonial-era segregationist policies designed to enforce racial hierarchy and white supremacy (Thompson, 2001). Key laws, such as the Population Registration Act (1950), the Group Areas Act (1950), and the Bantu Education Act (1953), institutionalized racial segregation and economic marginalization, stripping non-white populations of land, resources, and opportunities (Worden, 1994). Pass laws further restricted Black South Africans' movement, rendering them aliens in their own country (Mandela, 1994, NMF). The regime maintained control through brutal state apparatuses, including the police and judiciary, while suppressing dissent with tactics like arbitrary arrests, torture, and massacres, such as the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre (Davenport, 1991: 78).

Internationally condemned as a *crime against humanity* by the United Nations in 1966, apartheid persisted until internal resistance, led by the ANC and figures like Nelson Mandela, combined with global pressure, brought its downfall in the early 1990s. The system's human rights violations were profound, including forced removals to impoverished homelands, which devastated

communities and entrenched poverty (Platzky, 1985: 43). Desmond Tutu aptly described apartheid as a system that dehumanized our people and violated every tenet of human dignity and equality.

### 3. The Palestine-Israeli Conflict and Relevant Policies

The Palestine-Israel conflict is one of the most enduring and complex disputes in modern history, rooted in a struggle over land, identity, sovereignty, and historical narratives in the region between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. This multifaceted conflict has generated a range of policies from Israeli and Palestinian authorities, as well as interventions by international actors, shaping its trajectory over decades. The historical foundations of the conflict trace back centuries, shaped by colonial and imperial interventions. A key example is the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which promised a Jewish homeland in Palestine but failed to adequately address the impact on the Arab population (Khalidi, 2020: 163). Gabor Maté, a renowned author and trauma expert, emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the historical traumas experienced by both Jews and Palestinians, asserting that such recognition is essential for fostering meaningful dialogue and healing (Maté, 2023).

The establishment of Israel in 1948 was a pivotal moment, marked by the Arab-Israeli War and the mass displacement of Palestinians. Ilan Pappé describes this period as one of ethnic cleansing, with systematic efforts to expel the indigenous Palestinian population, leading to a significant refugee crisis (Pappé, 2007: 67). Rashid Khalidi attributes the failure to establish a Palestinian state in 1948 to a combination of military defeat, political disunity, and lack of international support (Khalidi, 2006: 124). The 1967 Six-Day War further intensified the conflict, resulting in Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and Sinai Peninsula. Martin Bunton describes this as a turning point that reshaped the geopolitical landscape, entrenching Israeli control and exacerbating tensions (Bunton, 2013: 96). Dov Waxman underscores the consequences of the occupation, including severe restrictions on Palestinian mobility, economic hardship, and a cycle of violence and resistance (Waxman, 2019: 56).

Israeli settlement expansion in occupied territories remains a central point of contention. Jimmy Carter criticizes these policies as violations of international law and obstacles to peace, particularly in undermining the feasibility of a two-state solution (Carter, 2006: 118). Pappé elaborates on the systematic expropriation of Palestinian land and resources, arguing that settlement policies aim to alter demographic and geographic realities, making Palestinian statehood increasingly unattainable (Pappé, 2015: 72). Meanwhile, Palestinian nationalism and governance have faced significant challenges. Khalidi points to internal divisions and external pressures as key obstacles to the Palestinian national movement's success (Khalidi, 2006: 91). Sara Roy examines *Hamas's* dual identity as a militant organization and a provider of social services, which has contributed to its significant support among Palestinians (Roy, 2019: 59).

Scholars such as Noam Chomsky and Shlomo Sand have also contributed to the discourse. Chomsky advocates for the recognition of Palestinian rights and a just resolution to the conflict, while Sand emphasizes the need to rethink national identities and historical narratives to facilitate reconciliation (Sand, 2014). Together, these perspectives underscore the deep historical roots, ongoing complexities, and multifaceted dimensions of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Addressing its deep-rooted complexities requires a commitment to justice, mutual recognition, and inclusive dialogue to pave the way for lasting peace.

### 4. Hamas: From Militancy to Governance - Investigating Human Rights Issues in the Palestinian Territories

*Hamas*, an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (Islamic Resistance Movement), has undergone a significant transformation since its founding in 1987. Initially established as the militant wing of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood; *Hamas* sought to liberate Palestine through armed struggle, positioning itself as an alternative to the secular Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). *Hamas's* rise was fueled by widespread disillusionment with the

PLO's political failures and corruption (Khalidi, 2006). Over time, *Hamas* evolved into a political entity, gaining control of the Gaza Strip after its victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections. This victory, however, led to violent clashes with *Fatah* and entrenched *Hamas*'s governance in Gaza, marked by both internal stability and external isolation due to its refusal to recognize Israel and renounce violence (Waxman, 2019).

Hamas's dual role as a governing body and a militant organization has had profound implications for human rights in the Palestinian territories. While Sara Roy highlights Hamas's efforts to build social institutions and provide essential services in Gaza, its governance has also been marred by internal political strife, military conflicts with Israel, and international sanctions (Roy, 2019: 137). These factors have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where restrictions on movement, access to essential services, and widespread poverty have become endemic.

The human rights situation in the Palestinian territories, particularly in Gaza and the West Bank, has drawn significant international concern. Reports from organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch document extensive violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and restrictions on freedom of movement. Pappé contextualizes these abuses within the historical legacy of Palestinian displacement since 1948, arguing that the ongoing occupation has created a continuous state of emergency for Palestinians (Pappé, 2007: 97). Gabor Maté further emphasizes the psychological toll of prolonged conflict, noting that the trauma experienced by Palestinians under occupation is profound and multi-generational (Maté, 2023).

The United Nations and other international bodies have repeatedly called for accountability and adherence to international human rights laws. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2020), the destruction of infrastructure, restrictions on movement, and limited access to essential services have created a dire humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories (OCHA, 2020). Together, the evolution of Hamas and the broader context of occupation and conflict have shaped a complex and challenging reality for Palestinians, where governance, resistance, and human rights are deeply intertwined.

## **5. The Enduring Consequences of Human Rights Violations on the Palestinian People**

The ongoing human rights violations in the Palestinian territories have far-reaching impacts on the population, affecting social, economic, psychological, and political dimensions of life. The consequences of such systemic violations are not merely temporary disruptions but have left lasting scars that shape the daily existence and future prospects of Palestinians.

To begin with, economic deprivation is one of the most severe consequences of human rights abuses in the Palestinian territories. The blockade of Gaza and restrictions on trade have devastated the local economy. The World Bank reports Gaza's youth unemployment rate among the highest in the world, exceeding 50% (2020) which fosters dependence on humanitarian aid and perpetuates poverty. The economic policies imposed on Gaza have led to a humanitarian crisis that exacerbates social disintegration and dependency (Roy, 2019: 91). Furthermore, the destruction of agricultural lands, homes, and infrastructure worsens economic woes. Pappé emphasizes that the demolition of Palestinian homes and the expropriation of land are systematic strategies to displace populations and assert control. He states, "The persistent demolition of homes and the uprooting of olive groves are not only acts of dispossession but also of economic warfare" (Pappé, 2007: 99).

Psychologically, prolonged conflict and occupation have left deep, multi-generational scars. Maté highlights that living under constant threat and humiliation has resulted in widespread mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder PTSD (Maté, 2023). These mental health challenges are exacerbated by limited access to medical services, as the blockade and military operations have significantly damaged healthcare infrastructure. The impact on children is particularly severe. A report by Save the Children (2021) reveals that many children in Gaza suffer from emotional distress, with many experiencing nightmares, bedwetting, and

difficulty concentrating. This psychological toll hinders their educational development and future opportunities, perpetuating a cycle of trauma and deprivation.

Politically, human rights abuses hinder peace efforts, fostering disenfranchisement and radicalization. The continuous cycle of violence and retaliation erodes trust and fuels radicalization. Noam Chomsky has pointed out that the persistent state of conflict and human rights abuses make the prospect of a negotiated settlement increasingly elusive (Chomsky, 2015: 119). The fragmentation of Palestinian governance, with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority and Gaza controlled by Hamas, further complicates the political landscape. International isolation and the lack of a unified political strategy weaken the Palestinian position in negotiations. Rashid Khalidi, in *The Iron Cage*, argues, "The internal divisions and external pressures have historically hindered the Palestinian struggle for statehood" (Khalidi, 2006: 152). These governance challenges are compounded by the ongoing humanitarian crisis, as resources are diverted to immediate relief instead of long-term development.

Furthermore, the cultural and societal impacts of human rights violations extend beyond economic and political spheres, affecting the very identity and cohesion of Palestinian society. The restriction of movement and access to holy sites disrupts cultural practices and social interactions. Jimmy Carter in *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* highlights that the separation of families and communities due to movement restrictions erodes the social fabric and cultural continuity (Carter, 2006: 63). Moreover, the international portrayal of the Palestinian struggle often overlooks the rich cultural heritage and resilience of the Palestinian people. Ilan Pappé in *Palestine* (2015) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging Palestinian narratives and histories in the broader discourse on the conflict. He writes, "Recognizing the cultural and historical context of the Palestinian people is essential for a just and comprehensive solution."

Lastly, the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territories necessitates urgent and sustained international attention. The OCHA reports that the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with over two million in need of aid, underscores the urgency for international action. The ethical imperative to address these needs is clear, yet political barriers often hinder effective action. International bodies and NGOs continuously call for adherence to international human rights laws and accountability for violations. However, geopolitical interests and regional dynamics complicate these efforts. As Dov Waxman notes in *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: What Everyone Needs to Know*, "Addressing the human rights violations in the Palestinian territories requires a multifaceted approach that balances humanitarian aid, political pressure, and diplomatic engagement" (Waxman, 2019: 64).

In a nutshell, the impact of human rights violations on the Palestinian people is extensive and enduring. Addressing these violations is not only a moral imperative but also a prerequisite for achieving lasting peace and stability in the region. The international community must prioritize the protection of human rights and support efforts towards justice and reconciliation for the Palestinian people.

### **6. Examination of Israeli Laws and Policies Affecting Palestinians: An Emphasis on Apartheid Resemblance**

Israeli laws and policies in the occupied Palestinian territories have been widely criticized for resembling apartheid, characterized by segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement. Scholars and international organizations have argued that these laws and policies resemble apartheid, particularly in their effects of segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement.

The legal framework established by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories systematically restricts Palestinian rights. The Oslo Accords, initially seen as a step toward peace, fragmented the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C, limiting Palestinian autonomy and isolating communities. Waxman explains, "These divisions have created a patchwork of enclaves that isolate Palestinian communities and severely limit their autonomy." Furthermore, the construction of the West Bank barrier, often referred to as the *apartheid wall* by Palestinians, deemed illegal by the

International Court of Justice (2004), and severs Palestinian access to land, schools, and workplaces, exacerbating movement restrictions.

Israeli settlements in the West Bank, illegal under international law, undermine the possibility of a contiguous Palestinian state. Pappé argues, "The settlement project is a strategic tool used by Israel to assert control over the West Bank and to ensure a Jewish majority in key areas" (Pappé, 2007). They are supported by a network of roads from which Palestinians are excluded, which reinforces a system of separate and unequal infrastructure. Human Rights Watch, in its 2021 report, described these conditions as meeting the legal definition of apartheid, stating, "Israeli authorities methodically privilege Jewish Israelis while repressing Palestinians, amounting to crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution."

Beyond the occupied territories, discriminatory laws further marginalize Palestinians living within Israel. The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, first enacted in 2003 and repeatedly extended, restricts Palestinian citizens of Israel from marrying and living with Palestinian residents of the West Bank or Gaza. Human rights organizations have criticized these restrictions for effectively creating second-class citizenship for Palestinians (Khalidi, 2020:119). Additionally, administrative detention allows Israeli authorities to imprison Palestinians without charge or trial for renewable six-month periods. Amnesty International reports that "administrative detention is used extensively against Palestinians, including minors, as a tool of political repression" (2019).

Restrictions on movement and access to resources further deepen socio-economic disparities between Israelis and Palestinians. The blockade of Gaza, imposed since 2007, has led to severe economic deprivation, widespread poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity (UNRWA, 2020). These restrictions, coupled with the West Bank barrier and the system of checkpoints, hinder access to employment, education, healthcare, and social interaction, reinforcing a system of geographic and economic segregation (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Israel's residency and family reunification policies, particularly in East Jerusalem, also contribute to demographic shifts that favor Jewish settlers over the indigenous Palestinian population. The Law of Return grants any Jew worldwide the right to immigrate to Israel and gain citizenship, while stringent restrictions severely limit Palestinian family reunification, often resulting in family separations. These policies echo apartheid South Africa's efforts to control the racial composition of certain areas (Waxman, 2019: 86).

The Israeli government argues that its policies are driven by security concerns and denies that they constitute apartheid. However, human rights organizations and international bodies contend that systematic oppression and domination characterize Israeli policies, meeting the legal definition of apartheid (HRW, 2021).

Gabor Maté highlights the psychological trauma affecting both Israelis and Palestinians, emphasizing the need to address historical wounds for collective progress. Maté argues that unresolved trauma perpetuates cycles of violence, highlighting the necessity of acknowledging historical wounds for collective progress (Maté, 2023). Similarly, Shlomo Sand asserts that racism in Israel is deeply institutionalized, reinforced through legal frameworks, education, and media, leading many perpetrators to remain unaware of their discriminatory actions (Sand, 2014).

This analysis underscores the ongoing debate surrounding Israeli policies and their impact on Palestinians. While the Israeli government maintains that its actions are necessary for security, critics argue that systematic discrimination, restrictions, and legal frameworks create conditions akin to apartheid, perpetuating inequality and division.

## **7. Current Implications for the Palestinian Situation and Potential Paths Forward**

The ongoing human rights violations and socio-political challenges in the Palestinian territories have profound implications for the future of the region. The current situation is marked



by political stagnation, economic deprivation, and social fragmentation. However, understanding these implications also requires exploring potential paths towards a just and peaceful resolution.

Firstly, the economic blockade and movement restrictions imposed by Israel continue to devastate the Palestinian economy. According to the World Bank, the Gaza blockade has resulted in a youth unemployment rate that exceeds 50%, with widespread poverty and food insecurity. This economic strangulation not only hinders development but also fuels resentment and instability. While international aid mitigates some impacts, it is not a sustainable solution. Long-term recovery requires lifting the blockade, restoring freedom of movement, and investing in infrastructure and development.

Politically, Palestinian governance remains deeply divided. The split between *Fatah* in the West Bank and *Hamas* in Gaza weakens the national movement. Repeated failures at reconciliation have undermined prospects for a unified Palestinian front in negotiations with Israel. In *The Hundred Years War on Palestine*, Khalidi states, "A divided Palestinian leadership is less capable of effectively advocating for the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people." Therefore, bridging this divide is essential for meaningful progress.

On the international stage, there is growing recognition of the need for a renewed peace strategy. The two-state solution has long been the cornerstone of peace efforts, yet its feasibility is increasingly questioned due to Israeli settlement expansion and Palestinian territorial fragmentation. Some scholars and activists advocate for a one-state solution with equal rights for all inhabitants, arguing that it could dismantle systemic inequalities. Others propose a confederation model, where Israelis and Palestinians share sovereignty while maintaining distinct national identities (Waxman, 2019).

Additionally, grassroots movements and civil society initiatives play a crucial role in shaping the future. Organizations promoting dialogue, non-violent resistance, and human rights advocacy help build bridges between communities and foster a culture of peace. These initiatives often face repression and financial constraints, but they remain vital to a bottom-up approach to conflict resolution.

### **8. The Situation in Gaza after October 7<sup>th</sup>: A Modern Reflection of South African Apartheid**

The events of October 7, 2023, have plunged the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a new and devastating phase, reinforcing policies that numerous scholars and human rights organizations argue align with international legal definitions of apartheid. In the immediate aftermath, Israel launched a large-scale military campaign, inflicting unprecedented destruction across Gaza. This escalation has resulted in staggering civilian casualties and deepened systemic segregation and control, which many compare to apartheid-era South Africa.

Israel's military response has led to over 41,600 Palestinian deaths, with tens of thousands more injured or missing under the rubble, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The war has displaced nearly the entire population of Gaza, forcing millions into dire conditions without adequate shelter, food, or medical care. Israeli airstrikes have targeted critical infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and residential areas, making life untenable for those trapped within the besieged enclave. The scale of this destruction bears striking similarities to the spatial segregation and systemic disenfranchisement imposed on Black South Africans under apartheid.

Beyond the immediate toll in human lives, Israel's 17-year blockade of Gaza has exacerbated an already dire humanitarian crisis. By restricting food, medicine, and fuel, Israel has crippled Gaza's economy and healthcare system, leaving hospitals overwhelmed and barely functional due to chronic shortages of medical supplies and electricity. Legal experts liken this blockade to collective punishment, serving as a mechanism of economic and territorial segregation. The confinement of Gaza's population within a densely packed, resource-starved territory under

constant surveillance closely mirrors South Africa's Bantustan system, designed to isolate and economically suffocate Black communities.

The parallels between Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories and South African apartheid extend beyond displacement and economic deprivation. Israeli settlements in the West Bank, home demolitions in East Jerusalem, and land confiscation mirror South Africa's forced removals and racial zoning laws. Military checkpoints, an intrusive permit system, and severe movement restrictions imposed on Palestinians function much like South Africa's pass laws, which regulated and restricted the mobility of non-white citizens.

The psychological consequences of these policies, particularly since October 7, have been devastating. Save the Children reports a dramatic rise in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression among Palestinian children, many of whom have witnessed the destruction of their homes, the deaths of family members, and the constant threat of violence. This trauma echoes that endured by generations of Black South Africans under apartheid. The long-term psychological scars left by state-sanctioned oppression are not simply residual effects of conflict but are part of a broader strategy that seeks to break the spirit of an occupied and marginalized people.

International responses to the crisis in Gaza have been deeply divided, reflecting the broader geopolitical stakes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While Western governments largely defend Israel's actions as legitimate self-defence, much of the Global South and international human rights organizations condemn the military campaign as a continuation of apartheid policies and potential war crimes. This disparity recalls the international community's initial reluctance to impose sanctions on apartheid South Africa. Only through sustained economic boycotts, diplomatic isolation, and legal accountability was apartheid ultimately dismantled. Today, similar strategies, such as the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, seek to apply comparable pressure on Israel to end its occupation and apartheid policies.

Addressing the crisis in Gaza requires more than temporary ceasefires and humanitarian aid. A lasting resolution must dismantle the structural inequalities that sustain Israeli control over Palestinian territories. Just as apartheid in South Africa collapsed under a combination of internal resistance and sustained international pressure, a just resolution for Palestine will require the global community to move beyond passive condemnation toward concrete legal and diplomatic measures. The right to self-determination, the dismantling of apartheid structures, and adherence to international legal norms must be central to any viable peace process.

The October 7 attacks and their aftermath have laid bare the urgent need to recognize and challenge apartheid-like policies in the occupied Palestinian territories. South Africa's past provides a compelling framework for understanding the systemic oppression of Palestinians and the possible pathways to justice. The question that remains is whether the world will heed this call or allow history to repeat itself under a different name.

## **9. Geopolitical Dynamics and the International Response to the Palestinian Question**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been shaped by global geopolitical interests of Western powers. The United States and the European Union maintain strong economic, military, and diplomatic ties with Israel, citing historical obligations, shared democratic values, and strategic regional interests. This alignment has shielded Israel from meaningful consequences despite international criticism of its policies in the occupied Palestinian territories. In contrast to the global sanctions and boycotts that contributed to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, responses to Israel's actions have been fragmented and inconsistent. The U.S. provides over \$3.8 billion in annual military aid, ensuring Israel's military dominance, while the EU continues to strengthen trade and technology partnerships despite periodic condemnations of settlement expansion.

Scholars such as Noam Chomsky argue that Western geopolitical interests, particularly the need for a stable and powerful ally in the Middle East, have led to a reluctance to challenge Israeli policies meaningfully. Chomsky describes U.S. foreign policy as operating on *selective morality*,

where human rights violations are condemned only when they align with strategic interests (Chomsky, 2015). Similarly, R. Khalidi notes that Western governments view Israel as a strategic asset rather than a violator of international law, which has prevented an impartial global response (Khalidi, 2020).

Key historical moments have reinforced this dynamic. The Camp David Accords (1978) secured Egypt's peace with Israel but sidelined the Palestinian cause. The Oslo Accords (1993) were heralded as a step toward Palestinian self-governance but ultimately failed as Israeli settlements expanded, and trust eroded. The United Nations, a key international forum, has repeatedly passed resolutions condemning Israeli actions, but U.S. veto power in the Security Council has consistently blocked binding measures, undermining accountability. Even when General Assembly resolutions gain overwhelming support, they lack enforcement mechanisms, allowing the occupation to continue with impunity.

Beyond the West, non-aligned and Global South nations have historically backed Palestinian self-determination, though shifting economic and security interests have led to evolving stances. The Soviet Union once armed Palestinian factions, while post-Cold War Russia and China maintain rhetorical support but deepen economic ties with Israel. India, once firmly pro-Palestinian, now prioritizes arms deals with Israel. In the Arab world, normalization agreements like the Abraham Accords (2020) reflect a growing trend of states prioritizing national interests over pan-Arab solidarity, though countries like Algeria and South Africa remain vocal critics.

The divergence between the global response to South African apartheid and Israeli policies is striking. South Africa faced mounting diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions that forced its regime to negotiate its end, whereas Israel continues to benefit from Western economic integration. The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, modeled after the anti-apartheid struggle, has gained traction among civil society groups but has yet to translate into widespread governmental action. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and the failure of international diplomacy highlight the structural imbalance that sustains Israeli policies. While growing Global South pressure and grassroots activism challenge the status quo, the question remains whether the world will apply the same political and economic pressure on Israel as it did on apartheid South Africa or continue to allow strategic alliances to dictate selective enforcement of international law.

### Conclusion

The comparison between South African apartheid and Israel's policies in the occupied Palestinian territories reveals a troubling continuity in the institutionalization of segregation, population control, and the denial of fundamental rights. While apartheid in South Africa was dismantled through global solidarity and internal resistance, the structures of Israeli occupation and discrimination persist, reinforced by events like the October 7, 2023, escalation. The construction of barriers, land confiscation, displacement, and systemic human rights violations align with the legal definition of apartheid under international law, particularly the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid.

The aftermath of October 7 underscores the devastating impact of these policies. The destruction in Gaza, mass displacement, and targeting of essential infrastructure reveal not just a military campaign but an extension of a long-standing system of segregation and control. The blockade, akin to South Africa's Bantustan system, has crippled Gaza's economy and healthcare, leaving its population in a state of dependency and despair. The psychological toll on Palestinians, especially children, mirrors the generational trauma experienced under apartheid, further entrenching cycles of suffering.

The international community's response has been inconsistent, hindered by geopolitical interests and the veto power of influential states. While global solidarity played a decisive role in ending South African apartheid, similar efforts against Israeli policies have been fragmented. The

Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement echoes the strategies that once challenged apartheid, but sustained international pressure remains crucial for meaningful change.

Moving forward, any resolution must address the structural inequalities sustaining the occupation. Whether through a two-state solution, a single democratic state, or another framework, lasting peace must be grounded in justice, equality, and the dismantling of apartheid-like structures. As Nelson Mandela aptly stated, “Our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.” The global community must act to ensure that justice is not an abstract principle but a lived reality for all, whether in Johannesburg, Jerusalem, or Gaza.

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