



The Leviathan gas field, located in the Mediterranean Sea, was estimated to hold enough gas to "meet Israel's domestic needs for 40 years" as of 2017.
● GETTY IMAGES

Control of resources

This brings us to the second of the two explanations mentioned above, with regard to Israel's disproportionate response to the Hamas attack; that is, the far-right Israeli government's interest in maintaining or expanding Israel's control over the Palestinian territories' oil and gas reservoirs in violation of international law.

According to a 2019 United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report, "Geologists and natural resources economists have confirmed that the Occupied Palestinian Territory lies above sizable reservoirs of oil and natural-gas wealth, in Area C of the occupied West Bank, and the Mediterranean coast off the Gaza Strip...."

"The exploitation of Palestinian natural resources, including oil and natural gas, by the occupying power imposes on the Palestinian people enormous costs that continue to esca-

late as the occupation remains in effect. This is not only contrary to international law, but also in violation of natural justice and moral law."

"To date, the real and opportunity costs of the occupation exclusively in the area of oil and natural gas have accumulated to tens, if not hundreds, of billions of dollars," the report continues.

Of course, Israel has tried, self-servingly and without regard for the livelihoods of the civilian population in Palestine, to defend its policy of not allowing Palestinians to exploit their own oil and gas reserves, as well as their share of these resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, by claiming that such exploitation will help strengthen Palestinian fighters.

However, the UNCTAD report warns that this sort of arrangement is not only illegal, but also can "potentially be a source of additional

conflict and violence if individual parties exploit these resources without due regard for the fair share of others".

Thus, the idea that Israel's extreme military response since October 7 may have been designed to secure further control over the occupied Palestinian territory's oil and gas resources is a plausible one to consider, especially when viewed in relation to the massive population dislocation that Israel has managed to bring about in Gaza.

As migration and war experts Nicholas Mincinski, Adam Lichtenheld, and Kelsey Norman have explained in their article, titled "Israel's mass displacement of Gazans fits [the] strategy of using migration as a tool of war," population dislocation has historically been used for "three strategic reasons in conflict," the second of which is "as a grab for territory and resources".



Undercover Israeli security personnel (R) and Israeli soldiers detain a wounded Palestinian protester during clashes near the Jewish settlement of Bet El, near the West Bank city of Ramallah, October 7, 2015.
● MOHAMAD TOROKMAN/REUTERS

Seeking a way forward

Where to, one may ask, from here?

The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict clearly shows that, no matter how hard they try, ultranationalists in Israel will never be able to force Palestinians to give up their national aspirations or lose their longing for independence.

As the UNCTAD report has correctly noted, the conditions that Israel has imposed on the occupied territories are not only unfair and inhumane, but also against international law.

To this, one must add, of course, the relative decline of Western economies and the US-led liberal order (in terms of the emergence of new geopolitical configurations), as well as the global discontent with the dire situation in the Palestinian territories, the combination of which is bound to limit what Israel and its allies can do in the region.

It would, therefore, do Israel well to consider ending its occupation of the Palestinian territories and arriving at a negotiated solution with the parties representing the Palestinian people, one that is genuine in nature and anchored in international law. And this, of course, requires a politically united front in Palestine, with a realistic strategy for peace.

If, on the other hand, the far-right government in Israel decides to escalate the present situa-

tion further, then it should carefully consider renowned sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein's prescient remarks, which were made in 2015 in relation to Benjamin Netanyahu's electoral victory in the same year:

"[Netanyahu's strategy] is straining the world's patience, and most critically, the patience of those who have been more or less faithful supporters of the Israeli government's positions.... There has been a worldwide transformation of the perception of Israel as a 'victim' to that of Israel as a 'persecutor'."

"This is a nightmare for the Zionist cause in Israel. It can only get worse for Israel. There may even come a point, perhaps still a few years from now, that the United States will no longer be willing to veto resolutions in the UN Security Council that are critical of Israel."

And indeed, it seems the United States is already at a point where it is finding it increasingly difficult to support Israel without paying a hefty price at home and abroad.

A good case in point here is how some Arab and Muslim-American groups and leaders in swing states have threatened to abandon President Joe Biden in the 2024 general election for his refusal to push for a cease-fire in Gaza, even though they realize that such a move might not be to their advantage.

Another case in point is the global anger that has been directed at the Biden administration for vetoing, on December 8, yet another UN Security Council resolution that called for an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza.

Not surprisingly, however, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly on December 12 for the adoption of a non-binding resolution that demanded an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, further reflecting the lack of international support for the US position on the issue.

Additionally, one must pay attention to how the war in the region is also affecting social life in societies that claim to be free and democratic. In other words, will their governments be able to manage the domestic fallout of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in ways that would guarantee to their people their constitutional rights and freedoms? This remains to be seen. For now, people around the world should continue to call for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza and an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories as minimal conditions for the emergence of a viable solution to the decades-long conflict.

This article first appeared on [Countercurrents.org](https://www.countercurrents.org).

Palestinians have national identity, want sovereignty



By Dana El Kurd
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OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

There are several types of justice claims that challenge the international order, such as recognition justice and historical injustice claims. When actors feel unrecognized in their sovereignty — either because they challenge the notion of state sovereignty or believe they have not been accepted as fully part of the state system — this can erode the international order and its legitimacy. Similarly, when groups feel there has been historic harm done to their ancestors that has not been fully rectified, this can be corrosive to the international order.

The Palestinian national cause is an injustice claim that fits both in certain ways: a case where injustice occurred in the past and is ongoing, thus making it both a historical and contemporary harm.

Moreover, Palestinians have a national identity and desire statehood. Their recognition justice claim is not on the basis of rejecting the concept of state sovereignty, but rather that state sovereignty has not yet been extended to them. Famously, and with a good deal of criticism, Yasser Arafat declared that the Palestinians were "not Red Indians," in an effort to demonstrate that the Palestinians were a unified people with a national sovereignty claim.

Despite this emphasis over the years, the United States and its allies have never taken Palestinian sovereignty claims seriously, instead trying to resolve the issue with diminished versions of recognition: at the most, self-governance and at the least, a marginally improved subsistence.

Now the US, actively espousing a liberal international order, has ignored the Palestine issue, and has eroded its own legitimacy across the global south as a result. This has sparked a great deal of backlash against the liberal international order on the part of Palestinians and their Arab/regional allies, as well as a bandwagoning in active pursuit of the erosion of an American-dominated world system. The result is the increased likelihood of conflict. Thus, ongoing injustice against Palestinians should be seen as corrosive to the international order, and should be addressed rather than dismissed.

Sovereignty isn't limited self-governance

The compounding tragedy of the United States refusing to apply the same principles across the globe is the fact that America is uniquely positioned to exert pressure, deescalate, and intervene in a political negotiation — given not only the scope of American power but also its ties to the parties involved. As Sarah Parkinson reminded readers in a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, this is not outside the norm of American foreign policy: President Ronald Reagan, during Israel's bombardment of Lebanon, demanded the Israeli leadership stop shelling Beirut. This was later credited for the "moderation" of Israeli behavior by both Israeli and American media.

But by forfeiting that role and that leverage in their insistence on "bear hugging" Netanyahu, the Biden administration not only condemns thousands of Palestinians — and people in the broader region — to avoidable death, but also condemns the rest of the world since the guardrails for international conflict, however problematic and selectively applied, are completely removed. The actors empowered in this vacuum have no alternative vision for the world, except an order where might makes right.

Israeli government officials argue that the presence of Hamas in Gaza as a security concern cannot be tolerated. This is especially the case in the wake of the October 7 attack. Thus, they have repeatedly articulated that their objective is to eradicate Hamas entirely. But as analysts point out, a war of this scale and scope — and worse, the reoccupation of Gaza, which seems to be in progress — cannot accomplish the task of securing Israeli safety, or the goal of eradication.

Instead of continuing to ignore the Palestine factor, policymakers should address root causes of the ongoing violence, which includes the continued lack of a political future or sovereignty for Palestinians. It is important to note here that sovereignty does not mean simply limited self-governance, such as exists in pockets of the West Bank (as easily overturned as that self-governance might be). Sovereignty means people having actual control of their lives and their environment, and shaping a governance structure that reflects the people and is accountable to them.

Policymakers must address, head-on, Palestinian national claims for sovereignty and let go of the assumption that the status quo can persist, either through marginal improvements to Palestinian living conditions or extreme coercion. Such an assumption will not achieve security for anyone, including Israelis. Thus, nothing less than foregoing this assumption, and changing course, will begin to resolve this long-festering conflict — a conflict that has upended the dreams and lives of too many in this region for far too long.

The full article first appeared on the [Foreign Policy Research Institute](https://www.foreignpolicyresearchinstitute.org).