

Israel Should Not Continue to Enjoy Impunity

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Despite pressure from the Biden administration, the Palestinian Authority has firmly refused to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and adopted a passive neutral stand on the conflict. While the Authority is West-leaning, Palestinians have experienced nothing but abuse from all the US administrations succeeding president Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961).

He adopted a principled stand against aggression and occupation and commanded Israel to withdraw from Gaza and Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula after seizing these territories during the 1956 Anglo-French-Israeli war waged to topple Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser after he nationalised the Suez Canal. Israel reluctantly obliged by withdrawing in 1957.

The US has refused to exert pressure on Israel to evacuate Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank since Israel conquered them in 1967 and has not sanctioned Israel for colonising them in flagrant violation of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Instead, successive administrations have subsidised Israel’s occupation by providing military and economic aid and permitting the unhindered flow of tax free funds from US donors to the illegal colonies. The US has protected Israel from UN Security Council votes condemning its constant crack-down on Palestinians living under occupation, repeated wars against Gaza and Lebanon, and, during the last decade, all too frequent attacks on Syria.

Even after the Oslo accord was signed in ceremonies on the White House lawn, the US did not press Israel to abide by the deal’s terms by pulling its troops out of the West Bank and Gaza and negotiating a land-for-peace deal with the Palestinians. Determined to hang onto the land it occupies, Israel demands peace-for-peace. As a result, Israel has established an elaborate apartheid regime in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank and, since 2006-07 besieged and blockaded Gaza. Donald Trump recognised Israeli sovereignty over occupied East Jerusalem, moved the US embassy from Tel Aviv to the holy city, closed down the US consulate in occupied East Jerusalem and the Palestinian mission in Washington, and cancelled US contributions to UNRWA, the UN agency caring for 5 million Palestinian refugees. President Joe Biden has partially restored UNRWA’s funding but has not reversed

Trump's other anti-Palestinian actions.

Little wonder that the Palestinian Authority has refused to accept Biden's diktat. If the Authority had, there would be furious protests in the occupied Palestinian territories against US hypocrisy in condemning Russia's invasion of portions of Ukraine while giving full support to Israel's occupation of all Palestine. Palestinians are branded "terrorists" if they resist Israel's military regime, Ukraine's national guard and citizens are deemed heroes if they fight Russia.

In contrast with the US and its European partners which have not yet recognised Palestine, Moscow recognised the virtual state three days after the Palestine National Council's November 1988 declaration of independence in Algiers and established diplomatic relations with Palestine in 1989. Although lacking the muscle to seriously aid the Palestinians in their struggle for liberation from Israeli domination, Russia has repeatedly proven to be an ally in UN Security Council and General Assembly votes and in international fora.

Deeply indebted to the US for decades of support, Israel has tried to sit on the fence over Russia's war in Ukraine. While Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid condemned Russia's military campaign, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett did not and offered to mediate between Ukraine and Russia although Israel is in illegal occupation of Palestine.

Despite US pressure, Israel has not imposed sanctions on Russia and will not prevent Israeli companies from doing business with Russia or Israeli commercial aircraft from continuing flights to and from Russia. Israel has not provided Ukraine with drones or its Iron Dome anti-missile system which was funded by billions of US dollars. Israel has sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine and prepared to admit 13,500 Ukrainian refugees, but 1,000 either were rejected or, upon arrival, refused to stay in Israel.

Treatment is different for Jews and non-Jews. Jews are airlifted to Israel and their immigration procedures are expedited. Among the Ukrainians are 3,500 Jews who are eligible for healthcare, services, long-term residence, and Israeli citizenship under the "Law of Return", prompting critics to accuse the authorities of racism towards non-Jews. Non-Jews have to leave when the war ends. They either stay with relatives or are to be accommodated in caravans in three medium sized Israeli towns rather than Tel Aviv or Jerusalem.

Ukraine's Ambassador to Israel Yevgen Korniychuk expressed disappointment in Israel's attitude by saying Ukrainian refugees, including Jews, who receive shelter, food, health care and schooling for children in Europe, are not eager to travel to distant, expensive Israel.

The massive Western condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine might, just might, compel the US and Europe to recognise that all other countries waging war on their populations or neighbours must also be held to account for committing aggression, violating international law and perpetrating war crimes. Russia should not be the only country to be ostracised and comprehensively sanctioned if international law is to be respected and a global rule of law is to be enforced everywhere. No one should continue to enjoy impunity. Not even Israel.

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Featured image: A sign stating 'Danger, demolition. Entry is prohibited' was placed by Israeli authorities on top of the rubble of the Khalialehs' houses (MEE\Sondus Ewies)

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