

Both Israelis and Palestinians are victims of Israel's apartheid system

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The answer to Hamas's horrifying crimes isn't to kill innocent Gazans — it's to change the conditions from which this brutality sprang.

The violence in Gaza and Israel is bringing horrifying new levels of human suffering to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Both sides have committed heinous violations of international law, and all attacks on civilians must be condemned. But if we're serious about preventing such horrors in the future, we have to go beyond condemnation.

A lesson we ignore at our peril is that oppression undermines not only the rights, dignity, and lives of the oppressed, but eventually the security of the oppressors as well. The apartheid system that's been suffocating Palestinians for so long is now also undermining the safety of ordinary Israeli civilians. They've become victims of the same system.

We can't understand how we got here — or how to end the crisis — until we grapple with the immensity of Palestinian suffering. And for us in the United States, it means confronting the role our government and tax dollars play in enabling that oppression to continue.

Explosions of violence never just happen. Since 2007, Gazans have lived under siege, prohibited from leaving their open air prison by a high-security militarized wall and platoons of Israeli soldiers.

Well before the latest escalation, the transit of most goods was banned. Gazans couldn't get construction materials to repair the apartment blocks, power plants, water treatment facilities, hospitals, school, mosques, and churches that Israel bombed repeatedly — in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2018, and 2021.

Emergency medical permits were often denied, leaving many Gazans to die without care.

Electricity was already limited. A 72-year-old woman in Gaza told a reporter last January, "It is hard to imagine, but we used to experience 24 hours of electricity each day in Gaza; [now we are lucky if we get six.](#)"

Water was already unavailable except by expensive purchases from Israeli water companies. And food has long been scarce — by the age of two, 20 percent of Gaza's children are already stunted.

Now that long-running siege is much worse.

On October 9, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant called for a "total siege" of Gaza. "No electricity, no food, no water, no gas — it's all closed," he said. For Gaza's already impoverished and malnourished population, that's not just collective punishment — it's genocide.

Hospitals will be unable to treat patients. Families will starve or die of thirst.

Gallant is transforming an existing long-term risk of early death into an immediate, lethal threat. It's a policy consciously and specifically designed to kill innocent children, babies, elders — everyone.

Human rights experts, UN officials, faith leaders, and others have warned for years that the systemic oppression [rights groups now identify as apartheid](#) would one day be too much to stand. Resistance would be inevitable.

For decades, Palestinian resistance has taken overwhelmingly non-violent forms. But the world didn't hear — or if it heard, it didn't answer. When the UN warned in 2012 and 2015 that by 2020 Gaza would be "[unlivable](#)" without a "herculean effort" by the international community, the world didn't respond.

This time the resistance took a violent form, including Hamas targeting civilians in horrifying and illegal ways. Those illegitimate acts must be condemned. But if we're serious about preventing violence — all violence — we need to remember they didn't come out of nowhere.

We need to change the conditions from which this brutality sprang.

Sending more bombs, warplanes, guns, and bullets won't solve the problem. We've been providing Israel billions of our tax dollars — [supplying 20 percent of Israel's entire military budget](#) — for years. And we've done it without putting any conditions on an Israeli military that's enforced a brutal siege and is [indiscriminately bombing Gaza today](#).

That must end. We also need to stop protecting Israel from being held accountable in the International Criminal Court, and we need to stop vetoing virtually every UN resolution criticizing Israeli violations of human rights.

None of those things makes any attacks on civilians legal or morally acceptable. And Hamas's cruelty must not be used to justify more brutality against millions of innocent Gazans, [half of whom are under 19](#) and have lived through at least five Israeli wars already.

We need an immediate ceasefire right now. And we need to hold our own government accountable — which includes stopping Washington's enabling of Israel's oppression of Palestinians.

Palestinians have been paying the price for this apartheid system for generations. In the recent attacks, innocent Israelis paid a huge price for that system as well. It's time to end it.

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P.S.

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