



SETTLER COLONIALISM IN PALESTINE: STRUCTURES OF VIOLENCE AND INJUSTICE

ARTICLE

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Israeli settler colonialism and military occupation established the foundations of intractable conflicts in the region, becoming a model for contemporary colonial behaviour, and a root cause for the continuation of conflicts, tyranny, and violation of rights. Despite the grave violations of laws, treaties, and international norms, Israeli colonialism received exceptional Western support. SCPR reviews the multiple roots of conflict established by the occupation, which did not start with the recent genocidal warfare in Gaza in October 2023 and will not end there.

EXPANSIONIST OCCUPATION

The establishment of the state of Israel at the expense of the Palestinians was only possible through the support of the already existing British colonial project in Palestine and the region long before 1947. Israel has pursued a strategy of expansion through wars and annexation of lands,^{1,2} participated in the invasion of Egypt in 1956, the occupation of the rest of Palestine, Golan, and Sinai in 1967, and the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The military actions against the Palestinian people and neighbouring countries never ceased throughout this period including the assaults of 1993, 2000, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021, and 2022, with the latest being what we are witnessing today in Gaza. The occupation and belligerent wars were enabled by global power asymmetries, where hegemony is exerted by the use of force and disregard for international laws and humanitarian values.

MILITARIZATION OF THE STATE AND SOCIETY

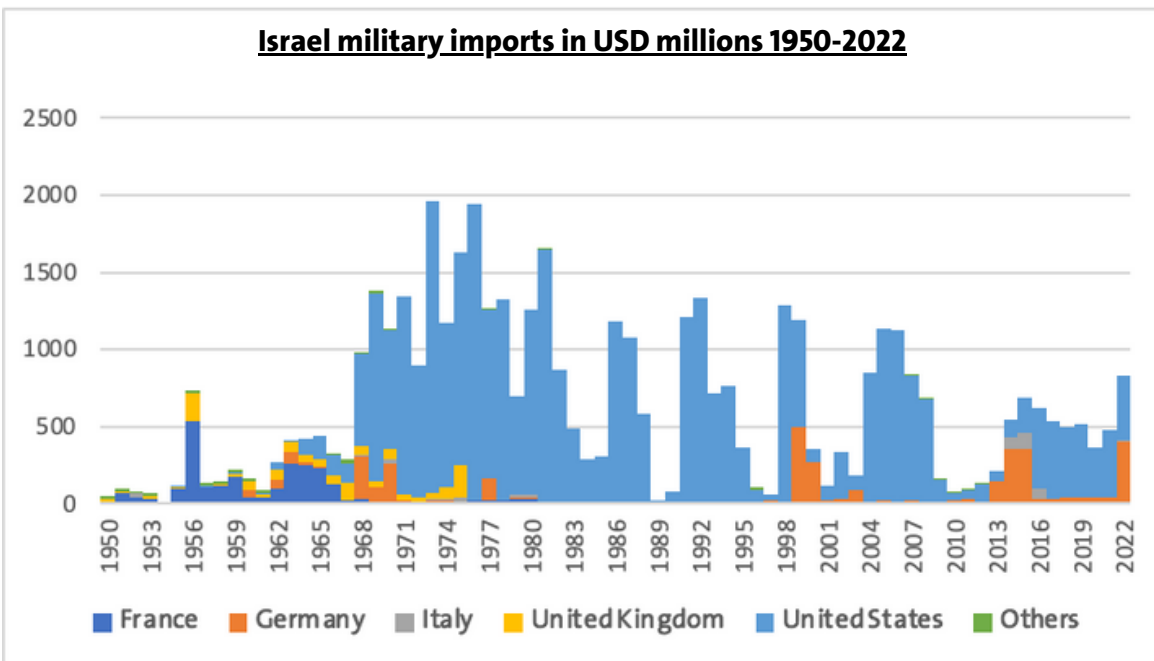
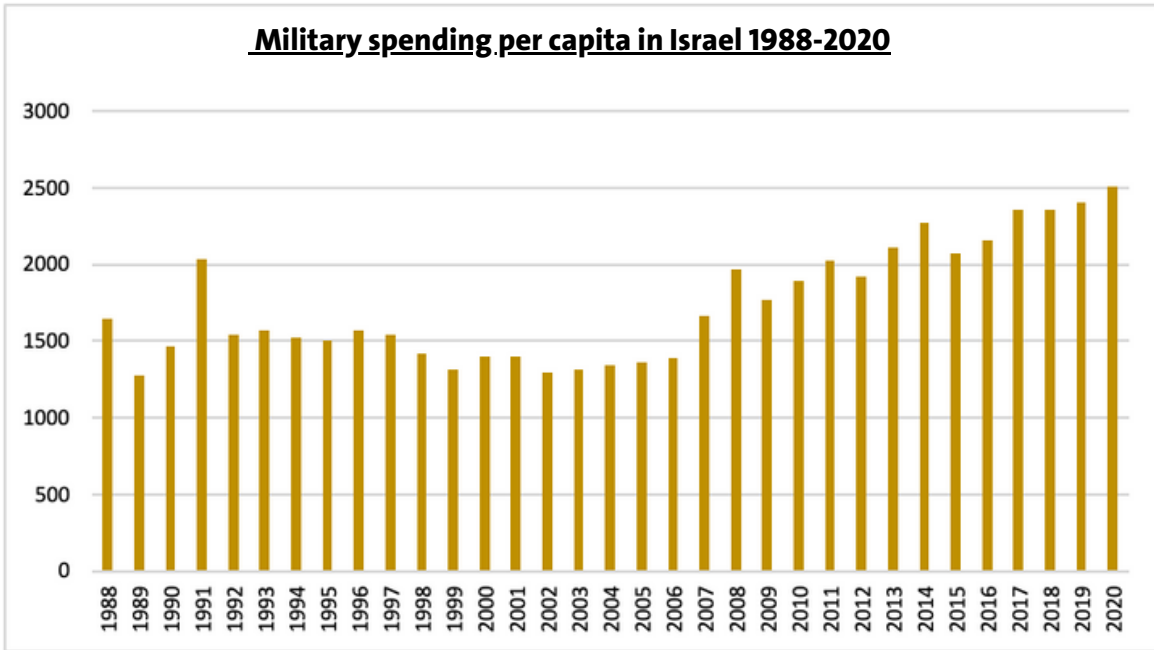
Israeli settler colonialism adopted a strategy of imposing its hegemony through military force. Extremist militias were the backbone of the state establishment in 1947, and the military was the central institution in the subsequently established occupying state. Military imperatives and forces dominated the decision-making process. It also worked on militarizing society and mobilizing it against the native inhabitants of the land. The centrality of the military in Israel had a contagion effect. Since independence regional powers have prioritized militarism "to face the danger from the expansionist occupation." Therefore, the belligerence and violations committed by Israel exacerbated the rule of military forces in neighbouring countries.³

[1] Masalha, N. (2000). Introduction. In *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion*. (pp. 1–27). Pluto Press.

[2] UN Meeting Coverage. (2023). [Settlement Expansion in Occupied Palestinian Territory Violates International Law, Must Cease, Many Delegates Tell Security Council](#)

[3] Elbadawi, Ibrahim and Samir Makdisi. (2007). [Democracy in the Arab world: Explaining the deficit](#).

The military establishment formed the backbone of Israel’s political authority, with most of its political leaders having military backgrounds. The military’s dominance is reflected through its centrality as a main pillar of the economy, as Israel ranked first globally in per capita military spending.⁴ Israel is also among the top ten arms exporting countries in the world between 1960-2022, with its share of global arms exports rising from 0.4 per cent (1960-1999) to 2.3 per cent (2000-2022). In recent years, Israel has been exporting surveillance and control technologies, including spyware on communications, marketing itself to authoritarian and democratic powers as a producer of the latest repression technologies globally. Israel is also among the top ten arms importing countries in the world (1950-2022), with Western countries, specifically the United States (85 per cent), Germany, and France being the prominent arms suppliers to Israel,⁵ including enabling it to possess nuclear weapons.



Source: SIPRI 2023 Military Expenditure Database, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

[4] Stockholm International Peace Institute. (2023). *SIPRI databases*.

[5] *Ibid*

POLITICIZATION OF IDENTITY AND COLONIZATION

The emergence of Israel and its politicization of religious identity coincided with the Arab states gaining independence and forming their national states post-World War II. Today, such politicization is one of the most dangerous drivers of contemporary conflict in the region. Religious narratives like "Promised Land" and "Israel's borders from the Euphrates to the Nile"⁶ were adopted to justify the state's establishment. The Zionist movement leveraged the victimization of Jews in Europe to rally support for protecting Jews from the "Arab and Islamic danger." Investing in ethnicity and religious beliefs while fostering racist and terrorist behaviour linked to exacerbated identity conflicts and hate speech. Both right-wing and left-wing Israeli currents utilized religious discourse, escalating fanaticism among Israelis themselves, with extremists reaching high governmental positions. The result of such discourses was continued justification for the usurping of Palestinian lands and settlement construction.⁷ Since the 1980s, Israel prominently intensified the use of identity, influenced by migration waves from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, and the significant growth of a more fanatic population.⁸ Occupation governments focused on the "Jewish" narrative of the state,⁹ and in 2018, the Knesset passed a constitutional law affirming Israel as the "national state of the Jewish people," declaring the right to self-determination within these lands as exclusive to the Jewish people and establishing "Jewish settlement" as a national value.¹⁰ Commenting on the 2005 citizenship law amendment, then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated, "No need to hide behind security arguments. There is a need for a Jewish state."

In March 2019, Netanyahu, now Prime Minister, declared, "Israel is not a state of all its citizens," but "the national state of the Jewish people only."¹¹ The politicization of religious identity was associated with the expansion of settlement.

In July 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 1967 noted that Israeli occupation is characterized by settlement expansion aimed at permanently changing the ethnic demographic composition of East Jerusalem, rising to the level of a war crime. Previously, in December 2016, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution reiterating that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories violate international law. Similar conclusions were reached by an International Inquiry Commission in September 2022, stating that Israeli government policies and actions led to the permanent occupation and effective annexation of Palestinian territories, likely constituting crimes under international law, including war crimes. Both the Commission and the Special Rapporteur noted that this ongoing coercive environment prevents Palestinians from exercising their right to self-determination among other fundamental human rights.¹²

[6] Torah, Genesis 15: 18.

[7] Le Monde. (2022). [The third political force in Israel represents what we must reluctantly call 'Jewish fascism'](#)

[8] Goldberg, J. J. (1997). [Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment](#). Basic Books.

[9] Mansour, C. (2018). [Israel's Nation-State Law](#). Retrieved

[10] Human Rights Watch. (2021). [A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution](#)

[11] Ibid

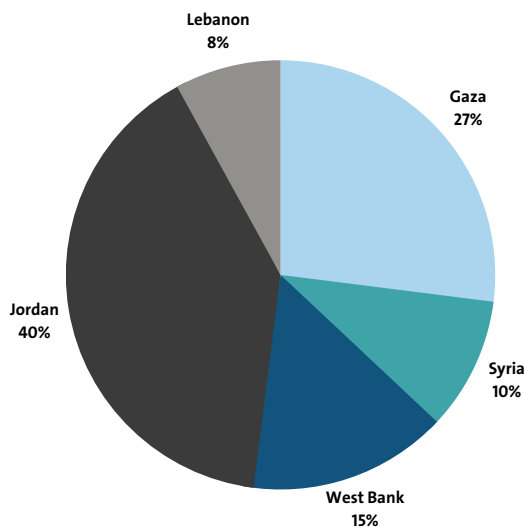
[12] The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. (2023). [Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Population at Risk](#).

APARTHEID AND MASS FORCED DISPLACEMENT

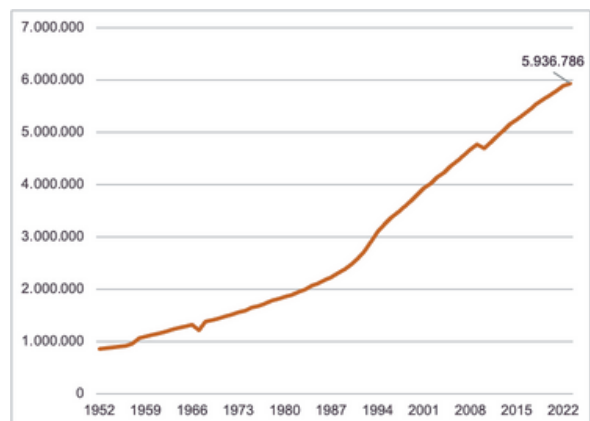
The occupation introduced a model of Apartheid through systematic discrimination based on ethnicity/religion in its most dangerous forms, including the violation of the rights to life and protection, forcible displacement, arbitrary arrest, deprivation of basic life necessities, confiscation of properties and lands, construction of separation walls, and the siege of millions over decades. This is a crime against humanity under international law, and the occupation's behaviour did not change post-peace agreements but instead encircled the West Bank and besieged Gaza.¹³⁻¹⁴ According to a March 2022 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Israeli political regime in the occupied Palestinian land meets the prevailing evidence standard for the crime of apartheid.¹⁵

During the Nakba in 1948, over 700,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced, and more than 400 Palestinian villages were destroyed. Between 1949 and 1966, Israeli occupation authorities placed most remaining Palestinians under military rule, confined them to dozens of pockets, and required them to obtain permits for movement. Since then, the occupation government established a two-tiered legal and political system providing comprehensive rights for Jewish Israeli settlers, while imposing military rule and control over Palestinians without any basic protections or rights under international law. The occupation government engaged in regular brutal practices like killing, torture, deprivation of basic human rights, arbitrary arrest, and collective punishment. In 1967, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced once again, forming the longest-lasting example of forced displacement due to violence since World War II. Seventy-five years after the onset of mass displacement of Palestinians, around 5.94 million Palestinians hold refugee status.¹⁶ The occupation refuses any negotiations regarding the right of return for Palestinian refugees to cities and villages from which they were displaced.

Distribution of Palestine refugees during the first half of 2023 (per cent)



Number of Palestine Refugees (1952 - first half 2023)



Source: UNHCR. (2023) Refugee Data Finder, and UNRWA. (2023). UNRWA Registered Population Dashboard

[13] Amnesty International. (2022). [ISRAEL'S APARTHEID AGAINST PALESTINIANS](#).

[14] Human Rights Watch. (2021). [A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution](#).

[15] The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. (2023). [Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Population at Risk](#).

[16] Migration Policy Institute. (2023). [Generations of Palestinian Refugees Face Protracted Displacement and Dispossession](#).

Palestinian refugees have dispersed across the region, with their numbers multiplying several times. Jordan has taken in the largest share of Palestinian refugees, numbering 2.38 million in the first half of 2023 (about 40 per cent of the total Palestinian refugees). While 584 thousand Palestinian refugees live in Syria (10 per cent of the total refugees), 490 thousand live in Lebanon (8 per cent of the total refugees), around 1.58 million in Gaza (27 per cent of the total refugees), and 905 thousand in the West Bank (15 per cent of the total refugees). Israel seeks to displace the remaining Palestinians in the occupied territories to Egypt or Jordan as part of the "alternative homeland" strategy, and during the recent war on Gaza, expressed this strategy by seeking to displace the people of Gaza to Egypt. In this war, the number of internally displaced persons in the Gaza Strip between October 7 and October 26, 2023, has exceeded one million displaced, 640 thousand of them are residing in shelters managed by UNRWA, which are operating at more than 12 times their capacity.¹⁷ The displaced were targeted by shelling in all areas including hospitals, schools, and 40 per cent of the residential buildings in Gaza were destroyed by October 26.

VIOLATION OF LIFE, RIGHTS, AND DIGNITY

The occupying authorities have carried out systematic violations of Palestinians' rights, categorized as genocidal crimes through systematic killing,¹⁸ in addition to arbitrary detention, displacement, humiliation, and collective punishments like deprivation of food, water, and medicine, considered crimes against humanity¹⁹ Palestinians regularly face violence by Israeli settlers, including physical assaults, live ammunition firing, burning of fields, theft, and property vandalism. Israeli security forces also launch widespread attacks against Palestinians, often leading to deadly escalations, including regular aerial bombardment of the Gaza Strip. Israel has turned the Palestinian self-rule as per Oslo agreements in the West Bank and Gaza into an open-air prison, where rights and properties are confiscated, mobility is restricted,²⁰ and arbitrary detentions occur. The occupation has also frozen all negotiations related to the two-state solution.

The aerial, maritime, and land blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza since 2007 remains in place, imposing collective punishment on over two million Palestinians. Israeli authorities regularly close the crossings to Gaza, preventing the flow of people, medical cases, and essential goods, including food items, to maintain permanent occupation at the expense of the rights of the Palestinian people.

During October 2023, Gaza witnessed one of the most brutal Israeli attacks in terms of extensive destruction of homes, infrastructure, hospitals, schools, and places of worship, with direct targeting of civilians, displacing hundreds of thousands, and depriving them of energy, food, and fuel, in what constitutes a complete genocidal crime. The number of victims exceeded 7028 people from October 7 to October 26, 2023, including 2913 children, in addition to 397 elderly, and 1709 women. More than 18484 people were injured, and 1650 missing were reported, including 940 children.²¹

[17] UNRWA. (2023, 27 Oct). [UNRWA Situation Report #16 on the Situation in the GAZA Strip and the WEST BANK.](#)

[18] Center for Constitutional Rights (2016). [The Genocide of the Palestinian People: An International Law and Human Rights Perspective](#)

[19] Human Rights Watch. (2021). [A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution](#)

[20] Ibid

[21] UNRWA. (2023, 27 Oct). [UNRWA Situation Report #16 on the Situation in the GAZA Strip and the WEST BANK.](#)

The occupying authorities have adopted policies to confront what they have described as the "demographic threat" posed by Palestinians. These policies include limiting the population and political authority of Palestinians, granting voting rights only to Palestinians living within the borders of Israel as established from 1948 to June 1967, and limiting the ability of Palestinians to move to Israel from the occupied Palestinian territories or from anywhere else to Israel or the occupied Palestinian territories. Other steps are taken to ensure Jewish dominance, including the state's policy of "separating" Palestinians between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, preventing the movement of people and goods within the occupied Palestinian territories, and "Judaizing" areas with a large Palestinian population, including Jerusalem as well as Galilee and the Negev in Israel.²²

WESTERN "DEMOCRATIC" SUPPORT

As mentioned earlier, British colonialism facilitated the establishment of a homeland for Jews in Palestine to export the "Jewish issue" from Western countries. Later, support for Israel was in response to and in compensation for Nazi atrocities, something which came at the expense of the Palestinian people and replaced self-accountability in Europe. Western countries sponsored the establishment of the state of Israel and provided it with exceptional political, military, and economic support. The United States has led the support for the occupation through military aid and utilizing its position as a permanent member of the Security Council by using its veto power to nullify dozens of resolutions condemning occupation violations.²³

At the level of material aid, the total amount provided by the United States alone to the Israeli occupation in the period 1946-2023 (excluding support related to the October 2023 war) amounted to about 260 billion US dollars at real prices (158.7 billion at current prices), 78 per cent of which is military aid.²⁴ The United States imposes no restrictions on the use of aid in practices fundamentally contradicting democratic principles, such as the continued occupation of Palestinian and Syrian lands, settlement expansion, demolition of Palestinian homes, and other practices that consolidate the occupation. Similarly, the occupying state enjoyed exceptional treatment by the European Union and was classified as a "special case" by the European Council concerning its strategic relations with the Union countries. This allowed Israel to benefit from preferential treatment in trade exchanges and economic transactions. Following this, a broader partnership agreement was signed in 1995 covering various sectors including agricultural, industrial, military, and even scientific research cooperation.²⁵

[22] Human Rights Watch. (2021). [A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution](#)

[23] United Nations Security Council. [Security Council Veto List in reverse chronological order from 16 Feb 1946 to 25 Oct 2023](#).

[24] Congressional Research Service. (2023). [U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel](#). United States Congress

[25] Plessix, C. (2011). [The European Union and Israel: A lasting and ambiguous "special" relationship](#).

Western countries have not only supported the Israeli government but have also gone further to combat anyone who tries to oppose this support or calls for holding the occupation accountable for its continuous violations of international law and its disregard for international humanitarian law. Among these practices are threats of imposing political and economic sanctions against countries that vote against Israel in United Nations institutions and withdrawal from UN institutions or halting funding to them due to their decisions that are unsatisfactory to Israel.²⁶ Additionally, in a clear contradiction to freedom of expression, which is one of the essential pillars of democracy and which is constantly boasted about in Western countries, the United States and many European countries (like Germany, the United Kingdom and France) have criminalized boycott movements calling for the boycott of Israeli settlement products as they are produced in occupied territories in blatant violation of international law.²⁷

The continuous and steady Western support for the Israeli occupation clearly empowers Israeli practices that contradict international laws, solidifying its image as a state above the law. This not only undermines the credibility of United Nations laws and institutions, but also fuels conflicts in the Arab region and normalizes “Israel state terrorism”, in addition to depriving the Palestinian people of their fundamental rights especially their basic right to live on their land within a fully sovereign Palestinian state.

"COLONIAL" KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Recently, awareness of the colonial origins of knowledge production has increased, and there has been increased critique of how such knowledge production including theories, frameworks, and cognitive tools reinforces inequality and exploitation on the international level. However, Israel as a direct colonizer of Palestine is an obvious exception that is often overlooked. One example of biased indices can be seen when international indicators on democracy, governance, and development present Israel as a democratic and developed state, with almost complete disregard for the system of apartheid, and its occupation, massacres, torture, and displacement. For example, the World Bank's global governance indicators rank Israel at 38, 28, 30, and 66 out of 213 countries in the areas of rule of law, quality of legislation, government effectiveness, and expression and accountability respectively for the period 2015-2022.²⁸ The Economist ranks Israel 29 out of 167 countries in the Democracy Index.²⁹ Also, the International Sustainable Competitiveness Index places governance in Israel at rank 23 out of 183 countries.³⁰ Freedom House classifies Israel as a free country and ranks it 58 out of 211 countries in the field of political freedoms.³¹ Such marginalization of the rights of Palestinians indicates a clear and persistent distortion in the methodologies of knowledge-producing institutions and undermines Western discourse on human rights and democracy.

[26] جيم الدعم الأمر بكي وأثره على الأمن القومي الإسرائيلي: 1967-2019، مركز القدس للدراسات (2022).

[27] Orient XXI, Bauduin Loos. (2023, 28 July). [The Criminalization of Solidarity with Palestine Is Gaining Ground in Europe.](#)

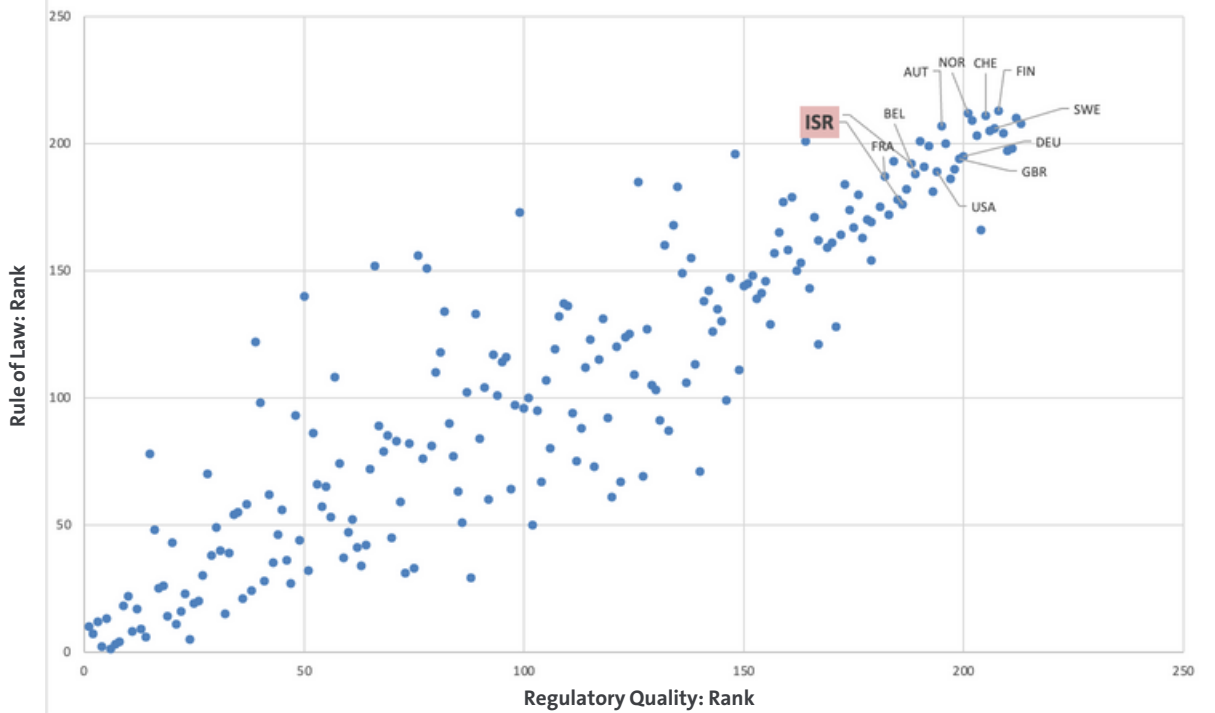
[28] World Bank. (2023). [Worldwide Governance Indicators – Data Bank.](#)

[29] Economist Intelligence Unit. (2023). [Democracy Index 2022.](#)

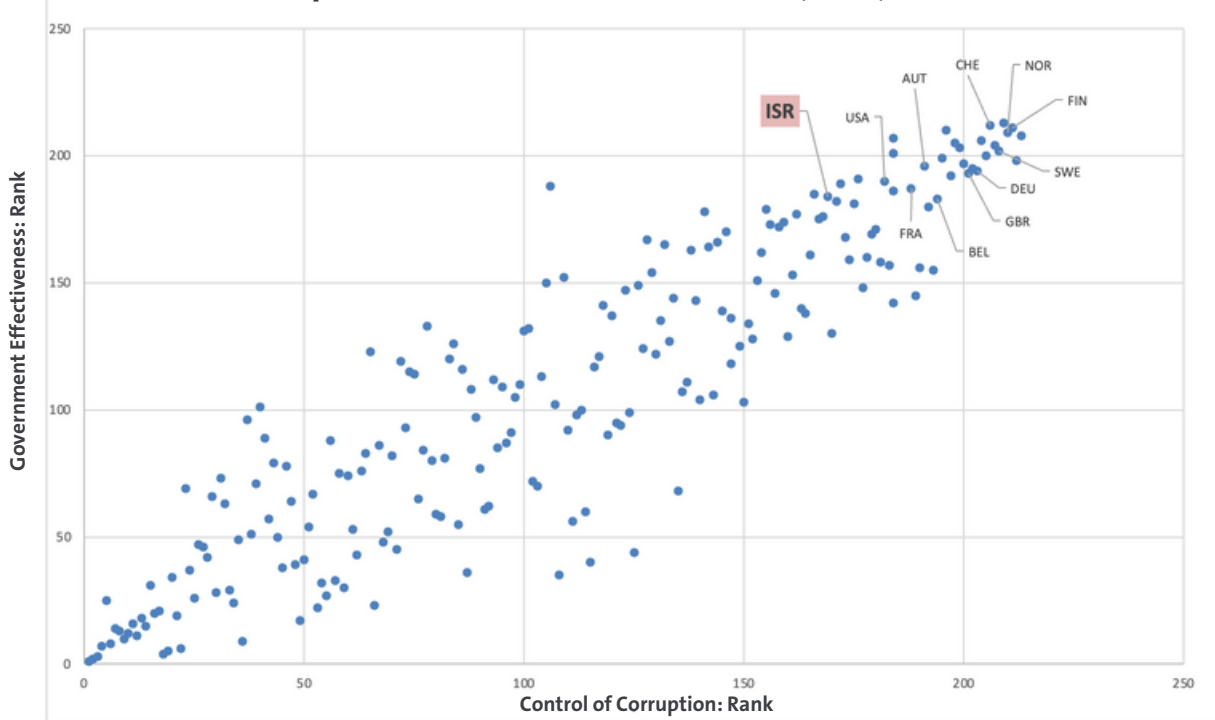
[30] SolAbility Sustainable Intelligence. (2022). [The Global Sustainable Competitiveness Index.](#)

[31] Freedom House. (2023). [Global Freedom Status.](#)

Regulatory Quality vs. Rule of Law (Rank) 2015-2022



Corruption vs. Government Effectiveness (Rank) 2015-2022



Source: World Bank's Global Governance Indicators 2023.

The conflict drivers created by the occupying state and its supporting nations will continue to undermine the pillars of the region's countries, leading to injustice and dominance, with the latest example being the genocide campaign carried out by Israel in Gaza. The "Israeli exception" undermines human rights discourse and threatens global normalization, while violating international legitimacy. Dismantling the system of war and destruction can only be achieved through a radical change in the approach to the Palestinian issue and dismantling the Israeli system of apartheid and colonialism.