

Comparing Palestinians to Ukrainians Stokes Dangerous Narrative

As millions flee war-torn Ukraine, anti-Israel activists attempt to hijack their suffering. These activists are comparing the plight of Ukrainians to that of Palestinians, and in doing so, they are not only distorting reality, but are also minimizing the struggles of both groups.

From the latter 20th century until today, the world had gotten used to relative tranquility. Minus small conflicts and incursions, the world had not yet been exposed to a major interstate war between bordering nations. That all changed on Feb. 24, 2022.

As Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the international community has largely rallied behind the people of Ukraine and their president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Russia has been on the receiving end of a great deal of criticism and backlash. Many states and large corporations are currently either sanctioning or boycotting Russia, and civilians have even begun to take matters into their own hands; anti-war protests are assembling throughout the world, social media platforms are flooded with Ukrainian flags, international sports competitions have started barring Russian athletes from competing, and bars are dumping Russian vodka and renaming Moscow Mules to Kyiv Mules.

Unfortunately, as support continues to grow for boycotts and sanctions against Russia, many anti-Israel activists are attempting to hijack the movement by calling for an extension of these boycotts to the democratic state of Israel. In fact, anytime a popular resistance narrative surfaces, anti-Zionist activists appropriate the narrative to demonize Israel, even

if it means propagating misrepresentations.

During the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, many activists compared police brutality and systemic racism against Black people in the United States to Israel's supposed treatment of the Palestinians. Similarly, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa has been arrogated to claim that Israel, the only true pluralistic and democratic state in the Near East, is a modern-day apartheid state. Most recently, Gigi Hadid, an outspoken anti-Zionist, was featured in *Vogue* magazine promising to send her proceeds to Ukraine since Ukrainians are currently experiencing "the same in Palestine."

Comparing Ukraine to Palestine, Kyiv to Gaza or Russia to Israel is not only ignorant and inaccurate, but also incredibly dangerous.

The Gaza Strip is currently run by Hamas, an internationally recognized Palestinian terrorist organization that started in the late 20th century. In 2005, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in efforts to make peace with the Palestinians.

In 2006, Palestinian legislative elections were held, and Hamas won a majority of the seats. In 2007, however, Hamas forcefully took over the Gaza Strip, removed political dissidents and established a fundamentalist dictatorship that rules to this day.

On the contrary, according to the International Election Observer Mission, Ukraine has held free and fair elections since 2004, including President Zelenskyy's election in 2019. Moreover, Hamas has been vocal about its desire for Israel's destruction and therefore has indiscriminately launched thousands of rockets toward Israeli civilian areas and started several wars with Israel, most recently in May of 2021.

Israel has an undeniable right to defend itself from these attacks, which is something Ukraine's leader has agreed with

in the past. During his inauguration speech, President Zelenskyy stated that Ukraine must become like “Israelis in defending our land.” Yet, instead of invading Gaza, Israel has tried making peace with Palestinian leaders for decades, constantly being rejected time and time again. The bottom line is this: Ukraine does not pose a security threat to Russia like Hamas poses to Israel, Ukraine has not launched terrorist attacks against Russian civilians, and Ukraine has kept the door open for negotiations to end the war.

As the world makes calls to boycott, divest and sanction Russia, it is important to remember that while these measures are a means to pressure Putin to end his invasion of Ukraine, the boycotting and sanctioning against Israel are synonymous with calls to dismantle Israel as a Jewish state.

Omar Barghouti, the co-founder of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement, has admitted that no Palestinian will ever accept a Jewish state in any part of Palestine. It is also important to note that Zelenskyy, who is proudly Jewish, has historically had a good relationship with Israel. As a result, Israel has mediated peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, and Zelenskyy publicly thanked Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett for trying to help broker an end to the war.

Continuing to let anti-Israel activists hijack this narrative will only continue to stoke the fire of antisemitism and will not advance us closer to peace. It is time to say enough.
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