

“Stand Your Ground” but Only for Some: The U.S. Double Standard on Self-Defense and the Palestinian Struggle

If someone breaks into your home, do you have the right to defend yourself?

In the United States, the answer is unequivocal: **yes**. Across dozens of states, “Stand Your Ground” laws allow individuals to use deadly force to protect their property and life - even in public, and even when retreat is an option. Yet when Palestinians, whose land has been occupied and homes demolished for over seven decades, attempt to resist that ongoing violence, they are not only denied the same moral consideration - they are branded **terrorists**. This contradiction lies at the heart of one of the most glaring hypocrisies in modern international politics.

Historical Context: The Colonial Roots of the Conflict

The injustice did not begin in 1967 or 2000 or 2023. In the late 19th century, amid the rise of European nationalism and antisemitism, the **Zionist movement** emerged with the goal of creating a Jewish homeland. In 1897, the **First Zionist Congress** formally declared its intent to establish this homeland in **Palestine**, then part of the Ottoman Empire. At the time, Palestine was home to a predominantly Arab population, and Hebrew was used primarily as a **liturgical language**, not a spoken one. Jewish presence was minimal, limited to small agricultural settlements and scattered communities.

Everything changed with the rise of fascism in Europe. In the 1930s and 1940s, as Jews fled Nazi persecution, tens of thousands immigrated to **British-mandated Palestine**, creating a dramatic demographic shift. Tensions exploded. Jewish paramilitary groups like **Irgun** and **Lehi** (Stern Gang) carried out acts that would today be classified as **terrorism**: bombing Arab markets, assassinating British officials, and executing attacks like the bombing of the **King David Hotel** in 1946, which killed 91 people. They even assassinated **Lord Moyne**, the British Minister of State in Cairo, and bombed the **British Embassy in Rome**.

These campaigns of violence helped render British rule untenable. In 1947, Britain handed over the mandate to the **newly formed United Nations**, which proposed a partition plan. Despite comprising **only 30% of the population** and owning **just 7% of the land**, the Jewish population was awarded **56% of Palestine**. Zionist militias, unsatisfied with this, launched a violent campaign to expel as many Palestinians as possible. The result was the **Nakba** - or “catastrophe” - during which **more than 750,000 Palestinians were expelled**, and **over 500 villages were destroyed** to create the new State of Israel.

International Law and the Right to Resist Occupation

Under international law, the Israeli presence in the **West Bank, East Jerusalem**, and previously **Gaza** is considered a **military occupation** - a legal status with specific obligations. The **Fourth Geneva Convention** and the **Hague Regulations** explicitly prohibit:

- The **permanent acquisition of occupied land**,
- The **transfer of an occupier's population** into the occupied territory (i.e., settlements),
- And the **exploitation of natural resources** for the benefit of the occupier.

The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** reaffirmed this in 2004, stating that the Israeli wall and settlements were illegal, and that Israel was in breach of international obligations. The **occupying power** is obligated to protect the **civilian population**, not to subject it to military law, home demolitions, curfews, and apartheid-style movement restrictions.

Moreover, international law recognizes the right of peoples under **colonial domination and foreign occupation to resist**, including through armed struggle. **UN General Assembly Resolutions 3246 (1974)** and **37/43 (1982)** affirm the:

“Legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for independence, territorial integrity, and liberation from colonial and foreign domination by all available means, including armed struggle.”

This is not a carte blanche for violence - resistance must still comply with international humanitarian law - but it affirms that **the right to resist occupation is legal**. Yet Palestinians exercising this right are almost always labeled **terrorists**, while the occupying power receives military aid and diplomatic cover.

The Ongoing Nakba: Ethnic Cleansing by Other Means

While the Nakba is often remembered as a one-time event in 1948, it is in reality an **ongoing process**. Today, over **7 million Palestinians** remain **refugees or internally displaced**, denied their internationally recognized **right of return**, affirmed in **UN Resolution 194**. Israel continues to enforce this denial, even as it grants automatic citizenship to Jews from anywhere in the world under its **Law of Return** - regardless of whether they or their ancestors ever lived in Palestine.

In the **occupied West Bank**, the process of displacement is active and intensifying. Armed Israeli settlers routinely carry out **pogrom-style attacks** on Palestinian villages, destroy crops, block roads, burn homes, and assault families - often under the protection or indifference of the Israeli military. These attacks are not isolated or rogue actions; they are part of a broader state-sanctioned strategy of **incremental ethnic cleansing** aimed at erasing Palestinian presence from the land.

In **2024**, the **International Court of Justice** issued a historic opinion declaring that:

- All **Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal**,
- Israel must **vacate and dismantle** them,
- And must **compensate Palestinians** for property destroyed and land stolen.

Israel has **ignored this ruling**, and instead accelerated settlement construction. The United States - despite its supposed commitment to international law - has continued to offer **unconditional military and political support**, shielding Israel from meaningful consequences.

The U.S. Double Standard on Self-Defense

Nowhere is this hypocrisy more glaring than when comparing American domestic policy to its foreign policy.

Across the U.S., **Stand Your Ground laws** allow citizens to use deadly force to defend themselves or their property. In many states, there is **no duty to retreat**, and courts often favor the narrative of self-defense even in questionable cases. American culture celebrates this principle as fundamental to liberty - the right to defend one's home, family, and land from any intruder.

But when Palestinians attempt to do precisely that - when they **stand their ground** against armed settlers, occupation forces, home demolitions, and land theft - they are not defended. They are **demonized**. They are called terrorists, targeted by drones, sanctioned, imprisoned without trial, and killed.

What does it say about American values when:

- A homeowner in Texas is celebrated for killing an unarmed trespasser,
- But a Palestinian farmer trying to protect his olive grove from settlers is labeled a militant and arrested?

This is not a failure of logic; it is a function of **political expediency**. The U.S. does not universally defend the right to self-defense - it defends that right **when it aligns with its strategic interests**, and **denies it when it threatens them**.

This selective morality allows Israel to carry out a decades-long campaign of dispossession while presenting itself as the victim - and for Palestinians to be rendered stateless, voiceless, and criminalized for resisting.

Conclusion: A Mirror to American Values

The United States cannot continue to claim the mantle of justice, law, and self-defense while **funding, arming, and defending an apartheid regime** that openly defies international law and violently suppresses an indigenous population.

If **self-defense** is a right, it must be recognized as a right for all people - **not just for settlers in Florida, but for shepherds in Hebron**; not just for suburban homeowners, but for refugees living under siege in Gaza.

Until the U.S. aligns its foreign policy with the same principles it claims to uphold domestically, it will remain complicit in the very injustice it claims to abhor.

The Nakba continues. And so does the struggle to stand one's ground.