



ISRAEL'S RELENTLESS LAND GRABS: HOW PALESTINIANS RESIST

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It has been 42 years since the Israeli police shot and killed six Palestinian citizens of Israel as they protested the expropriation of Palestinian land. The protests were a result of collective action to resist not only Israel's land seizures but also its policies of erasing the presence of Palestinians. March 30, 1976 has since been known as Land Day, and the fact that 2018 also marks 70 years since the Nakba – the loss of the Palestinian homeland and the creation of the state of Israel – adds to its significance this year. “The Great March of Return” organized in Gaza last month aimed to commemorate Land Day and to link it with the right of return of the Palestinian refugees. The fact that triple the number of those killed on the original Land Day were killed this year highlights how Palestinian resistance is deemed just as much as a threat as it was over four decades ago.

In settler colonial projects the main outcome is a rearrangement of physical spaces and indigenous people – a rearrangement that is neither peaceful nor passive, but constitutes a violent restructuring to make way for a new society with new social and spatial organization. In 1948 Zionists, in a settler colonial project, expelled 750,000 Palestinians. The 150,000 that stayed on the land had to be incorporated as citizens, yet they [remained excluded](#) on the basis that they were not Jewish.

In the early years after 1948, Israel utilized various mechanisms to appropriate land, including legislative measures. Israel's justifications – then and now – for seizing the land are the acquisition of it for public use and the preservation of the Jewish character of the state.

Since Israel's occupation of the West Bank in 1967, various “legal” mechanisms and military orders have similarly facilitated the colonization of Palestinian land. These include the expropriation of land in the name of security, through which Israel has seized land for at least [42 settlements](#), and the use of an [Ottoman and British Mandate law](#) that allows the state to confiscate land for a “public purpose.”

Today, the expropriation of Palestinian land is accelerating at an astonishing speed. Political maneuverings in Jerusalem have recently highlighted this crisis as the Israeli government capitalizes on the US administration's disregard for international law. The US decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem has emboldened Israel to cement its complete control over the city.

In the face of this history, Palestinians have long engaged in acts of what some have termed [spatial resistance](#) – practices that affirm Palestinian presence and continuity on the land and challenge Israeli colonization. These include erecting Palestinian tent “villages” that assert Palestinian ownership of the land and challenge its ongoing confiscation, and maintaining a presence – long-term or temporary – at sites of destroyed villages.

Policy Recommendations

Palestinians engaged in grassroots activities should continue to link local struggles and call for coordination across the Green Line. Palestinians should also demand international and third party support and protection for these activities. International actors that have invested in infrastructure in Palestinian communities that Israel has destroyed should demand financial compensation.

Third states must use all possible measures to suppress Israeli violations as defined by international law, including supporting submissions of reported war crimes to the International Criminal Court, such as [the one submitted in 2017](#) by Palestinian civil society organizations; demanding an extensive and formal probe into Israeli violations, such as [the one called for by Human Rights Watch in 2016](#); and instituting and enforcing sanctions – a mechanism used against Russia for its annexation of [Crimea](#).

Efforts must also be made to retroactively challenge Israeli property and land theft that has occurred since 1948. Palestinians should organize a mass effort to research and formulate their claims building on and expanding existing resources.