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## From 'Defense' to Destruction: The Evolution of Zionist

### Aggression



Image by Emad El Byed.

The most significant recent escalation in the ongoing [Zionist real estate project](#), enabled by apartheid and [genocide](#) of the Palestinian people, occurred on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, when Hamas fighters broke through Gaza's prison fence, carrying out a bloody incursion on Israeli military installations and border towns. Since, the Israel "Defense" Forces (IDF) have engaged in the offensive flattening of Gaza, destruction of its infrastructure, extensive land seizure and elimination, torture and expulsion of its Palestinian population.

Meanwhile, [liberal Zionists](#) have been whitewashing these events, regurgitating fantasies of a “two-state solution” and ignoring widespread use of the [Hannibal Directive](#) while scapegoating Netanyahu as a bug rather than a [feature](#). Undeniably, Zionism remains a colonialist, white supremacist movement aimed at capitalist resource acquisition while appropriating Judaism.

Viewing this dynamic through a behavioral neuroscientific lens, which studies violence as an expression of defensive and offensive aggression, provides insight into the mechanisms of a deadly, escalating cycle of eliminatory force, its underlying motivations and associated propaganda. The genocidal [imperial practices](#) in Gaza constitute a blueprint for future aggressive actions in the Global South and for suppressing dissent within the imperial core. Thus, such an analysis may assist in identifying state criminality, fostering an improved process of truth and accountability *en route* to reconciliation, peace, and justice.

### **Defensive versus Offensive Aggression**

Vertebrates, including [humans](#), exhibit defensive reactions to mitigate danger and ensure survival. These behaviors involve the activation of similar brain structures and associated neurotransmitters, leading to the consensus that they are species-typical and consistent across species in form, function and triggers.

Defensive responsivity is influenced by several factors. Context plays a crucial role; an animal will typically flee a threat if [escape](#) is possible yet will freeze when trapped. The intensity of the stimulus is also important. Ambiguous stimuli trigger risk assessment behaviors, while clear and immediate threats trigger flight, avoidance, defensive threat and/or attack. The distance to the threat further influences defensive strategies; longer distances prompt avoidance, while shorter distances and contact lead to defensive threat and attack postures, collectively termed defensive aggression.

The primary objective of offensive aggression, as opposed to defensive aggression, is resource acquisition. Offensive aggression targets competitors and typically involves disputes over territory and access to assets crucial for evolutionary success. Notably, in many mammalian and primate groups, offensive aggression is employed to establish authority within a social hierarchy, where both dominant and subordinate roles are crucial for collective survival, making it typically non-lethal.

In contrast, defensive aggression, or ‘self-defense,’ is driven by the perceived intensity of the threat and can escalate to lethal force. Indeed, an analysis of fighting patterns in

animals reveals offensive aggression targets protected body areas to convey dominance, while defensive aggression targets vulnerable body sites.

An extrapolation to human social behavior reveals interesting parallels. Collective offensive aggression, aka war, a [far later](#), explicitly human development, as expressed by the acquisition and annexation of territory through conquest, is [prohibited by the UN charter](#) and establishment and expansion of settlements on such land is a violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. In contrast, [Article 51](#) of the UN Charter explicitly recognizes self-defense, including defensive aggression, as a right.

### **Jewish Defense**

The 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II, carried out by the revolutionary group *Narodnaya Volya* (“People’s Will”), triggered a surge in antisemitic sentiment and widespread pogroms.

In response to this onslaught of violence by antisemites, Jewish people defended themselves via the above outlined patterns. First, those who had the means and ability chose to escape, leaving for Western Europe, the Americas, Australia and other destinations. Second, many opted for avoidance, further self-segregating in Jewish communities – shtetls. Third, a minority chose defensive aggression, forming organized self-defense units aimed at repelling antisemitic attacks.

During this period, [many Jewish inhabitants](#) had become secular yet were not emancipated. Consequently, their understanding of antisemitism and its associated violence and trauma was modern, contrasting with the traditional Jewish belief that viewed oppression and hardship as divine punishment for sins.

Zionism, emerging amidst the rise of European colonial and nationalist movements and the imposition of the restrictive “May Laws” on land ownership in Jewish communities in the Russian Empire, recognized the potential in this dynamic. It presented an empowering vision of a “new Jew,” rejecting outdated beliefs perceived as passive and weak, including sole reliance on defense. Instead, Zionists advocated for an offensive response to oppression and adopted the antisemitic notion that Jews were responsible for their own suffering, promoting segregation and land acquisition in a new homeland as a solution.

### **Zionist Propaganda**

Nationalistic propaganda merges the perception of ‘self’ with that of ‘nation’ into a cohesive identity loyal to the ruling class. Zionist propaganda fused Jewish longing for safety with white supremacist, messianic and [fascistic ideologies](#) aimed at land theft.

Settler colonialism often relies on depicting targeted territories as inhabited by dehumanized, primitive barbarians unworthy of land. Contrary to the reality of an historically continuous Palestinian society with an educated and politically engaged urban elite and a flourishing web of rural communities, this portrayal allowed Zionists to displace Indigenous Palestinian people without moral qualms, framing the establishment of ‘Jewish only’ settlements as a divine right.

In this context, any threat to the manufactured Zionist collective became existential, used to justify an often-brutal, so-called ‘defensive’ response, which involved genocide of the Indigenous, Palestinian “other”.

In the movement’s early days, Zionists employed various settlement tactics in Palestine, leading to frequent clashes with Palestinian people. The causes of tension were typically land disputes, quarrels over pastureland, the use of spring water and wells, thefts and robberies. Consequently, Zionist self-defense militias were formed with the aim of protecting settlements on acquired lands.

The tangible rewards from Zionist offensive aggression – power and resources – in conjunction with increased Jewish migration encouraged by Zionists, the rise of antisemitism in Europe and the British Passfield White Paper (1930), which attempted to limit Jewish immigration and land purchases in Palestine and increased frequency of Arab rebellions, encouraged the various Zionist militias to transition increasingly to openly offensive tactics, such as the “[wall and watchtower](#)” doctrine.

Their goal was to secure as much land with as few Palestinians as possible, using offensive tactics in concert with propagandized Jewish victimhood, so-called deterrence and dehumanization of Palestinian people to justify the brutality afforded by defensive aggression, i.e. self-defense – the ability to respond to threat by any means necessary, including lethal force.

The concept of ‘self-defense’ carries entirely different meanings for the colonized and the colonizer. For the colonized, self is rooted in ancestral land, identity and resources. In contrast, the colonizer’s self is built on expansionism, a manufactured identity and stolen resources.

Indeed, the foremost Zionist militia which later transformed into the IDF was called “Haganah” – “defense” in Hebrew – and the settlers’ mission was outlined in three stages: ‘from survival to defense to struggle to war.’

This strategy culminated in the Palestinian *Nakba*, sanitized as the Israeli “war of independence” during which Israel, under the guise of ‘defense’, carried out mass expulsions, genocide and land grabs.

### **Atrocity Propaganda and Genocide**

While the events on October 7<sup>th</sup> were still unfolding, Zionist leaders within political, military and media echelons launched a propaganda campaign serving their established pattern of colonial genocide.

The campaign targeted Israeli citizenry with Zionist tropes aimed at fortifying a united front against Palestinian people, including their dehumanization by reinstatement of fear-conditioning with Jim Crow-style rape allegations and other fictitious horrors. This deliberate, malicious embroidery served to garner support for wide-scale eliminatory aggression branded as ‘self-defense,’ transforming the Israeli public’s shock into genocidal tribalism, diverting attention from Israel’s political, intelligence and military failures that enabled Hamas’s attack. Additionally, the campaign helped the government secure crucial public support for the mass mobilization of reserve units, paving the way for the subsequent full-scale ground invasion of the Gaza Strip accompanied by a host of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

While the underlying aim was consistent with historical Zionist criminality – the acquisition of the land of Gaza with as few Palestinian people as possible – the Israeli campaign sought to circumvent legal barriers to conquest by portraying the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks as an existential threat and defense of hostages which warranted defensive aggression. In this manner, and throughout much of Zionist history, Jewish victimhood was used as a tool of oppression, apartheid and genocide of Palestinians, while enriching Zionist leaders and their benefactor in Washington.

What began as an appeal to ‘self-defense’ has morphed into a military adventure with openly offensive aims and associated propaganda, including potential annexation of Gaza and possibly elsewhere, into Lebanon, whilst wallpapering over concurrent settler attacks and massive land heists in the occupied West Bank. ‘Self-defense’ has even been used as an excuse for torture.

Similarly, the state of Israel was instituted under the propagandized premise of ‘self-defense’, yet now as then, as its leaders threaten nuclear war in the Middle East and by extension the world, its offensive aggression is clear and criminal. In contrast, Palestinian people have the full right to defend themselves against Zionist aggression by any means necessary.

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