

Comparing and contrasting the Russia and Ukraine conflict with the Israel and Palestine conflict.

Out of all the current ongoing conflicts across the globe, there are two in particular, to have gained a huge amount of attention and notoriety from international news sources. Both Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022,¹ and Israel's militarized retaliation to the Hamas attacks in October of 2023,² are modern conflicts seeped in long histories of political disagreement and fighting, that have led to vast amounts of civilian casualties and humanitarian concerns in their regions. As these are two of the most well-known conflicts of the modern era, it is worth investigating the overlapping similarities and noticeable differences within their approaches, to further understand the state of modern warfare and how conflict is viewed globally.

On the 24th of February 2022, Russia made a military advance on neighbouring Ukraine and invaded the country.³ This came as a reasonable surprise to people around the world, as not only was an interstate war on this level uncommon to see in modern day Europe, but despite Ukraine not being a member of Nato, it was assumed that the likelihood of pushback from other western nations would be high.⁴ No matter what the response would be, the reality is that wars do not occur for no reason, and Russian leaders had their own set of reasoning for why they decided to take this course of action. Long standing territorial disputes, implied security threats⁵ and potential ambitions for future power, are all perceived as partial reasons for why Russia chose to invade Ukraine.⁶ And though the validity of these reasons is up to interpretation, it is certain that the conflict is driven by a complex history between the two countries, dating back to the fall of the Soviet Union. It can be speculated that Russia felt threatened by the ex-Soviet states, including Ukraine, growing close relationships with the EU and NATO.⁷ Prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia had already engaged in conflict with another former Soviet state, Georgia, in 2008, and then pushed for a referendum to annex the Crimea region of Ukraine in 2014.⁸ Russia justified these actions in both cases with the need to protect civilian life, specifically for humanitarian necessity in Georgia and the defence of Crimea's

¹ Pankaj C, Patel and Jack I, Richter, 'Self-Interest over Ethics: Firm Withdrawal from Russia After the Ukraine Invasion', *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol 199, (Germany: Springer Nature, 2025) p. 365.

² Muhammad, Abu, Salmiya, 'Stop the Gaza genocide immediately', *The Lancet*, vol 403, (London: Elsevier Limited, 2024), p. 2286.

³ Mykola, Kapitonenko, 'WHY DID RUSSIA INVADE UKRAINE? PLAUSIBLE THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS', *Strategic Panorama*, vol 2, (The National Institute for Strategic Studies, 2023) p. 6.

⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁷ Sofia, Cavandoli, and Gary, Wilson, 'Distorting Fundamental Norms of International Law to Resurrect the Soviet Union: The International Law Context of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine', *Netherlands International Law Review*, vol 69, (2022) p. 384.

⁸ Ibid., p. 385.

Russian speaking population in Ukraine,⁹ despite the underlying motive seeming to involve these countries distancing themselves from Russian influence.¹⁰

When establishing the origins of the most recent conflict between Israel and Palestine, it is important to acknowledge the long history that led up to this conflict. Just as the fall of the Soviet Union can be linked to the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, the conflict between Israel and Palestine did not begin when Hamas attacked the country on the 7th of October 2023.¹¹ The desire for the creation of a Jewish state has routes dating back over 100 years ago, and with European assistance, particularly British backed militarization, then further intervention from the United Nations, and the involvement of other Arab states, conflict broke out in the area over the course of many years, leading to the displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians.¹² From then on, Israel has had heavy influence over Gaza and the West Bank, commonly refusing to invest in beneficial infrastructure, and allowing Israeli settlers to occupy portions of the West Bank.¹³ This rocky history between the two states could be argued to be the reason for Hamas' attack on October 7th, 2023, as it can be considered the cause of other uprisings, such as the second intifada back in 2000.¹⁴ Since the beginning of this most recent conflict, Israel has been consistently criticised by international organizations such as WHO and the UN, for its military conduct in Gaza.¹⁵ Israel has been known to target civilians, health-care workers, and hospitals with their bombing campaigns, and to deny allowing essential aid into Gaza.¹⁶ This conflict, similar to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, is still ongoing, and there has been calls for a ceasefire since the conflict began, with the most recent ceasefire agreement coming into effect on the 10th of October 2025.¹⁷

In both of these cases, senior government leadership has decided that war is the most necessary course of action. There is no way to know for certain whether the motives they share with the world are truly the reason for conflict. To some extent, there is a utilitarian perspective that can be applied, with both countries who incited the current warfare claiming that it is for the greater good of their people.¹⁸ However, with the rich history shared between these conflicting states, there is fair probability

⁹ Ibid., p. 385.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 384-385.

¹¹ Salmiya, *The Lancet*, p. 2286.

¹² The Economist, *Israel and the Palestinians: A Century of Conflict*, (London: The Economist, 2023) <https://video-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/watch/israel-and-the-palestinians-a-century-of-conflict?utm_campaign=Video&utm_medium=MARC&utm_source=aspresolver> [Accessed 17 December 2025].

¹³ Erika, Weinthal, and Jeannie, Sowers, 'Targeting infrastructure and livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza', *International Affairs*, vol 95, (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2019) p. 325.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 325.

¹⁵ Salmiya, *The Lancet*, p. 2286.

¹⁶ Salmiya, *The Lancet*, p. 2286.

¹⁷ John, Zarocostas, 'What does the ceasefire plan mean for health in Gaza?', *The Lancet*, vol 406, (London: Elsevier Limited, 2025), p. 1935.

¹⁸ John, W, Lango, *The Ethics of Armed Conflict: A Cosmopolitan Just War Theory*, (Edinburgh: University Press, 2014).

that further reasoning can be applied, with more to gain than the stability of their states.

Russia has been known for centuries as one of the greatest powers in the world, due to its large land mass, nuclear programmes, large arsenal of weaponry, and its influence on global markets.¹⁹ It can be questioned whether their actions are truly based in such humanitarian merits, when they have always perused larger goals of establishing high status in the international community.²⁰ Although it is undeniable to acknowledge that despite whatever their goals are, Russia is a greater power globally than Ukraine and maintaining its influence over the state is deemed in their best strategic interests.²¹ Israel shares this specific similarity with Russia, as it is another example of a country engaging in conflict with a state that maintains less power globally. Israel has received support from the US throughout the whole conflict and many years before.²² The United States is another huge global power, that sees great interest in Middle Eastern conflicts as a way of staking their influence across the world.²³ Palestine, however, has faced years of violent occupation and military bombardment by Israeli forces.²⁴ It was only able to join the UN in May of 2023 due to a sponsorship from fellow Arab states²⁵ and has only recently been recognized as a state by other prominent countries, such as Ireland, Spain and Norway.²⁶ It would be dishonest to deny that Palestine's lack of power in the region has great impact on the war being waged, and that it is clear that Israel is much better equipped to handle such a high stakes conflict.

Although militarized conflict is inherently complicated, there are many commonalities that occur between different forms of warfare across the world. Both the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces, and the retaliation to the Hamas attacks from Israel, share many similarities in how their conflict is approached and conducted. However, there are also many features of each conflict that are unique to their own disagreements, and it is important to acknowledge these separations. As previously mentioned, Russia's invasion of the sovereign state of Ukraine, was shocking for many reasons, but one attribute that easily catches attention, is that the violence took form of an interstate conflict. Interstate conflicts are not as common to see

¹⁹ Janko, Šćepanović, 'Still a great power? Russia's status dilemmas post-Ukraine war', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol 32, (2024) p. 80.

²⁰ Maria, Raquel, Freire, and Regina, Heller, 'Russia's Power Politics in Ukraine and Syria: Status-seeking between Identity, Opportunity and Costs', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol 70, (2018) p. 1185.

²¹ Ibid., p. 1188.

²² Ilai Z, Saltzman, 'Not So "Special Relationship"? US-Israel Relations During Barak Obama's Presidency', *Israel Studies*, vol 22, (Indiana: University Press, 2017) p. 51.

²³ Yoram, Evron, Rotem, Kowner, and Oshrit, Birvadker, 'Asia-Middle East Relations and the Global Power Dynamic: Insights from the Israel-Hamas War', *Asia Policy*, vol 20 (Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2025) p. 105.

²⁴ Weinthal, and Sowers, *International Affairs*, p. 326.

²⁵ Edy, Kaufman, and Suheir, Freitekh, 'Welcoming Palestine as a Full UN Member – Good for the Arabs, for the Jews and the International Community', *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture*, vol 29, (East Jerusalem: Middle East Publications, 2024) p. 65.

²⁶ Emile, Badarin, 'Foreign Policy and the Performance of Collective State Recognition Amidst Genocide', *Middle East Critique*, vol 33, (2024) p. 635.

involving great global powers, as many western states mostly participate in proxy wars in the modern era.²⁷ Whereas, considering the long history of conflict stemming from the creation of Israel, Palestine's debated legitimacy as a sovereign state, can lead to the belief that this conflict is more akin to an Intrastate war.

The differencing international perceptions surrounding these conflicts is also worth noting, as there have been many different interpretations and opinions spread across international news sources, surrounding what has been occurring in these conflicts and who is at fault for them. There was once a time, after the end of the Cold War, when Russia considered foreign policy one of its highest priorities, and made strong efforts to build relationships with western organizations and institutions.²⁸ Although, as the country faced difficulties after the fall of the Soviet Union, dissatisfaction grew towards the west's effectiveness in solving those issues, which is where the anti-western sentiment spread from.²⁹ Russia's actions from then on became almost retaliatory measures to the rising western tension, and to limit the expansion of western ideals.³⁰ This understandably has created an environment of tension between Russia and the west, with each participant viewing the other as a significant threat to their existence. Following Ukraine's push to separate itself from its Soviet past,³¹ it wouldn't be unlikely that Russia deemed this desired distance as another threat to their security, especially as the majority of UN member states chose to support Ukraine after the invasion.³² The overall perception from the west towards this conflict is negative on Russia's part, while providing messages of unwavering support to Ukraine. This perception is quite the contrast to the original western reactions to Israel's bombing campaign of Gaza. As the conflict was triggered by an attack from Hamas, the main justification that was used when defending Israel's retaliation, was that they had a legal right to defend themselves.³³ This defence completely overshadowed the atrocities that Israel was committing to civilian populations in Gaza, classing many of their attacks on civilians as necessary military targets, which can constitute as a war crime.³⁴ What Israel had on their side, that Russia did not when choosing to invade, was the support of another major western global power, such as the US. It can be claimed that the US has incentive to support Israel due to their development of the Iron dome, which remains to be Israel's

²⁷ Errol, Henderson, and J. Singer, "New Wars" and Rumors of "New Wars", *International Interactions*, vol 28, (2002) p. 168.

²⁸ Saeed, Khavarinejad, 'How Putin's Perceived Threats Escalate Russia-West Tensions: Balance of Threat-Based Content Analysis', *Russian Politics*, vol 9 (2024) p. 525.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 525.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 525.

³¹ Cavandoli, and Wilson, *Netherlands International Law Review*, p. 384.

³² Giuseppe, Grossi, and Veronika, Vakulenko, 'New development: Accounting for human - made disasters – comparative analysis of the support to Ukraine in times of War', *Public Money & Management*, vol 42, (Norway: Nord University, and Sweden: Kristianstad University, 2022) p. 467.

³³ The Economist, *Is Israel Breaking the Rules of War?*, (London: The Economist, 2023) https://video-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/watch/is-israel-breaking-the-rules-of-war?utm_campaign=Video&utm_medium=MARC&utm_source=aspresolver [Accessed 17 December 2025].

³⁴ Salmiya, *The Lancet*, p. 2286.

strongest line of defence.³⁵ The US deems Israel a strategic partner,³⁶ but it would be ignorant to ignore the power the US gains from having a foothold in the Middle East, when Asian powers such as China and India, have increased their influence in the region.³⁷ It has been over two years since the Hamas terrorist attack, and over two years of a vicious militarized attacks on Palestinians living in Gaza, and though there are many who still support Israel wholeheartedly, there has been a rise in humanitarian and legal organizations condemning Israel's actions,³⁸ along with prominent countries announcing their support for the Palestinian state.³⁹ It can be argued that the lack of western support for Russia stems from the perceived threat to western values, while Israel's placement in the Middle East, is something exploitable and worth protecting, despite Israel's documented cruelties to the civilian population in Gaza. But as time goes on, perceptions have the ability to change, and any future outcomes of these conflicts is unpredictable.

In conclusion, the reason that both of these conflicts broke out has little to do with modern opinion and instead shines a light on a rich history of conflict and disagreement between these states. Russia's invasion of Ukraine cannot be defined in simple terms, nor can Israel's bombardment of Palestine be boiled down to one terrorist attack. These conflicts are occurring for a multitude of complex reasons, and yet they share a decent amount of similarities worth considering. Both involve a state with noticeably more power than the other, taking action against what they perceive as a threat, while international organizations continue to worry for the innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. However, the perception of these conflicts differs vastly across the globe, and in the end, it is certain that modern conflict cannot be boxed into one definition, as there is no definitive opinion on what is right when everyone will have their own perspective and possible bias to consider.

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³⁵ Arnon, Gutfeld, 'From 'Star Wars' to 'Iron Dome': US Support of Israel's Missile Defense Systems', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol 53, (2017) p. 934.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 934.

³⁷ Evron, Kowner, and Birvadker, Asia Policy, p. 105.

³⁸ Salmiya, *The Lancet*, p. 2286.

³⁹ Badarin, *Middle East Critique*, p. 635.

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