

INT 498: Capstone

The US Perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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INT 498: Senior Seminar- International Security

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April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

## **Introduction and Research Question**

The Middle East is a region that the US has been heavily involved in for the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> and entire 21<sup>st</sup> century, and its presence in the region has resulted in a variety of repercussions, including the incitement and the prolonging of several conflicts. One of the largest conflicts in the Middle East is the ongoing Israel-Palestine struggle, and the US has historically been an important figure in Israeli and Palestinian relations. Several attempts have been made by the US to reconcile the situation, typically through peace talks and international summits, which paints an image that suggests the country's desire to end the conflict.<sup>1</sup> The US has been one of Israel's strongest allies since the creation of the nation, and it is in the national interest of both the US and Israel to have greater stability in the Middle East. However, despite the US' international displays of efforts made to reconcile the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the situation continues to persist with no end in sight. This led me to the question that is at the center of my paper: how has the US' relationship with Israel perpetuated, and continues to prolong the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? It is well-known in the international community that Israel has committed grave human rights violations and broken international law with its past and continuing illegal annexation of territories, but the nation has barely been held accountable for its actions in terms of lasting and productive measures taken by organizations such as the United Nations and major world powers. This lack of accountability is a large reason why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to persist, and the US is a main actor in its endurance.

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<sup>1</sup> Husam Mohamad, "U.S. Policy and Israeli-Palestinian Relations," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (2019): 36.

## Literature Review

There has been a significant amount of research done on the US relationship with Israel regarding US motivations for a positive relationship with the nation. In order to give context to the US' financial and military support of Israel, I will include research on US-Israel shared interests within the Middle East. I have found several articles which focus on the US-Israel relationship and the political and financial support which stems from the US, and to what extent the Israel lobby influences this.

In addition to this area of US-Israel relations, I will be incorporating literature which emphasizes the important role of the US in the UN, specifically the UNSC. One of these reports which focuses on Israel's pressure on the US to veto a UNSC resolution regarding Palestine and the subsequent strategies of the other permanent members of the Security Council to attempt to avoid this veto, is amongst the several sources I will use to emphasize the US' favoritism and unequivocal support amongst the international community.<sup>2</sup>

My research will also emphasize the relationship between the US' unequivocal support of Israel and its perpetuation of the stance that criticizing Israel is often anti-Semitic. This is a view that is not thoroughly explored in any of the sources I have found so far, and I will showcase how this view is a large factor in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The majority of the existing literature on the US-Israel relationship emphasizes how the US continuously stands as a main supporter of Israel in the midst of international criticism within the UN and outside of it, but it largely does not explain how this relationship is leading to the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Whilst there are a few sources which speak of US policy within Israeli-Palestinian relations, there are none that explicitly make the connection that

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<sup>2</sup> Shimon Stein and Shlomo Brom, "The Palestinian Bid at the Security Council: International and Domestic Ramifications for Israel," Institute for National Security Studies (2014): 2.

the US is one of the major reasons that this conflict is raging on. My research will fill in this gap by showcasing how US domestic support of Israel and the US' powerful role in the UN and international community directly leads to the perpetuation of this conflict.

## **Findings and Thesis**

The answer to my research question lies in three main areas: US domestic support of Israel, the US' powerful role in the United Nations and international community, and the US perpetuation of the stance that criticizing the Israeli government is anti-Semitic.

Regarding US domestic support, this is shown most significantly in the amount of military and civilian aid pledged to Israel. Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of US foreign aid since WWII, and it receives these funds earlier than other countries receiving US aid, as well as with hardly any limitations on how they can use the money.<sup>3</sup> Between 1976 and 2017, the US has sent a total of over \$55 billion in civilian aid and \$130 billion in military aid to Israel.<sup>4</sup> This strong domestic support stems largely in part from the Israel lobby present in the United States, made up of several prominent institutions including the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) which lobby politicians on Israel's behalf.<sup>5</sup> This continued financial and military support, as well as Congressional backing of policies designed to support Israel on matters involving clashes with Palestine has given Israel the needed assistance to continue complicating the process to reach an agreement with Palestinian authorities that would adequately benefit both sides.<sup>6</sup> This unequivocal support of Israel transfers to the US' important

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<sup>3</sup> Amnon Cavari and Elan Nyer, "From Bipartisanship to Dysergia: Trends in Congressional Actions Toward Israel," *Israel Studies* 19, no. 3 (2014): 2.

<sup>4</sup> Murad Ali, "Aid and Human Rights: The Case of US Aid to Israel," *Policy Perspectives* 15, no. 3 (2018): 39.

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell Plitnick and Chris Toensing, "'The Israel Lobby' in Perspective," *Middle East Report*, no. 243 (2007): 44.

<sup>6</sup> George E. Gruen, "The United States, Israel, and the Middle East," *The American Jewish Year Book* 101 (2001): 217.

status within the UN and its weight as a world power.

The US has used its role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and its influential voice in the UN General Assembly to be a shield for Israel when it comes to international criticism.<sup>7</sup> A permanent membership on the UNSC gives the US the ability to veto resolutions, a power which it has used on several resolutions that involve criticism of Israel on either Israeli-Palestinian relations within Israel, or issues of Israel's continued illegal annexation of territories.<sup>8</sup> In the midst of general condemnation by the international community of Israel's illegal acquisition of territory, the US has recognized the nation's sovereignty over these territories. This recognition is in direct opposition to the UN Charter, which states that "wartime acquisition of territory does not confer a right to sovereignty over that territory."<sup>9</sup> By supporting Israel when it breaks international law, the US gives greater power to Israel to continue encroaching on the rights of Palestinians and to be in direct conflict with UNSC resolutions without any threat of being held accountable. This continued disregard of the Palestinian struggle on the part of the US pushes a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict further and further away.

In addition to largely legitimizing Israel's controversial actions, the US has in turn contributed to perpetuating a highly harmful view that any criticism of Israel is equal to anti-Semitism. The general US political response to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS), highlights how the US adds fuel to this view. The BDS movement calls for three main demands for Israel to meet: to end occupation of all land it has acquired in 1967 and

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<sup>7</sup> Michal Hatuel-Radoshitzky, "US-Israel Bilateral Relations and Recent Developments in the UN," Institute for National Security Studies (2018): 1.

<sup>8</sup> Michal Hatuel-Radoshitzky, "Criticism of the UN Security Council Veto Mechanism: Ramifications for Israel," Institute for National Security Studies (2015): 2.

<sup>9</sup> Shlomo Brom, "Recognition by the US Administration of Israel's Sovereignty over the Golan Heights: Political and Security Implications," Institute for National Security Studies (2019): 1.

afterwards, grant equal rights to Palestinian citizens of Israel, and make certain the right of return to Palestinian refugees and their descendants.<sup>10</sup> In response to BDS support in the US across college campuses, Congress created a taskforce which emphasized how anti-Zionism and the boycotting of Israel can turn into anti-Semitism, emphasizing that Jewish people and Israel as a Jewish state are threatened when this occurs.<sup>11</sup> The taskforce's work is one of many measures and efforts made by the US government to associate the BDS movement with anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is a real and extremely important issue which must be addressed, but by associating a non-violent movement organized to hold Israel accountable such as BDS with a harmful worldview, the US perpetuates the stance that to criticize Israel is to be simultaneously anti-Semitic. Terming criticism of Israel in this light further prolongs the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by refusing to acknowledge Israel's wrongdoing.

My argument lies in these three main points. The US is a main actor in prolonging the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the US' firm domestic support of Israel despite Israel's continued human rights violations, the US' influential role in the UN and international community, and the US perpetuation of the view that criticism of Israel is related to anti-Semitism.

## **Research Design**

I will be doing a case study approach to my topic and will be focusing specifically on how the US-Israel relationship has affected and prolonged the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The US-Israel relationship has significant effects on other nations in the Middle East, but my research will largely address Palestine alone. I will be identifying specific aspects of the relationship

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<sup>10</sup> Joshua Sperber, "BDS, Israel, and the World System," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 45, no. 1 (177) (2015): 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen Cannon, "The BDS and Anti-BDS Campaigns: Propaganda War vs. Legislative Interest-Group Articulation," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 30, no. 1/2 (2019): 25.

between Israel and the US to explain how each aspect directly contributes to prolonging the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I will begin my argument with a section on US domestic support, explaining motivations for the US' strong relationship with Israel, US aid to Israel, and how US politics on Israeli issues are influenced. This section (I) will showcase how Israel is entrenched in the US' This first section, as well as the other sections, will follow a background information to explanation sequence that I will be utilizing throughout the paper. The first few parts of each section give needed context to how the US prolongs the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. My second section (II) will be on the US' powerful role in the international community and the UN, as well as its stance on illegal Israeli annexation. In this section I will be examining the response of the international community to Israel's acquisition of territories in comparison to the US response, and how this further exacerbates the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The last section (III) will focus on how the US assists in perpetuating the harmful view that criticizing Israel is anti-Semitic. This section will focus largely on the response of the US to the BDS movement, including Congressional action taken to criticize the movement and link it to anti-Semitism. In addition, I will also mention certain US actions within the UN that contribute to this link. The third section will connect the perpetuation of this view to the US' prominent role in prolonging of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I will conclude with a section on the current state of the conflict and the implications of the US' continued support of Israel despite Israel's human rights violations against the Palestinian people, as well as conflict with international law.

### **I: Motivations for US Domestic Support of Israel**

The US' special relationship with Israel has endured since the inception of the nation, and has been rooted in the favoring of Israel against its antagonists in the Middle East. The

relationship is arguably one of the US' strongest, and given the US concerns surrounding stability in the region, a foothold of security within Israel is in the interest of both nations.<sup>12</sup> Instability in the Middle East is highly concerning to the US, given its economic interests in the region. Areas which have impaired central governments, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon, are seen by the US as a threat due to the constant risk of their lack of cooperation with US demands and interests.<sup>13</sup> One of these unstable governments is the Palestinian Authority, and given Israel's rocky relationship with this entity, the US stands with Israel when it comes into conflict with the area, and views them as a threat.

Another key concern of the US within the Middle East is terrorism, and the rise of radical Islam. The US has been engaged in a war on terror for decades now, and given Israel's status as a Jewish state within a largely Muslim region, the US sees Israel as a vital ally in its efforts to suppress and eradicate terrorist activity.<sup>14</sup> Given that Israel has experience combatting global terrorism since the nineties, in the forms of the First and the Second Gulf Wars and both Lebanon Wars, the US views Israel as well-versed in dealing with terrorist activity.<sup>15</sup> After 9/11, the US sensitivity to terrorism and its rise came to an all-time high, and a relationship with Israel in a region where terrorist sentiments find their roots is a way for the US to have a head start in preventing this violence from coming to its shores.<sup>16</sup> These interests in the Middle East showcase how important desires for the US such as cooperation and economic gain from the region and the combatting terrorism largely benefit with having a strong relationship with Israel. Israel is seen

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<sup>12</sup> Shmuel Even and Sason Hadad, "US Aid to Israel: Budgetary and Strategic Significance," Institute for National Security Studies (2018): 1.

<sup>13</sup> Aharon Ze'evi Farkash, "Security Challenges Facing the US and Israel," in *The US and Israel under Changing Political Circumstances: Security Challenges of the 21st Century Conference Proceedings*, Institute for National Security Studies (2009): 70.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>16</sup> Mohamad, "U.S. Policy and Israeli-Palestinian Relations," 34.



as the exception to the instability throughout the Middle East, and the US works to make certain that the nation receives its utmost support.

### **I: US Military and Economic Aid regarding Israel**

US aid to Israel has been a key factor in supporting Israel's military power over almost fifty years, mainly since the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and this support currently makes up almost a fifth of Israel's gross defense budget.<sup>17</sup> The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), are highly trained in combat, and given some of the world's most advanced weapons, which showcases the commitment of the US administration to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge (QME).<sup>18</sup> Congress defined Israel's QME in 2008 as the "ability [of Israel] to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat from any individual state or possible coalition of states or from non-state actors...through the use of superior military means, possessed in sufficient quantity..."<sup>19</sup> Through this statement, the US recognizes that Israel's presence in the Middle East is threatened at times by other nations within the region, and the mention of "non-state actors" is a reference mainly to Palestinian opposition to Israel. Due to Israel's unique position as a Jewish state amongst large Muslim populations, and as technically the most democratic nation in the region according to the Democracy Index, sending military aid to maintain its power is a way for the US to strengthen its own position in the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> According to USAID data, Israel receives around \$1,377 million in economic aid and \$3,105 million in military aid per year.<sup>21</sup> As constant as this flow of aid has been for decades, Israel's human rights violations have also been

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<sup>17</sup> Even and Hadad, "US Aid to Israel: Budgetary and Strategic Significance," 1.

<sup>18</sup> Cavari and Nyer, "From Bipartisanship to Dysergia," 3.

<sup>19</sup> Even and Hadad, "US Aid to Israel: Budgetary and Strategic Significance," 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ali, "Aid and Human Rights," 34.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 39.

continuous, and the morality behind US support of Israel in the face of these actions has been called into question.

### **I: US Aid to Israel Amidst Human Rights Violations**

In keeping with the US' role as one of the world's leading democratic nations during the Cold War, the US government sought to further emphasize its position as a harbinger of freedom and human rights. In 1974, the US amended its Foreign Assistance Act, promising that no assistance would be provided to governments involved in human rights violations, the amendment stating that assistance cannot be given to a country which "engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights, including torture or cruel, inhuman, or de-grading treatment or punishment, prolonged detention without charges..."<sup>22</sup> When this amendment is looked at in congruence with Israel's human rights record (or the US' for that matter), the aid being sent to Israel is in direct violation of the Foreign Assistance Act. According to the Political Terror Scale which measures political violence on a scale of 1-5, Israel has scored on average a 3.5 or more since the 1980s, and its scores have gone up to 4-5 in the 2000s.<sup>23</sup> This substantial aid to Israel in the midst of grave human rights violations is representative of the US' policy in regards to Israel: turning the other cheek due to the importance of a strong relationship with the nation. This unwavering support in turn emphasizes its repercussions most seriously in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **I: US Policy and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

The US has been involved in Israeli-Palestinian relations thoroughly since the establishment of Israel as a nation, and several attempts in recent decades have been made to alleviate the situation, in hopes of eventually solving the conflict. However, US policy has

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<sup>22</sup> Ali, "Aid and Human Rights," 32.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 35.

always significantly favored Israel, and policymakers tend to reject the internationally recognized claims which Palestinians hold.<sup>24</sup> Before Jimmy Carter's presidency in 1977-1981, Palestinians were largely excluded from U.S. political discourse, and an opportunity for the US to present itself as a mediator in the conflict came during Bill Clinton's presidency.<sup>25</sup> Camp David was a summit organized for Clinton where Yasser Arafat, the first president of the Palestinian National Authority, and Ehud Barak, the prime minister of Israel at the time, agreed to meet and engage in extensive talks on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>26</sup> The talks were an effective failure, and both sides could not agree on the core issues of addressing the refugee problem and the sovereignty of Jerusalem. Clinton expressed great disappointment over the lack of progress made, and stated that Arafat's unwillingness to compromise was the main reason the summit was not productive.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Clinton solely criticized the conduct of the Palestinians and made no mention of any lack of cooperation on the part of the Israelis.<sup>28</sup> The actions of Clinton during and following Camp David emphasizes the favorable US stance towards Israel, even when the US offers to be a mediator. The unwillingness of the US to accurately take into account issues on both sides of the conflict, and to overwhelmingly support Israel regarding policy on these matters only prolongs the conflict.

### **I: Congress' Support of Israel and the Israel Lobby**

This pro-Israel stance even in the context of mediation is characteristic of US congressional support as well. The US has large bi-partisan support regarding Israel, and one issue that both the Democratic and Republican parties can agree on is the importance of a good

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<sup>24</sup> Mohamad, "U.S. Policy and Israeli-Palestinian Relations," 36.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Gruen, "The United States, Israel, and the Middle East," 210.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>28</sup> Mohamad, "U.S. Policy and Israeli-Palestinian Relations," 37.

relationship with the nation. Despite the tense relations between President Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu throughout Obama's presidency, Netanyahu was invited to deliver a speech to a joint meeting of Congress in 2011, making him the fourth foreign leader in the US' history to have ever done this more than once.<sup>29</sup> His speech received a response of 29 standing ovations, and made clear to the President that despite the qualms he may have held towards Netanyahu, the overwhelming opinion of Congress would always be to support Israel and its leadership.<sup>30</sup> Congressional support is a major factor in crafting US policy, and with a stable pro-Israel stance within this body no matter what Israel does, a solution to the Palestinian conflict is pushed further and further away. Significant progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be made if the main governing body of the US holds a strong position of support for only one side. This unwavering support from Congress lies in a powerful facet of the political framework of the US: the Israel lobby.

The pro-Israel lobby is a collection of organizations which seek to influence policymakers on issues pertaining to Israel, with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), being the most well-known organization which has a hold on the stance of politicians.<sup>31</sup> AIPAC does not directly make campaign contributions like other pro-Israel lobbies, but with its \$100 million budget and extensive network of members across the country, it has the means to put forward detailed and highly documented campaigns against members of Congress that are judged as not sufficiently supporting Israel.<sup>32</sup> This pressure on politicians to support Israel on any policy or issue stems significantly from the influence of these lobbies, and

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<sup>29</sup> Cavari and Nyer, "From Bipartisanship to Dysergia," 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>31</sup> Dov Waxman, "The Israel Lobbies: A Survey of the Pro-Israel Community in the United States," *Israel Studies Forum* 25, no. 1 (2010): 7.

<sup>32</sup> Plitnick and Toensing, ""The Israel Lobby" in Perspective," 44.

translates into a US foreign policy which provides unwavering approval from the US for Israel in the midst of Israeli human rights violations, as well as violations of international law.

## **II: US-Israel Relations in the UN**

Given the US' status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), the US is given the ability to veto any presented resolutions. In the years from 1946 to 2012, the US has vetoed 42 UN Security Council Resolutions which have criticized or made demands on Israel.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, many other resolutions focusing on holding Israel accountable have been withdrawn due to the certainty that the US will veto them.<sup>34</sup> The total of UNSC resolutions which the US has vetoed remains the highest number that a permanent member of the UNSC has vetoed on one issue.<sup>35</sup> The UNSC's main purpose is to address issues that threaten international peace and security, and Israel's actions towards Palestinians within its borders, as well as its annexation of territories directly compromise stability within the Middle East. By vetoing resolutions which will put pressure on Israel to act in accordance with international law, the US further legitimizes Israel's actions, and prohibits productive action taken which can lead to the alleviation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Given that the international community is generally critical of Israel's actions and is much more willing to call out Israel for its faults than the US, other permanent members of the UNSC such as France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, often show frustration at the US' unwillingness to go forward with resolutions critical of Israel.<sup>36</sup>

In 2014, the Palestinian Authority sought a UN Security Council resolution that would recognize a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, make East Jerusalem its capital, and

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<sup>33</sup> Cavari and Nyer, "From Bipartisanship to Dysergia," 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Hatuel-Radoshitzky, "Criticism of the UN Security Council Veto Mechanism," 2.

<sup>36</sup> Cavari and Nyer, "From Bipartisanship to Dysergia," 4.

require Israel to withdraw from these territories.<sup>37</sup> After the recent failure of Israeli-Palestinian talks organized by former US Secretary of State John Kerry, continued blocks in negotiations with the Israeli government, and exacerbated tensions between Israel and Palestinians within its borders, the Palestinian Authority turned to the UNSC for its claims.<sup>38</sup> Knowing that the US would more than likely veto this resolution, further stalling any progress in solving the conflict, France, the UK, and Germany set to work on crafting a resolution that would allow the US to not use its veto, but due to the general lack of a majority vote, the resolution ended up not passing.<sup>39</sup> The fact that certain resolutions regarding Israel need to be drafted in a way which is mindful of the US veto poses significant limitations on the content of these resolutions and how bids for compromise within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be phrased. The UNSC walking on eggshells around the US whenever it comes to an issue which will call upon Israel to make any concessions to the Palestinians is a large blockage in achieving any solution.

## **II: Israel's Illegal Annexation of Territories and International Response**

In the Six Day War of June 1967, Israel captured the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula, and has since then been gradually annexing these territories.<sup>40</sup> Disputes over sovereignty to these territories have been a crucial issue in the Arab world, and relations between the Arab world and Israel have remained tense. Further annexation by Israel has put nations such as the Gulf States in a difficult position, as good relations with the US are desired, and therefore their stance on Israel is marked with duality. Anwar Gargash, the UAE Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that the UAE can “disagree

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<sup>37</sup> Stein and Brom, “The Palestinian Bid at the Security Council,” 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Raja Shedadeh, “From Jerusalem to the Rest of the West Bank: Israel’s Strategies of Annexation,” *Review of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 1 (2019): 7.

with Israel on political issues and still cooperate in other areas, such as the coronavirus and technological matters.”<sup>41</sup> Despite Gargash’s statement of cooperation with Israel, the UAE’s position on annexation is still in strong opposition.<sup>42</sup> The majority of the Arab world is firmly opposed to Israeli annexation even if they do concede to Israel on other matters, and Israel’s declaration of sovereignty of these territories is in direct violation of international law.

## **II: The Effects of Israel’s Annexation on the Palestinian Conflict**

Due to the illegal status of Israel’s annexation of territories, the international community is largely in opposition to the nation’s actions. This acquisition of territory violates the UN charter, and Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states: “The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”<sup>43</sup> Not transferring its population to occupied territories is the exact opposite of what Israel has done, and currently over half a million Israeli Jews live under Israeli law in settlements that are an extension of Israel’s political, social, and economic infrastructure.<sup>44</sup> Israel acquires these territories through violations of international agreements and further exacerbates the Palestinian struggle.

The separation wall, also known as the apartheid wall by Palestinians, is a 440 mile barrier which separates Israel from the West Bank, and instead of establishing its route to follow the Green line (the border between Israel and Jordan agreed to in the Armistice Agreement of 1949), Israel annexed about 13.5 percent of the West Bank in the process.<sup>45</sup> Before the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 (a pair of agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority), the

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<sup>41</sup> Yoel Guzansky, “Israel, the Gulf States, and Annexation,” Institute for National Security Studies (2020): 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Shedadeh, “Israel’s Strategies of Annexation,” 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>45</sup> Shedadeh, “Israel’s Strategies of Annexation,” 10.

Israeli Commander of the West Bank instituted military orders which exempted the Jewish settlers living in the Occupied Territories from restrictions which only applied to Palestinian residents.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the Israeli and Palestinian communities were split into two different categories regarding laws, administrations, and courts. Whilst Palestinians are subjected to repressive measures such as severe limitations on movement, the restrictions of the entry and exit of necessary goods, and travel bans, Israeli citizens in the Occupied Territories enjoy full freedoms given to them by the Israeli government.<sup>47</sup> The distinction between the treatment of Palestinian citizens and Israeli citizens is clear, and the combination of these human rights violations with breach of international law is supported by the US' stance on the Occupied Territories.

## **II: The US Legitimization of Israel's Illegal Annexations**

Unlike the majority of the international community, the US has maintained recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the territories it has illegally annexed. Trump's presidency has been particularly favorable of Israel, and his 2019 recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights brought negative reactions from several other world powers.<sup>48</sup> Trump signing a presidential proclamation more than 37 years after the Knesset (Israel's legislative body) ratified a bill which expanded Israeli control over the Golan Heights sent a clear message about the US stance on Israeli annexation.<sup>49</sup> Since Israel's ratification of this bill in 1981, no major world power had accepted Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and a few days after it had ratified, the UNSC had passed Resolution 497, which stated that the annexation had "no

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<sup>46</sup> Shedadeh, "Israel's Strategies of Annexation," 11.

<sup>47</sup> "Israel and Palestine," Human Rights Watch (2021): 353

<sup>48</sup> Brom, "Recognition by the US Administration of Israel's Sovereignty over the Golan Heights," 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



international significance.”<sup>50</sup> The US recognition of Israel’s sovereignty over this territory gave Israel greater legitimacy and protection over their annexation. Even though Israel occupying this territory is against international law, the US making a proclamation of this nature gives Israel a strong ally when it attempts to justify its occupation to the rest of the international community. The US stance on Israel’s actions, even when they conflict with the opinions of several world powers, is to support the nation unequivocally. Strong allies of the US, including the European Union as a whole, stated that Israeli sovereignty over the Golan heights was a breach of international law and UNSC resolutions 242 and 497.<sup>51</sup> The US remains the only one of the permanent UNSC members to recognize Israeli sovereignty over its annexed territories, and its status as a permanent member combined with its stance on the matter is a firm block in any productive efforts made to hold Israel accountable for breaking international law. Through strengthening Israel’s claim to the Golan Heights, the US further enables Israel to justify its occupation of its other territories and continue to suppress the Palestinian people within them.

One of the most significant actions of the US in recent years that has prolonged the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital in 2017.<sup>52</sup> The Bush and Obama administrations had previously supported the two-state solution which would separate Israeli-Jews from Palestinian Arabs and create a Palestinian state alongside Israel, but Trump’s stance on the matter threw an even larger block in already strained peace negotiations.<sup>53</sup> By recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, Trump gave greater legitimacy to the ongoing Jewish settlements in east Jerusalem, an area where Palestinians continue to be

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<sup>50</sup> Brom, “Recognition by the US Administration of Israel's Sovereignty over the Golan Heights,” 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Mohamad, "U.S. Policy and Israeli-Palestinian Relations," 28.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

displaced from.<sup>54</sup> Trump's recent actions exacerbated the American stance of largely delegitimizing the Palestinian people and their struggle, ignoring their claims and throwing all support behind Israel's. This recognition pushed the US stance to the one-democratic state idea, which anticipates a society where Palestinians have equal rights to Israeli citizens, and are given adequate political representation in the framework of the state.<sup>55</sup> However, many Palestinians are opposed to this idea due to the loss of their national identity, and skepticism of if Israel will even follow these democratic regulations.<sup>56</sup> Given Israel's continuous human rights violations when it comes to the Palestinian people, these doubts are not unfounded, and the US position on Israel's annexations ignores the concerns of the Palestinians. By largely favoring Israel on annexation, the US discredits the Palestinian perspective in the conflict and drives it further away from a solution.

### **III: The Link of Criticism of Israel to Anti-Semitism and the BDS Movement**

One of the largest obstacles to holding Israel accountable for their actions is the view that criticizing Israel can be equated to anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism, which is prejudice and discrimination against Jewish people, is a serious issue globally and has been addressed several times by the United Nations. Most recently in 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ahmed Shaheed, presented a report to the UN General Assembly titled "Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance."<sup>57</sup> This report focused specifically on anti-Semitism, and emphasized three types: "anti-Semitism rooted in white supremacist right wing ideology; anti-Semitism rooted in radical Islamist ideology; and anti-Semitism rooted in radical

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<sup>54</sup> Mohamad, "U.S. Policy and Israeli-Palestinian Relations," 30.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Hatuel-Radoshitzky, "The United Nations and Anti-Semitism. Perhaps Not What You Thought," Institute for National Security Studies (2019): 1.

left-wing worldviews.”<sup>58</sup> The last two types of anti-Semitism mentioned have been most utilized in attempting to equate anti-Semitism to criticism of Israel, specifically in linking the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement to this harmful worldview.

BDS is a non-violent movement which calls on countries, business, and universities to cut ties with Israel unless it concedes to three requirements: ceasing its occupation of land captured in 1967 and afterwards as well as destroying the Separation wall, granting Palestinian citizens full equal rights, and assuring the right of return to Palestinian refugees and their descendants.<sup>59</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur’s Report mentioned BDS in the context of boycotts being “legitimate forms of political expression,” but also as a possible “slippery slope” regarding the boycott of Israel being a result of anti-Semitic motives.<sup>60</sup> The Israeli Ambassador to the UN took this section of the report and stated that it asserts “that the BDS movement encourages anti-Semitism,” which is not what the report declared, but what the Ambassador interpreted it as saying.<sup>61</sup> This kind of interpretation is the common response from Israel when regarding BDS, and the movement is consistently termed as delegitimizing Israel and posing a direct threat to its right to exist.

### **III: Concerns Surrounding The Motives of BDS and US Response**

The most contentious issue surrounding BDS is the Palestinian right to return, which several critics of BDS term as an action which will effectively put an end to Israel. This concern is based in the fear that in establishing a Palestinian state, an end to Israel’s Jewish state would be sought, and given the millions of Palestinians which are classified as refugees, the Jewish

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<sup>58</sup> Hatuel-Radoshitzky, “The United Nations and Anti-Semitism,” 2.

<sup>59</sup> Sperber, “BDS, Israel, and the World System,” 8.

<sup>60</sup> Hatuel-Radoshitzky, “The United Nations and Anti-Semitism,” 3.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

majority would end and once again be threatened.<sup>62</sup> Whilst the right to return is seen as highly controversial to many critics of BDS, it is in line with UN Resolution 194 which states that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date...”<sup>63</sup> All of BDS’ demands are supported by international law and UN resolutions, but the goals of the movement are continuously termed as wanting to cease Israel’s right to exist and destroy the nation.

The US is one of Israel’s largest supporters in combatting BDS and there has been steady Congressional support of measures which contribute to the association of BDS with anti-Semitism. In response to growing anti-Semitism in the US and Europe, Congress launched the House of Representatives Bipartisan Task Force for Combating Anti-Semitism in 2015.<sup>64</sup> The bill emphasized the connection between anti-Zionism developing into anti-Semitism, which places BDS on shaky ground, given the movement’s proud anti-Zionist stance.<sup>65</sup> Anti-Zionism is the rejection of the ideology that advocates for the return of the Jewish people to their historic homeland, and the reinstatement of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel.<sup>66</sup> BDS is anti-Zionist, because this ideology is an effective way in which the State of Israel has justified its displacement of the Palestinian people, as well as the continued annexation of more land in the region. The framing of the taskforce’s bill sent a clear message to the BDS movement that its actions can be accused of being anti-Semitic due to its strong anti-Zionist ties.<sup>67</sup> Linking anti-Zionism to anti-Semitism has been a common tactic of Israel’s government to criticize BDS and any opposition to the actions of Israel for that matter, and as seen in the taskforce’s bill, this

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<sup>62</sup> Sperber, “BDS, Israel, and the World System,” 14.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Cannon, “The BDS and Anti-BDS Campaigns,” 24.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>66</sup> Sperber, “BDS, Israel, and the World System,” 3.

<sup>67</sup> Cannon, “The BDS and Anti-BDS Campaigns,” 27.

stance is openly supported by the US government. The connection between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism puts advocates for Palestine in a difficult position, since both supporting Zionism and being against Israel's illegal annexation of territories is not possible when looked at from any standpoint, be it logical or moral. Therefore, those who promote the BDS movement can be considered automatically anti-Zionist when they call out Israel's violation of international and humanitarian law.<sup>68</sup> By framing this connection in a way which ignores Israel's illegal actions and the humanitarian aspect of the conflict, and instead focuses only on the possibilities that anti-Zionism can lead to anti-Semitic rhetoric, US Congressional support of such a bill strengthens the link between the two views, creating one harmful worldview linking anti-Semitism to criticism of Israel.

US Congressional activity also has turned to bipartisan support in combatting the BDS movement's calls for ceasing trade with Israel at the national and international levels.<sup>69</sup> This legislation was devised in a way which emphasizes the US' opposition to boycott movements and highlights common American economic interests with Israel. In 2015, the United States-Israel Trade and Commercial Enhancement Act was introduced, which influences trade negotiations to discourage US trade partners from acceding to BDS' demands to sever economic ties with Israel until the nation significantly changes its behavior regarding the treatment of Palestinians and the illegal occupation of territories.<sup>70</sup> The act states that the boycott constitutes "economic discrimination" against Israel, and that BDS is a threat to regional peace and stability in the region through the disruption of global trade.<sup>71</sup> US framing of BDS as a movement which threatens not only Israel but global trade delegitimizes the Palestinian struggle and further

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<sup>68</sup> Cannon, "The BDS and Anti-BDS Campaigns," 28.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

enables the illegal actions of the nation. Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), one of the co-sponsors of the act, also stated, “we cannot allow political partners in the EU to fall prey to efforts that threaten Israel’s existence.”<sup>72</sup> This stance of several members of Congress on BDS has also linked BDS to threatening the well-being and survival of Jewish citizens in Israel.<sup>73</sup> By linking a non-violent movement using legal forms of protest to call for Israel’s accountability of its actions to directly threatening Jewish people, strengthens the view that criticism of Israel is equated to anti-Semitism. More than 50 percent of state governments have passed some form of anti-BDS legislation in congruence with legislation against anti-Semitism, in addition to several municipalities and cities.<sup>74</sup> This widespread effort amongst the levels of the US government to link the BDS movement to anti-Semitism paints the calling for Israel’s accountability regarding the unjust treatment of Palestinians and illegal occupation of territories as somehow being equated to wishing harm on Jewish people. This kind of view is a large reason why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be prolonged, since criticism of Israel’s actions is often so quickly and easily attributed to anti-Semitism by the US.

The perpetuation of this link is also present in the US’ actions within the UN, and the US departure from the UN Human Rights Council in 2018 is a direct indication of this. Former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley cited the Human Rights Council’s “disproportionate focus and unending hostility towards Israel,” as one of the main reasons for the US decision to leave the Council.<sup>75</sup> The US withdrawal from the Council came at a crucial time in which reforms to the body’s structure were being attempted, and once again US bias towards Israel disrupted UN

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<sup>72</sup> Cannon, “The BDS and Anti-BDS Campaigns,” 35.

<sup>73</sup> Zipi, Israeli and Michal Hatuel-Radoshitzky, “Fighting the Boycott: BDS and the Media,” Institute for National Security Studies (2015): 4.

<sup>74</sup> Cannon, “The BDS and Anti-BDS Campaigns,” 45.

<sup>75</sup> Hatuel-Radoshitzky, “US-Israel Bilateral Relations and Recent Developments in the UN,” 2.

procedure.<sup>76</sup> The US' association of hostility towards Israel with UN resolutions regarding Israel's violations of international law contributes to the view that criticizing Israel's actions is equated to aggression towards the country and subsequently towards Jewish people. Attempts to hold Israel accountable for human rights violations being termed as hostility towards the nation is one of the main blocks towards finding a solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The US continuously paints pro-Palestinian groups, critiques of Israel, and movements such as BDS as the aggressors of Jewish people, and Israel's aggressive actions are in turn not addressed properly.

### **Conclusion: The Current State of the Conflict and Implications**

There is currently a stalemate in making progress with further peace negotiations, due in part to Trump's actions throughout his presidency such as recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, supporting Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights, and his overall unequivocal support of the nation. Trump has made it very clear from his first meeting with Netanyahu that the US fund for Palestinians would be dependent on their continued security cooperation with Israel and conceding to Israel's demands.<sup>77</sup> This move is common of US policy in treating the conflict in a manner that suggests both countries have had an equal position throughout the negotiations, and places emphasis on Palestine being the uncooperative party when an agreement must be made. In addition, the Trump administration stopped all funds which were directed towards the Palestinian Authority as well as the UN agency which provides Palestinian refugees with basic goods and services.<sup>78</sup> The Trump administration has effectively denied Palestine's internationally recognized claims and set back the peace process significantly.

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<sup>76</sup> Hatuel-Radoshitzky, "US-Israel Bilateral Relations and Recent Developments in the UN," 3.

<sup>77</sup> Mohamad, "U.S. Policy and Israeli-Palestinian Relations," 48.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 49.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian people within Israel and the Occupied Territories continue to be subject to multiple human rights abuses. For the 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive year the Israeli government administered a travel ban on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, as well as restricting the entry and exit of basic goods. These restrictions denied the 2 million Palestinians living in this territory their right to freedom of movement, exacerbated poverty through greatly hurting the economy, and limited their access to electricity and water.<sup>79</sup> The UN Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that as of October 19, 2020, Israeli officials have destroyed 568 Palestinian homes and other buildings in the West Bank in 2020, leading to the displacement of 759 people.<sup>80</sup> Israel's violations of humanitarian law continue and an end to the conflict is not seen in the near future.

In January the US brought forth a plan that would install a two-state solution, but recognizes permanent Israeli control over large portions of the West Bank, formal annexation of settlements, the Jordan Valley, and other areas of its currently occupied territories.<sup>81</sup> The European Union responded to this plan with a call to guarantee equal rights for Palestinians and Israelis, and pleas to Israel to cease further annexation plans as well as the construction of illegal settlements.<sup>82</sup> The US' unique role on the world stage as unconditionally supporting Israel's annexations continues, and is a large contributor to blocking the peace process. Through strong US domestic support, the US' influential role in the UN regarding Israeli matters, and the perpetuation of the view that criticism of Israel is equated to anti-Semitism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is prolonged, and Palestinians are largely the ones to suffer the consequences.

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<sup>79</sup> "Israel and Palestine," Human Rights Watch (2021): 353.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.



It is vital that the US' role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is more accurately addressed. Israel's illegally annexed territories are especially suffering, with the continued demolition of Palestinian homes, unequal treatment of Palestinian citizens, the displacement of Palestinian families, and extremely high poverty rates. Israel's occupation of these territories and treatment of Palestinians living within Israel as second-class citizens is a perpetuation of human rights abuses and illegal occupation, and the US is one of their largest enablers in these matters.

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