

# Israel Wants More from US

The Obama administration and Israel are locked in a curious negotiation over how many billions of dollars the U.S. will send to Tel Aviv, a demonstration of Israel's political clout, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

With most stalemated international negotiations, the reasons for both the impasse and the continuation of talks are easy to understand. A range of possible agreed outcomes exists, with some more favorable to one party and some more favorable to the other, and with each side naturally trying to get as good a deal as it can. For each party, there is at least some possible agreement that would be better than no agreement at all.

The parties keep bargaining because each would lose something if they failed to reach an agreement. If that were not the case, then one or the other of the parties would have no reason to bargain in the first place and there would be no negotiation at all.

It thus is hard to explain, or rather to justify, what is described as a negotiating impasse between the United States and Israel over the size of a new package of U.S. aid to Israel. The situation is reported as if this were one more example of a typical stalemated international negotiation, but it is not.

This is not a situation in which each country would have something to lose if no agreement is reached. Instead it is entirely a one-sided arrangement: a gift of money from the United States to Israel. There is nothing in any such aid package that carries a benefit for the United States and that the United States would not be getting in the absence of an agreement.

It is not as if the absence of an agreement about an aid package would entail some consequence in the Middle East detrimental to U.S. interests as well as Israeli interests, such as giving rise to a destabilizing military threat by some other state in the region against Israel.

This is not the case first of all because of Israel's overwhelming military superiority in the region, which still would be overwhelming even without any further U.S.-funded enhancements. It also is not the case because even if enhancements were required to maintain the superiority, Israel – which is among the richest 15 percent of countries in the world as measured by GDP per capita – is quite capable of paying for them itself.

**A U.S. Subsidy**

The U.S. aid is a subsidy for Israeli taxpayers, paid for by American taxpayers. American taxpayers have been very generous in this regard (or made to be so by American politicians), with the annual aid package to Israel exceeding \$3 billion in each of the last several years and with total U.S. aid to Israel, even by the most conservative tallies, topping \$120 billion. With the Israeli government budget at around \$75 billion, the annual gift from American taxpayers is equivalent to about a four percent rebate to Israeli taxpayers.

Or one can look at equivalence in terms of the spending end rather than the revenue end. The gifted funds involve that much less money available for programs benefiting Americans and that much more money for the Israeli government to spend on whatever it wants to spend it on.

Shekels, like dollars, being fungible, what the money gets spent on need not have anything to do with the defense or security of Israel. The money that is no longer available for repair of America's crumbling roads and bridges, for example, can get spent by Israel on other roads and bridges – including the roads in the West Bank that are used only by Israelis and especially settlers and that the Palestinians who live in the West Bank are prohibited from using, or even crossing except on foot.

Of course, we all know what goes through the minds of American politicians when they are dealing with a subject involving Israel and why this question of the aid package is being treated as if it really were like other international negotiations in which each side has something to lose. The feared loss is the domestic political consequence of being targeted as someone whose love for Israel is less fervent than that of a political opponent and of being outspent by, and losing to, that opponent in the next election.

In the case of President Barack Obama, the *New York Times* article on this subject describes his objective as being “to burnish his legacy” with “the largest package of military aid ever provided by the United States to another nation” and to “cement his claim to have done more than any other president to support Israel's security.”

### **Political Consequences**

Let us at least be honest about the objectives if those objectives involve individual politicians' re-election prospects or the legacies of politicians not running for re-election. Such objectives are quite different from the interests of the United States or of American taxpayers. They are even different from the security and well-being of Israel.

A larger aid package for Israel certainly is not in order as “compensation” for

concluding the multilateral agreement that limits Iran's nuclear program. An agreement that has curtailed that program and moved Iran farther away from any prospect of having a nuclear weapon is, as many former senior Israeli national security officials have recognized, an improvement in, rather than a detriment to, the security of Israel.

The Netanyahu government's actual reasons for not wanting anyone to have any dealings with Iran are not reasons to be encouraged, from the standpoint of either Israeli or U.S. interests. Any "compensation" would only be in the North Korean sense of a regime engaging in troublesome behavior (which in the Netanyahu government's case has involved its blatant interference in the U.S. political process to try to kill the Iran agreement) and then expecting a payoff in return for not engaging, for a while, in more such behavior.

The only possible justification for increased largesse to Israel at this point would be as preparation for a serious effort in the remaining months of the Obama administration to get the Israeli government to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians involving a genuine two-state solution. To be seen bending over even farther backwards than before as a supporter of Israel could be a necessary part of any such effort, given political realities in both Israel and the United States. But whether the Obama administration will make such an effort remains to be seen.

In the meantime, those members of the U.S. Senate who signed a letter urging the administration to conclude quickly a memorandum of understanding with Israel about a new aid package ought to be explaining to their taxpaying constituents what such aid really means in fiscal terms as described above.

The administration itself might take some advice from Donald Trump – even though Trump himself might not always apply his own advice to dealings with Israel – in a speech on foreign policy that, while studded with inconsistencies and falsehoods, included a pointer from this self-proclaimed expert on deal-making.

"In negotiation you must be willing to walk," said Trump. "When the other side knows you're not going to walk, it becomes absolutely impossible to win."

Walking away from a negotiation can entail substantial risk, in the form of losing benefits that can only be gained from an agreement. Such risks are much more common in international relations than in the business dealings Trump is familiar with, in which there is always some other property owner, or some other hotel or golf course, to which one can turn for an alternative deal. But as far as U.S. gift-giving to Israel is concerned, there is no risk at all to U.S. interests from walking.

The situation at hand is the equivalent of a nephew complaining about the amount of birthday gift money he got from an uncle and wanting uncle to agree to give more. Negotiation is not the appropriate response for uncle. Either walking or saying “take it or leave it” would be more appropriate, as would a stern reminder to the nephew about who in this relationship is the giver and who is the taker.

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as [a blog post at The National Interest’s Web site](#). Reprinted with author’s permission.)**

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## Egypt’s Dangerous Turn

Egypt’s military regime is suppressing political opposition even more ferociously than the longtime Mubarak dictatorship while also collaborating in the strangulation of Gaza, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

With U.S. attention toward the Middle East being recently focused on such matters as warfare in Syria and Iraq and on the relationship with Saudi Arabia, little attention span is left over for the relationship with the most populous Arab nation.

But developments in Egypt have, in multiple respects, significant capacity for creating attention-grabbing problems for Washington in addition to problems to which Egypt already is contributing in significant though less salient ways.

The regime of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi has become increasingly harsh, illiberal, and downright brutal—much more so than the last previous Egyptian general-turned-president, Hosni Mubarak.

The State Department’s official [human rights report](#) on Egypt says that the most significant human rights problems there have been “excessive use of force by security forces, deficiencies in due process, and the suppression of civil liberties. Excessive use of force included unlawful killings and torture. Due process problems included the excessive use of preventative custody and pretrial detention, the use of military courts to try civilians, and trials involving

hundreds of defendants in which authorities did not present evidence on an individual basis. Civil liberties problems included societal and government restrictions on freedoms of expression and the press, as well as on the freedoms of assembly and association.”

Nongovernmental human rights organizations have used even stronger language to describe the situation in Egypt.

The most worrisome consequence of the regime’s harsh policy has been the boost it gives to extremism, including violent extremism in the form of international terrorism. This is an unsurprising result of denying people peaceful channels for expressing opposition and dissent. It also is a direct product of anger over the harsh practices themselves.

And it is not as if the Sisi regime has been any better able than its predecessors to pull off an economic miracle that would keep Egyptians content. Unemployment among young males in particular provides a receptive audience for extremist messages.

Much of the regime’s crackdown has been aimed at the Muslim Brotherhood. Sisi’s regime came to power in a coup that deposed the democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi, who was a member of the Brotherhood. Under Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood constituted a peaceful opposition that was formally banned but informally tolerated.

Now that the Sisi regime has instead tried to smash the Brotherhood, some of its members have been led to conclude that peaceful opposition does not work and that violence is the only path with a chance of bringing results. Such members have been among the recruits to terrorist groups.

A substantial escalation of terrorist violence in Egypt has been taking place since Sisi took power. This has included, but is not limited to, an armed uprising in the Sinai by a group that has declared its allegiance to ISIS. Given what would be natural responses to the regime’s policies, this is not a surprise.

The U.S. government considers Egypt a partner in counterterrorism, which was a topic for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, in a recent visit to Egypt. Certainly the two government share objectives in countering and degrading Islamist groups such as ISIS and its self-declared affiliate in the Sinai.

But the net effect of all of the Sisi regime’s policies almost certainly has been an increase rather than a decrease in the number of terrorists in action. The regime probably hopes and expects that it can quell violent Islamist groups

through police and military measures the way the Mubarak regime was able to do in the 1990s.

But even if it could – and given the current regime's other policies, this is doubtful – this would be less a matter of eliminating the terrorism than of exporting it, making it at least as much of a problem for the United States. The head of one of those Egyptian groups from the 1990s, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is now the head of Al Qaeda.

Most recently there have been indications of broader, and active even if nonviolent, opposition to the Sisi regime. Earlier this month Cairo saw the largest protest demonstration in Egypt in at least two years. The immediate issue was the handing over of two Red Sea islands as part of a deal with Saudi Arabia, but the discontent being exhibited against the Sisi regime ran much deeper than that.

The regime is not on the verge of being toppled, but at least in the short term such open defiance is likely to trigger still more crackdowns by the regime, with more of the resulting anger and radicalization. Over the longer term, one cannot be confident about how in Egypt, the site of the high emotions of Tahrir Square five years ago, events may get ahead of the current general-turned-president as they did with the last one.

Even before matters come to that point, the United States faces the problem of being closely associated with a regime that is increasingly on the wrong side of popular sentiment.

The benefits said to flow to the United States from that close association usually center on two things.

One is some matters of military access that include privileged passage through the Suez Canal for U.S. Navy ships. That undoubtedly is a benefit of a relationship that is something more than just normal and businesslike, but there is no common currency for evaluating whether that benefit is worth enough to the United States to offset the negative aspects of the relationship.

The other topic usually cited is Egypt's continued adherence to the peace treaty with Israel signed in 1979. The voluminous U.S. aid relationship with Egypt, which is second in size only to U.S. aid to Israel itself, dates directly from that peace agreement, with the aid being in effect part of the price that the United States paid for Anwar Sadat's signature on the treaty. It certainly is beneficial that, with all the things the United States is worrying about in the Middle East, it does not have to worry about a new war between Israel and neighboring Arab states.

But the main reason that is not a worry is not so much any warm feelings about peace with Israel (such feelings being hard to find in Egypt) but the fact that Egypt's war-fighting ability, despite all that U.S. military aid, has atrophied from where it was in the 1970s while Israel's has grown.

In other words, everyone realizes that any new Egyptian-Israeli war would be a rout and an easy victory for an Israel whose military superiority over everyone else in the Middle East is as great as it has ever been.

An undesirable aspect of the Egyptian-Israeli relationship since Sisi has been in power has been Egypt's collusion with Israel in strangling the Gaza Strip. The connection of Hamas with the Muslim Brotherhood is the Egyptian regime's main motivation in this regard.

By playing a part in maintaining Gaza as an open-air prison, the Egyptian regime is contributing further to a major human rights problem as well as to more radicalization, with Hamas being not nearly radical enough in the eyes of some desperate Palestinians in the Strip.

So there are reasons to believe that Egypt, even if not in the headlines much today, may return to the headlines in the not too distant future. We should hope there is some careful policy planning going on in Washington for the day when it does.

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as [a blog post at The National Interest's Web site](#). Reprinted with author's permission.)**

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## No Reward for Sanders's Israel Stance

**Exclusive:** Sen. Sanders showed guts when he broke from the political lock-step of unrestrained praise for Israel, but his loss in the New York primary shows there's little reward for such courage, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

So much for political bravery! Sen. Bernie Sanders had the audacity to say that the Palestinians are human beings, that there are two sides to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is "not right all of the time" – and lost the New York primary by more than 15 percentage points.

Obviously, there were many other factors, including the tightly closed rules for the New York primaries, requiring voters to have declared their party affiliation by last October or be barred from participating.

But still New York Democrats did not appear to reward Sanders for breaking with Official Washington's orthodoxy on Israel, which holds that the only permissible political stance is total obeisance to Netanyahu and his government. Whether Sanders's stance hurt him may be debatable but the election result could resonate nonetheless with future candidates who might be more chary about taking a more even-handed position on Israel-Palestine.

In one of the sharper exchanges from last Thursday's Democratic debate, Sanders, who is Jewish and once worked on an Israeli kibbutz, chided his rival, Hillary Clinton, for appearing before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee last month and giving a speech that "barely mentioned the Palestinians."

While political insiders gasped at his heresy, Sanders plunged on, "All that I am saying is we cannot continue to be one-sided. There are two sides to the issue. ... There comes a time when if we pursue justice and peace, we are going to have to say that Netanyahu is not right all of the time."

By contrast, former Secretary of State Clinton and the three remaining Republican candidates, including front-runner Donald Trump, went politically prostrate before AIPAC, competing to see who could out-pander the others.

### **Clinton Prevails**

Despite serious efforts by Trump, Ted Cruz and John Kasich, Clinton appeared to come out on top in the pander-off, perhaps partly because she is more experienced at telling Israel's right-wing government what it wants to hear. She depicted Israel as an innocent victim in the Mideast conflicts facing unconscionable challenges from Iran, the Palestinians and global activists seeking to put pressure on Israel through a program of boycott, divestment and sanctions.

"As we gather here, three evolving threats – Iran's continued aggression, a rising tide of extremism across a wide arc of instability, and the growing effort to de-legitimize Israel on the world stage – are converging to make the U.S.-Israel alliance more indispensable than ever," she declared.

"The United States and Israel must be closer than ever, stronger than ever and more determined than ever to prevail against our common adversaries and to advance our shared values. ... This is especially true at a time when Israel faces brutal terrorist stabbings, shootings and vehicle attacks at home. Parents worry about letting their children walk down the street. Families live in fear."

Clinton promised to put her future administration at the service of the Israeli government. "One of the first things I'll do in office is invite the Israeli prime minister to visit the White House. And I will send a delegation from the Pentagon and the Joint Chiefs to Israel for early consultations. Let's also expand our collaboration beyond security," Clinton said, adding:.

"The first choice is this: are we prepared to take the U.S./Israel alliance to the next level?"

Clinton's one-sided presentation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict fit with her longstanding approach to the Middle East, where she has either actively supported or quietly accepted Israel meting out military retribution on the region's Arabs, even when justified by clear-cut bigotry.

For instance, in summer 2006, as a Senator from New York, Clinton shared a stage with Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations Dan Gillerman while Israeli warplanes pounded southern Lebanon, killing more than 1,000 Lebanese. Gillerman was a well-known Muslim-basher who had once quipped, "While it may be true and probably is that not all Muslims are terrorists, it also happens to be true that nearly all terrorists are Muslim."

At a pro-Israel rally with Clinton in New York on July 17, 2006, Gillerman proudly defended Israel's massive violence against targets in Lebanon. "Let us finish the job," Gillerman told the crowd. "We will excise the cancer in Lebanon" and "cut off the fingers" of Hezbollah.

Responding to international concerns that Israel was using "disproportionate" force in bombing Lebanon and killing hundreds of civilians, Gillerman said, "You're damn right we are." [NYT, July 18, 2006]

Clinton did not protest Gillerman's remarks, since doing so would presumably have offended an important pro-Israel constituency.

Clinton has learned those lessons well. They may have helped her trounce Sanders in the crucial New York primary, pulling her close to clinching the Democratic nomination. By contrast, Sanders might have won scattered praise for political courage but his bravery clearly did not turn around the New York race.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

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# How Israel Killed the 'Two-State Solution'

Except for Bernie Sanders, the remaining presidential candidates (Clinton, Trump, Cruz and Kasich) have pledged fealty to Israel's right-wing government as hopes for a two-state solution fade away, explains Chuck Spinney.

By Chuck Spinney

The radical Israeli settlers in the West Bank city of Hebron present what is certainly a candidate for being the ugliest face of Israel's creeping annexation of the West Bank. And, the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has reached a point that renders the so-called *Two State Solution* an impossibility.

The situation also recalls what General Yigael Yadin, Israel's Chief of General Staff, wrote in 1949: "To exploit the principles of war for our purpose and base ourselves upon (the) strategic indirect approach, so as to determine the issue of the fighting even before fighting has begun, it is necessary to achieve the three following aims: a. to cut the enemy's lines of communications, thus paralyzing his physical build-up; b. to seal him off from his lines of retreat, thus undermining the enemy's will and destroying his morale; c. to hit his centers of administration and disrupt his communications, thus severing the link between his brain and limbs.

"Reflection on these three aims proves the truth of Napoleon's saying: 'The whole secret of the art of war lies in the ability to become the master of the lines of communication.'" [See B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, Signet 1974, page 387.]

General Yadin's comments on the strategy of the indirect approach may have been made in the context of the 1948 Arab Israeli War, but they go a long way toward understanding Israel's strategy for solving its Palestinian Question in the Occupied Territories.

Of course, in Israel's eyes, the two-state solution was never a serious consideration – not even during the heady days of the Oslo Peace Process in the early 1990s. On Oct. 5, 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin laid out his case for ratifying the Oslo II Accord in a speech to the Knesset. Rabin described Israel's goals for the agreement.

He explicitly rejected the idea of a binational state and stated clearly that Israel wanted a permanent solution that would include: (1) a "*Palestinian*

entity" that would be "less than a state," (2) a "united Jerusalem" as the Israel's capital, and (3) "blocs of settlements in Judea and Samaria."

Figure 1 shows that Rabin's vision is now in place, or as Israeli's like to say, it is a reality established by "facts on the ground." The graphic on the left side of Figure 1 depicts the buildup of settlers in the Occupied Territories since the 1967 War. The black line represents the total while the blue line represents the buildup in the West Bank.

The difference between them represents primarily the buildup in East Jerusalem, but it also includes the 20,000 or so settlers in the Golan Heights and the settlers in Gaza (before Israel evacuated all 7,800 settlers from Gaza in 2005).

### Figure 1

The red areas in the map on the right side of Figure 1 depict the settlement locations in the West Bank. The three areas delineated in the Oslo accords are distinguished by color: Area A – brown: the Palestinian Authority (PA) is assigned control of security and administration (except with Israel makes periodic incursions to fight people it deems to be terrorists); Area B – tan: Israeli control of security; PA control of administration; Area C – blue: Complete Israeli control. Area C comprises 60 percent of the land area of the West Bank and 80 percent of the water in the aquifers under the West Bank (more below).

At least seven points are worth noting with regard to Figure 1: (1) The rate of settlement growth accelerated after the 1979 U.S.-brokered Camp David Agreement. Camp David not only removed Egypt from the Arab-Israeli Conflict but also resulted in Egypt's complicity in the maintenance of the Gaza blockade. (2) The U.S.-brokered Oslo Accords (triggered by the First Intifada) and its U.S.-brokered successors (e.g., the now-forgotten "roadmap for peace," triggered by the Second Intifada) had *no effect* on the rate of settler growth in the Occupied Territories.

(3) Notwithstanding soaring rhetoric of President Barack Obama's Cairo speech and his tepid criticisms of Israel's settlement program, the rate of settler growth accelerated again after President Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took office, especially in East Jerusalem, but also in the Area C.

Turning to the right side of the figure: (4) The vast majority of Palestinians now live in Areas A & B (many having migrated into these areas from Area C) and are divided up into separated cantons surrounded by Area C. (5) Israeli settlements, a network of Israeli-only access roads connecting the settlements

(not shown), and a system of Palestinian check points controlling entry and exit at the canton boundaries carve up the cantons into disconnected bits and pieces.

(6) Moreover, with the exception of isolated Jericho canton just north of the Dead Sea, all the Palestinian areas are well west of the Jordan border with a network of settlements and the Israeli only access roads as well the Dead Sea separating the Palestinians from the Jordan, the nearest Arab state.

In short, the Palestinian “entity” is cutoff and surrounded by Israel. And that central fact, dear reader, is why Figure 1 is an exemplar how the Yadin strategy fits the occupation like a hand fits a glove.

While the election of Barack Obama as president in 2008 raised the world’s hopes for a more balanced approach to the Palestinian Question, Figure 1 shows Israeli settlements actually accelerated during his Presidency, making a formal Israeli annexation of Area C a likely possibility (as Israel has already done with the Golan Heights of Syria and Jerusalem).

Not only have the Palestinian controlled areas been reduced to an irrational disconnected patchwork that defies any logic for integration into a coherent governable entity, Figure 2 below shows how the pattern of settlements and the Israeli-only roads connecting them have established Israeli control of the West Bank’s water resources.

## Figure 2

The blue arrows in left side of Figure 2 show the underground flows of water as winter rains are collected in the aquifers under the West Bank and relates this to the pattern of Israeli settlements as the Palestinian areas. The right side overlays the underground aquifers on this data.

The dark blue regions (labeled 1, 2, and 3) depict the highest quality fresh-water pumping areas. The light blue areas depict areas of lower quality but viable pumping. The reddish-orange areas portray areas of poor pumping. Israel controls how these different areas are pumped.

This report (also referenced above), describes how this control is exercised. Today, over one-third of Israel’s fresh water budget comes from the aquifers under the West Bank’s highlands. In so doing, Israel (including its settlements) consumes more than 80 percent of the annual recharge of these aquifers, leaving only 20 percent for the Palestinians. (Readers interested in the water question will find a more detailed analysis at this link.)

The United States has been culpable in Israel’s colonization of the West Bank – not only by acquiescing to the creeping annexation depicted in Figures 1 and 2,

but also in the financing of Israel's efforts.

This brings us back to Hebron. The report, [Why is Goldman Sachs funding the violent, racist Jewish settlers in Hebron](#), in one of Israel's most prestigious newspapers, Ha'aretz, is the tip of a funding iceberg of American funding of illegal settlements. [See Ha'aretz's Dec. 7, 2015 special report [here](#).]

Ha'aretz just reported that President Obama is proposing to prop up Israel with a [\\$40 billion military aid package over the next 10 years](#), including \$3.7 billion this first year, then increasing steadily over the 10 years of the plan. Israel is not happy with this offer, because President Obama has added a condition to this offer: Israel must promise not to lobby Congress for any additional aid during the decade that the deal is in force. The Ha'aretz report is silent on any condition to roll back or restrict the rate of growth of settlement activity.

With the possible exception of Sen. Bernie Sanders, American complicity in Israel's solution Palestinian question is not at issue in current presidential election. This can be seen in the obsequious speeches to the recent AIPAC conference made by all the other candidates. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Clinton/Trump AIPAC 'Pander-Off'](#)" and "[Groveling Before AIPAC](#)."]

So Israel's creeping annexation of the West Bank and its lock of the West Bank's water resources will continue unabated, in part financed by tax-deductible donations from the U.S., and propped up by increased military aid.

**Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the "Spinney Report," which criticized the Pentagon's wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems. [This story originally appeared as a blog post at <http://chuckspinney.blogspot.com/2016/04/the-palestinian-question-why-two-state.html>]**

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## The Sanders/Clinton Split on Israel

Because U.S. politicians reflexively bow to whatever Israel wants, any deviation is surprising, such as Bernie Sanders's call to respect Palestinian rights, especially in contrast to Hillary Clinton's Israel pandering, notes Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

An amazing thing happened at the prime-time Democratic debate in Brooklyn last Thursday. A few days ahead of Tuesday's delegate-rich New York primary, presidential candidate Bernie Sanders dared to criticize Israel. Rival Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, stood firm as an uncritical apologist for Israel.

CNN's Wolf Blitzer asked Sanders to explain his assertion that Israel's actions during the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict, after Hamas launched rocket attacks on Israel, was "disproportionate and led to the unnecessary loss of life." Sanders stated that Israel has the right to defend itself and "to live in peace and security without fear of terrorist attack," adding, "That is not a debate."

But Sanders went on to say that 10,000 Palestinian civilians had been wounded and 1,500 were killed. Sanders actually understated the fatalities. According to an independent international commission of inquiry convened by the United Nations Human Rights Council, more than 2,100 Palestinians lost their lives in that conflict. Seventy-one Israelis were killed.

Sanders added, "Now, if you're asking not just me, but countries all over the world was that a disproportionate attack? The answer is that I believe it was."

The U.N. commission documented 2,251 Palestinian deaths, including 1,462 civilians (299 women and 551 children), and the wounding of 11,231 Palestinians, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children. By contrast, six Israeli civilians and 67 Israeli soldiers were killed, and up to 1,600 were injured.

Quoting "official Israeli sources," the commission reported that Israeli "rockets and mortars hit civilian buildings and infrastructure, including schools and houses, causing direct damage to civilian property amounting to almost \$25 million." The commission found that 18,000 Palestinian housing units were totally or partially destroyed; much of the electrical, water and sanitation infrastructure was incapacitated; and 73 medical facilities and several ambulances were damaged. Moreover, 28 percent of the Palestinian population was displaced.

In international law, the principle of proportionality requires an attack be proportionate to the military advantage sought. Israel did not provide information to the commission to support the conclusion that "the civilian casualties and damage to the targeted and surrounding buildings were not excessive." The commission therefore found that the Israeli attacks could be disproportionate, and may amount to war crimes.

When Blitzer asked Clinton whether she agreed with Sanders that Israel "overreacts to Palestinians attacks" and that in order to achieve peace, Israel must end its "disproportionate" responses, she demurred, citing the requirement

that Israel take “precautions.”

The principle of precautions in international law means Israel had a legal duty to take precautions to avoid or limit civilian casualties. The commission concluded, “In many incidents, however, the weapons used, the timing of the attacks, and the fact that the targets were located in densely populated areas indicate that the Israel Defense Forces [IDF] may not have done everything feasible to avoid or limit civilian casualties.”

The commission said that the IDF’s use of roof-knock warnings before the strikes did not constitute effective warning. The commission found that either the people affected didn’t understand that their homes were being subjected to “roof-knocking” or the IDF gave insufficient time for them to evacuate after the warnings.

The commission also criticized Israel for “inferring that anyone remaining in an area that has been the object of a warning is an enemy or a person engaging in ‘terrorist activity.’ Those civilians choosing not to heed a warning do not lose the protection granted by their status. The only way in which civilians lose their protection from attack is by directly participating in the hostilities.”

As the commission pointed out, the targeting of civilians may amount to a war crime as well as a violation of the right to life enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Sanders made another declaration one would not expect from an American politician on national television. He said, “If we are ever going to bring peace to that region which has seen so much hatred and so much war, we are going to have to treat the Palestinian people with respect and dignity.”

But Clinton could not bring herself to agree with Sanders. In fact, Sanders pointed out that during Clinton’s speech to AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) in March, “I heard virtually no discussion at all about the needs of the Palestinian people. Almost none in that speech.”

Clinton did tell AIPAC that “Palestinians should be able to govern themselves in their own state, in peace and dignity,” and she made a veiled reference to “avoiding damaging action, including with respect to settlements.” Israel continues to build illegal settlements on Palestinian land.

But Clinton spoke only of the threat to Israel from the Palestinians and Iran. She called out anti-Semitism, and opposed BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions), an international nonviolent movement initiated by Palestinian civil society to pressure Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian lands.

In the Brooklyn debate, Sanders said that in order to achieve peace in the region, the United States must play “an even-handed role,” adding, “We cannot continue to be one-sided. There are two sides to the issue.”

But for Clinton there is only one side and that is Israel’s. When she mentioned the Palestinians during the debate, she described them as threats to Israel, focusing only on Hamas. Absent from her remarks was any mention of the humanity of the Palestinian people.

During her address to AIPAC, Clinton advocated “bolstering Israeli missile defenses with new systems.” But she said nothing about providing the Palestinians with missile defenses against 155-millimeter Israeli artillery.

Although Sanders had declined an invitation to personally address AIPAC, he made a statement he would have delivered to the group. It included: “But peace also means security for every Palestinian. It means achieving self-determination, civil rights, and economic well-being for the Palestinian people.”

Sanders also argued for “ending what amounts to the [Israeli] occupation of Palestinian territory, establishing mutually agreed-upon borders, and pulling back settlements in the West Bank,” as well as “ending the economic blockade of Gaza.”

Clinton promised AIPAC that one of the first things she would do as president would be to invite Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the White House. She would probably also push to increase the \$3.1 billion in military assistance the United States provides to Israel annually—more than to any other country.

There is a vast difference between Sanders and Clinton on Israel. Make no mistake. A President Hillary Clinton would strengthen Israel’s noose around the necks of the Palestinian people. She would not be an honest broker in any process to bring peace to that region.

**Marjorie Cohn is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. Her most recent book is Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues. Follow her on Twitter @marjoriecohn. [This article first appeared on Truthdig.]**

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## Obama’s Failed ‘Hope’ in Gaza

Eight years ago, President Obama offered “hope” for change in the world, but

politics and pressures won out, with his failure nowhere more obvious than in Gaza, as Palestinian journalist Mohammed Omer explains in this open letter.

By Mohammed Omer

To President Barack Obama

Dear Mr. President,

As president of the most powerful country on the planet; the loving and protective father of two children; and a man fully aware of the human struggles of so many in the down-trodden communities of many lands, including your own, your eyes must have been opened during the last three – of many – Israeli assaults on besieged Gaza, where I live with my wife and young son.

I recall being in the Netherlands when you were first elected president. Like so many millions around the world, I cheered loudly for you, believing that a fresh wind was blowing through the narrow halls of U.S. politics. I dared to hope that a brave man – a champion of good people who were neglected and abused – had arrived to stand up and ease the pain and injustice inflicted on so many, including my people in Palestine, long tormented and driven from their ancient land, deprived of their human dignity.

Sadly, however, I perhaps dared to believe too much. As I look around Gaza today and see only the aftermath of more Israeli cruelty and evidence of ever more bloodshed, pain, sadness and destruction, the words “Yes, we can” now drift away with the dust, carried by the winds of despair.

This despair has hung over our heads for at least the past 10 years, the result of Israel’s harsh collective punishment of the 1.9 million human beings who struggle to survive in Gaza. Half of them are children younger than your Sasha and Malia; many are babies, like mine, held in their parents’ arms.

Perhaps, being so far removed from it, you cannot empathize with the effects of collective punishment. Having studied law and worked closely in community projects, however, you surely have an intellectual and historical understanding. I think you know that Israel’s intentions extend beyond removing Hamas – or any other group that would resist an occupier’s expansion and invasion of their homes and leaders.

The U.S. Constitution does not call for the punishment of an entire population simply for voting for the “wrong party.” It and the Bill of Rights guarantee Americans the freedom to express themselves freely and the right to struggle and defend their inalienable rights. The American Revolution was an act of rebellion against oppression and the denial of “self-evident” rights and freedoms.

In Gaza, we are struggling against similar oppression. Israel increasingly confines and punishes us for our struggle, as we use whatever meager means we have to attain the same freedom and human dignity your forbearers fought for.

**“Do Americans like us? Does Obama like us?”**

What is the bond that binds U.S. politics and power to Israel’s ongoing cruel oppression? How can the U.S. justify its unconditional patronage of Israel escalating infliction of pain upon innocent others? What satisfaction and reward does Israel gain for punishing every aspect of human life for nearly two million good Palestinian people in Gaza, who just want their freedom again?

Three recent wars have whipped, beaten and left homeless many families who are still waiting for short- and long-term protection from cruelty. I met with Ahmed Al Kafarneh, an elderly man of dignity, living with his wife, son, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. Before the 51-day war in 2014, he, like 100,000 other Palestinians, had built a beautiful home after 20 years of working in Israel – no easy task indeed. Now everything is gone, and he lives with his extended family in a rusty metal shipping container.

Mr. President, it is a cold and wet winter here – the coldest in years. Try to imagine yourself, Michelle, Sasha and Malia sitting on cold metal floors with rain dripping in from more holes in the container roof than you can count.

Are you not the same president who, when proclaiming Israel’s right to defend itself, vowed that you would do everything to protect your children? Does that same determination to protect not apply to our Palestinian children?

It seems you have forgotten our right – not only as Palestinians, but as human beings – to exist in freedom and safety from oppression and disproportionately heavy attacks from the Israeli military. In Gaza, our youngest generation knows only war, displacement, loss, trauma and pain. It faces even more obstacles in the path of “Yes we can” in the form of massive unemployment, repression and isolation caused by Israel’s U.S.-sanctioned economic blockade, denying an entire people free movement and a normal life of choices.

Does that not sound like slavery, Mr. President?

We are locked behind walls, contained like cattle, spied on by armed drones, with Israeli-army snipers patrolling barbed-wire fences, and placed on a “diet” meted out by occupiers and thieves. Is that not extremism? Would you not resist it?

A few days ago, I met with 13 brave and dedicated U.S. doctors who came here to assist the local hospitals – a rare occasion when American doctors get to meet

face to face with our own courageous doctors and Hippocratic Oath colleagues. A 24-year-old Palestinian fine arts student paused when she heard of the delegation and asked, "Do Americans like us? Does Obama like us?"

This is why I am writing this open letter to you, Mr. President.

Human beings, of all generations, live here in Gaza, waiting for your replies to these questions. "Change we can believe in," Mr. President – but it must include our freedom of choice.

Gaza is the size of Manhattan Island. We are human beings like you and your fellow Americans – but we are trapped behind walls and fences we have never lived behind before and don't want to wake up to tomorrow. Our southern borders are now fenced off by Egypt, locking down Rafah crossing. To the west, our beaches – frequented by children, families and fishermen – are threatened by Israeli naval vessels armed with missiles and water cannons. They confine our fishing boats to 6 nautical miles offshore instead of the designated 20 nautical miles.

Are you aware that 73 Palestinian fishermen were fired upon and arrested in 2015? Or that 55 percent of Gazans suffer from clinical depression, that 43 percent are unemployed, 40 percent fall below the poverty line, and 60 percent are food insecure? Do you know how few hours of electricity we are allowed in 24 hours, with no power for 12 to 16 hours?

The same shortage applies to water, cooking gas and many other basic essentials. As you are served your meal this evening, remember we have half a million gas cylinders waiting to be filled before we can cook or boil water for washing and drinking (a human right).

This is all the more tragic because Gaza could be the perfect neighbor for Israel, living in peace and harmony and sharing mutually beneficial economic and trade relationships. We have many skilled workers and a well-educated young generation. Palestine has always been progressive. The only thing we need is a chance to grow, develop and contribute with dignity and equality.

We want to build bridges of understanding, instead of separation walls of bigotry and hatred. We don't want Israel experimenting with its new hi-tech weapons on the children of Gaza. Your American-made missiles have been used to attack U.N. schools and shelters – the very schools which offer quality education and steer our children away from extremism. This is usually something to be applauded, not targeted.

You have not seen Khuza'a and the massive destruction that Israel's war machine left behind. Its children's feet are cold this frigid winter because water

continues to drip from their shell-pocked ceilings onto their beds. You are welcome to visit us at any time, should you choose to place humanitarian considerations over political ones.

It is time for you, Mr. President, to provide the children and youth of Gaza with hope they can believe in. You can do it before you leave office, and all your promises, behind. You can reignite the enthusiasm we felt when you stepped up to address the world, and strengthen your legacy for promoting peace after you leave the Oval Office.

Meanwhile, you are among the very few people on earth who could influence Israel and Egypt to open borders and end the collective blockade. Is not a decade enough? Especially when we know that the ones who suffer from the siege are ordinary people, not political groups such as Hamas. If the aim is for people to look beyond Hamas, they must be given options for the future.

The children and parents of Gaza are waiting for a solution, and you can revitalize the positive energy that came with you and your speeches early in your presidency. Make all people proud – including Americans – of your long-lasting achievements.

Stand up for Gaza, as you always do for Israel, regardless of how badly they treat their fellow man (including yourself). We don't want or need extremism in any form. We want stability, peace and to live in our homes without drones and tanks threatening us day and night. The young people of Gaza are seeking a better future.

Can we do this? Yes, we can! Step up Mr. President—please.

**Award-winning journalist Mohammed Omer reports from the Gaza Strip. Follow him on Twitter: @MoGaza. [This letter was adapted from an article in Washington Report on Middle East Affairs.]**

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## A Media Unmoored from Facts

**Exclusive:** Mainstream U.S. journalism has completely lost its way, especially in dealing with foreign policy issues where bias now overwhelms any commitment to facts, a dangerous development, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Several weeks ago, I received a phone call from legendary investigative reporter

Seymour Hersh who had seen one of my recent stories about Syria and wanted to commiserate over the state of modern journalism. Hersh's primary question regarding reporters and editors at major news outlets these days was: "Do they care what the facts are?"

Hersh noted that in the past – in the 1970s when he worked at The New York Times – even executive editor Abe Rosenthal, who was a hard-line cold warrior with strong ideological biases, still wanted to know what was really going on.

My experience was similar at The Associated Press. Among the older editors, there was still a pride in getting the facts right – and not getting misled by some politician or spun by some government flack.

That journalistic code, however, no longer exists – at least not on foreign policy and national security issues. The major newspapers and TV networks are staffed largely by careerists who uncritically accept what they are fed by U.S. government officials or what they get from think-tank experts who are essentially in the pay of special interests.

For a variety of reasons – from the draconian staff cuts among foreign correspondents to the career fear of challenging some widely held "group think" – many journalists have simply become stenographers, taking down what the Important People say is true, not necessarily what is true.

It's especially easy to go with the flow when writing about some demonized foreign leader. Then, no editor apparently expects anything approaching balance or objectivity, supposedly key principles of journalism. Indeed, if a reporter gave one of these hated figures a fair shake, there might be grumblings about whether the reporter was a "fill-in-the-blank apologist." The safe play is to pile on.

This dishonesty – or lack of any commitment to the truth – is even worse among editorialists and columnists. Having discovered that there was virtually no cost for being catastrophically wrong about the facts leading into the Iraq invasion in 2003, these writers must feel so immune from accountability that they can safely ignore reality.

But – for some of us old-timers – it's still unnerving to read the work of these "highly respected" journalists who simply don't care what the facts are.

For instance, the establishment media has been striking back ferociously against President Barack Obama's apostasy in a series of interviews published in The Atlantic, in which he defends his decision not to bomb the Syrian government in reaction to a mysterious sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013.

Though The Atlantic article was posted a month ago, the media fury is still resonating and reverberating around Official Washington, with Washington Post editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt penning the latest condemnation of Obama's supposed fecklessness for not enforcing his "red line" on chemical-weapon use in Syria by bombing the Syrian military.

Remember that in 2002-03, Hiatt penned Post editorials that reported, as "flat fact," that Iraq possessed hidden stockpiles of WMD – and he suffered not a whit for being horribly wrong. More than a dozen years later, Hiatt is still the Post's editorial-page editor – one of the most influential jobs in American journalism.

On Thursday, Hiatt reported as flat fact that Syria's "dictator, Bashar al-Assad, killed 1,400 or more people in a chemical gas attack," a reference to the 2013 sarin atrocity. Hiatt then lashed out at President Obama for not punishing Assad and – even worse – for showing satisfaction over that restraint.

Citing The Atlantic interviews, Hiatt wrote that Obama "said he had been criticized because he refused to follow the 'playbook that comes out of the foreign-policy establishment,' which would have counseled greater U.S. intervention." Hiatt was clearly disgusted with Obama's pusillanimous choice.

### **The No 'Slam Dunk' Warning**

But what Hiatt and other neocon columnists consistently ignore from The Atlantic article is the disclosure that Director of National Intelligence James Clapper informed Obama that U.S. intelligence analysts doubted that Assad was responsible for the sarin attack.

Clapper even used the phrase "slam dunk," which is associated with the infamous 2002 pledge from then-CIA Director George Tenet to President George W. Bush about how "slam dunk" easy it would be to make the case that Iraq was hiding WMD. More than a decade later, brandishing that disgraced phrase, Clapper told Obama that it was not a "slam dunk" that Assad was responsible for the sarin attack.

In other words, Obama's decision not to bomb Assad's military was driven, in part, by the intelligence community's advice that he might end up bombing the wrong people. Since then, evidence has built up that radical jihadists opposed to Assad staged the sarin attack as a provocation to trick the U.S. military into entering the war on their side.

But those facts clearly are not convenient to Hiatt's neocon goal – i.e., how to get the United States into another Mideast "regime change" war – so he simply expunges the "slam dunk" exchange between Clapper and Obama and inserts instead

a made-up “fact,” the flat-fact certainty of Assad’s guilt.

Hiatt’s assertion of the death toll – as “1,400 or more people” – is also dubious. Doctors on the ground in Damascus placed the number of dead at several hundred. The 1,400 figure was essentially manufactured by the U.S. government using a dubious methodology of counting bodies shown on “social media,” failing to take into account the question of whether the victims died as a result of the Aug. 21, 2013 incident.

Relying on “social media” for evidence is a notoriously unreliable practice, since pretty much anyone can post anything on the Internet. And, in the case of Syria, there are plenty of interest groups that have a motive to misidentify or even fabricate images for the purpose of influencing public opinion and policy. There is also the Internet’s vulnerability as a devil’s playground for professional intelligence services.

But Hiatt is far from alone in lambasting Obama for failing to do what All the Smart People of Washington knew he should do: bomb, bomb, bomb Assad’s forces in Syria – even if that might have led to the collapse of the army and the takeover of Damascus by Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front and/or the Islamic State.

Nationally syndicated columnist Richard Cohen, another Iraq War cheerleader who suffered not at all for that catastrophe, accused Obama of “hubris” for taking pride in his decision not to bomb Syria in 2013 and then supposedly basing his foreign policy on that inaction.

“In an odd way, Obama’s failure to intervene in Syria or to enforce his stated ‘red line’ there has become the rationale for an entire foreign policy doctrine – one based more on hubris than success,” wrote Cohen in a column on Tuesday.

Note how Cohen – like Hiatt – fails to mention the relevant fact that DNI Clapper warned the President that the intelligence community was unsure who had unleashed the sarin attack or whether Assad had, in fact, crossed the “red line.”

Cohen also embraces the conventional wisdom that Obama was mistaken not to have intervened in Syria, ignoring the fact that Obama did, in violation of international law, authorize arming and training of thousands of Syrian rebels to violently overthrow the Syrian government, with many of those weapons (and recruits) falling into the hands of terror groups, such as Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Climbing into Bed with Al Qaeda.”]

### **Neocon Ideologues**

So, it appears that these well-regarded geniuses don’t appreciate the idea of

ascertaining the facts before charging off to war. And there's a reason for that: many are neocon ideologues who reached their conclusion about what needs to be done in the Middle East – eliminate governments that are troublesome to Israel – and thus they view information as just something to be manipulated to manipulate the public.

This thinking stems from the 1990s when neocons combined their recognition of America's unmatched military capabilities – as displayed in the Persian Gulf War in 1990-91 and made even more unchallengeable with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991– with Israel's annoyance over inconclusive negotiations with the Palestinians and security concerns over Lebanon's Hezbollah militia.

The new solution to Israel's political and security problems would be “regime change” in countries seen as aiding and abetting Israel's enemies. The strategy came together among prominent U.S. neocons working on Benjamin Netanyahu's 1996 campaign for Israeli prime minister.

Rather than continuing those annoying negotiations with the Palestinians, Netanyahu's neocon advisers – including Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser and Mevray Wurmser – advocated a new approach, called “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm.”

The “clean break” sought “regime change” in countries supporting Israel's close-in enemies, whether Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Syria under the Assad dynasty or Iran, a leading benefactor of Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas.

Two years later, in 1998, the neocon Project for the New American Century called for a U.S. invasion of Iraq. PNAC was founded by neocon luminaries William Kristol and Robert Kagan. [See Consortiumnews.com's [“The Mysterious Why of the Iraq War.”](#)]

After George W. Bush became president and the 9/11 attacks left the American people lusting for revenge, the pathway was cleared for implementing the “regime change” agenda, with Iraq still at the top of the list although it had nothing to do with 9/11. Again, the last thing the neocons wanted was to inform the American people of the real facts about Iraq because that might have sunk the plans for this war of choice.

Thus, the American public was consistently misled by both the Bush administration and the neocon-dominated mainstream media. The Post's Hiatt, for instance, was out there regularly reporting Iraq's WMD threat as “flat fact.”

After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and months of fruitless searching for the promised WMD caches, Hiatt finally acknowledged that the Post should have been more circumspect in its confident claims about the WMD. “If you look

at the editorials we write running up [to the war], we state as flat fact that he [Saddam Hussein] has weapons of mass destruction," Hiatt said in an interview with the Columbia Journalism Review. "If that's not true, it would have been better not to say it." [CJR, March/April 2004]

Yet, Hiatt's supposed remorse didn't stop him and the Post editorial page from continuing its single-minded support for the Iraq War – and heaping abuse on war critics, such as former U.S. Ambassador Joe Wilson who challenged President Bush's claims about Iraq seeking yellowcake uranium from Niger.

The degree to which the neocons continue to dominate the major news outlets, such as The Washington Post and The New York Times, is demonstrated by the lack of virtually any accountability on the journalists who misinformed their readers about an issue as consequential as the war in Iraq.

And, despite the disaster in Iraq, the neocons never cast aside their "clean break" playbook. After Iraq, the "regime change" strategy listed Syria next and then Iran. Although the neocons suffered a setback in 2008 with the election of Iraq War opponent Barack Obama, they never gave up their dreams.

The neocons worked through Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other Iraq War supporters who managed to survive and even move up through the government ranks despite Obama's distaste for their military solutions.

While in office, Clinton sabotaged chances to get Iran to surrender much of its nuclear material – all the better to keep the "regime change" option in play – and she lobbied for a covert military intervention to oust Syria's Assad. (She also tipped the balance in favor of another "regime change" war in Libya that has created one more failed state in the volatile region.)

But the most disturbing fact is that these war promoters – both in politics and the press – continue to be rewarded for their warmongering. Hiatt retains his gilded perch as the Post's editorial-page editor (setting Official Washington's agenda); Cohen remains one of America's leading national columnists; and Hillary Clinton is favored to become the next President.

So, the answer to Sy Hersh's question – "Do they care what the facts are?" – is, it appears, no. There is just too much money and power involved in influencing and controlling Washington and – through those levers of finance, diplomacy and war – controlling the world. When that's at stake, real facts can become troublesome things. For the people who wield this influence and control, it is better for them to manufacture their own.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book,**

*America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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## How Israeli Propaganda Succeeds

Pervasive Israeli propaganda has blinded many Americans to the injustice meted out to Palestinians, a “group think” that a new documentary calls “The Occupation of the American Mind,” reviewed by Abba A. Solomon.

By Abba A. Solomon

Harriet Beecher Stowe is reputed – in Stowe family legend at least – to have been greeted by President Abraham Lincoln with, “Is this the little woman who made this great war?” *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe's novel that dramatized government-sanctioned human bondage, is credited, somewhat fancifully, with moving American public opinion about slavery and helping start the U.S. Civil War.

The documentary film – *The Occupation of the American Mind: Israel's Public Relations War in the United States* – aims to explain why U.S. media, in contrast to most of the world's, omits the Palestinian story, and thus why U.S. public opinion favors Israel so markedly. The film organizes the evidence in plain sight of the unnatural situation that has been maintained in U.S. news reporting – the tropes that reinforce Zionist ideology, and recognize only Jewish Israeli life as imperiled.

Roger Waters narrates that during the July 2014 Israeli assault on Gaza, lasting 51 days – using 20,000 tons of explosives – “The sheer scale of the attack provoked outrage and condemnation around the world. But in the United States the story was different. Polls showed the American people holding firm in their support for Israel.”

Aerial surveys of Gaza now show vast wastelands and ruins of that urban area, holding more than 1.8 million people, the majority exiles from present-day Israel. The film's title, “The Occupation of the American Mind” communicates the hope that once the mechanisms are seen, they can't be unseen.

During Israel's operation Protective Shield (summer 2014), as during Operation Cast Lead (2008-09), the plea that “Israel has the right to defend itself” dominated American reporting. With deft editing, the film shows a risible sequence of Israeli spokesmen, American politicians (up to President Obama) and U.S. newscasters all repeating the same lines of Israeli vulnerability and Arab

menace.

We can presume that by understanding the highly calculated effort of American public relations experts and Israeli officials to “explain” the asymmetry of power and suffering between Jewish nationalist forces and Arab civilians, inexorably losing homes and homeland – a passion for justice in Americans will be excited.

The United States is one gentile culture where the Zionist narrative dominates. Key to this is control of language, controlling thought. U.S. pollster Frank Luntz was commissioned to maintain this, producing a “dictionary” of language to use – a playbook for shading domination as defense.

“When a narrative is so dominant, without any visible dissent or complication, it’s extremely difficult to make clear to people that it is basically a propaganda story. How do you make that clear when the spectacle is so unrelenting and total?” asks New York University scholar Mark Crispin Miller, one of the film’s media studies experts.

What would break the spell? The *New York Times* made a baby step with its concession in an editorial January 2016 that the “Two-state solution” is “fading.” In a masterwork of understatement, an American official is quoted by the *Times*, saying of the settlements that began in late 1967 and continue in 2016, “It is starting to look like a de facto annexation.”

(Israel has moved 3/4 million Jews into the captured territories, including a surprisingly large proportion who’ve moved from the United States).

The argument that the occupied Palestinian territories are held by Israel for “security reasons” serves to screen territorial expansion, the film argues. “If you buy that (security) argument, then it’s a license to occupy indefinitely,” media and militarism critic Norman Solomon explains in the film. (Disclosure: Norman Solomon is my brother.)

The film reports the overwhelming financial contributions to American politicians advocating the Jewish nationalist narrative in Palestine, and shows clips from the many public devotionals that congressmen, cabinet members and presidents attend, to pledge what can fairly be described as Zionist allegiance.

Historian Rashid Khalidi of Columbia University says that American media provides “no sense of how this started, where the animus comes from. It’s completely inexplicable in the way it’s generally presented – these people (Palestinians) kill because they hate, and they hate because they’re irrational Muslim fanatics, or whatever.”

In American politics on this issue, we can notice things that don't happen, as Sherlock Holmes noted the dog that didn't bark. When American Jewish legislators speak of their devotion to Israel, no fuss follows, and brilliant non-Jewish politicians like Joe Biden have made careers steeped in American Zionism and mirroring that loyalty.

A Jan.6 article by Hillary Clinton for the *Jewish Journal* of Los Angeles is an example of the predominant way of relating to Israel/Palestine by centrist U.S. politicians. Her alignment with Israel is slavish, with a promise to raise the U.S.-Israel relationship to "the next level." Clinton proclaims her "deep emotional connection with Israel."

The procession of American presidential candidates at last week's American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) policy conference in Washington (except for Sen. Bernie Sanders) gave a graphic demonstration of the place of Israel as something like an honorary U.S. state.

I hypothesize one contributing reason for the American atmosphere: for some American Jews, Jewish statehood is integral to their Jewish identity. Most Americans have not known Palestinians or Arabs, so making sense of the situation requires relating to what they do know – fellow Americans who are Jews. From that perspective, Americans can imagine Israel as just like the American Jews who are their neighbors, friends, and associates, with no idea of the complexities.

American demographic changes require that Arab-Americans remain a dangerous Other, for the phenomenon of Israeli-American "twinning" to continue. Otherwise, countervailing sympathy and empathy with Arabs will operate. For Israel's purposes, Syria's chaos and evisceration is a godsend, associating Arabs with danger.

With more exposure, the Ku KluxKlan-like behavior of settlers in the occupied Judea and Samaria and the Klan-like blending of religious identity and bigotry in Jewish supremacism may repulse Americans. However, for Americans to understand the Israeli violence systematically unleashed on captive Palestinians would be to sense a hint of the violence that the United States unleashed methodically in achievement of its North American empire.

That, and much of America's direct and proxy military adventurism abroad since, has been invisible to the public, much as Israel's infliction of death and suffering is invisible as precursor to "unprovoked" Arab attacks. Will Americans become conversant with Israeli, Zionist and Palestinian history, if their own is hidden from them?

One difference from the North American settler-colonialism is the Jewish claim of indigeneity, with accusations that Arabs are settlers in Palestine who should by rights move or be expelled from “the state of the Jewish people.”

A film of this sort can only review so much Zionist and Palestine history to set the scene. The producers did a nice job fitting in a lot of content, selectively, in the time. (The U.S. organization Jewish Voice for Peace made an animated short, “[Israeli/Palestinian Conflict 101](#),” that shows the challenge of compressing facts and sequences of events of Zionism and Palestine. Their summary is 6.5 minutes.)

Intended as an educational film to join the [Media Education Foundation's](#) strong list, “The Occupation of the American Mind,” the work of writer/producers Loretta Alper and Jeremy Earp, is invaluable as a contrast to Israel’s fantasy world in media. (The film is not about an allied subject, the Zionist Occupation of the American Jewish Mind, where another fantasy world operates, where Jews heroically rebuild Jewish sovereignty.)

The film concentrates on American media dating from the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and the formalization of Israel’s Western-media Hasbara/PR institutions in reaction to horror at consequences of Israel’s Lebanon occupation. (Bombardment and siege of Beirut, and massacre at Sabra and Shatilla)

The film’s coda surveys pro-Palestinian campus activism and alliance-building with African-American and other groups locked out of the American narrative, younger Americans awakening to the Palestinian perception of events. A series of Pew polls show that among American young people, Democrats, and independents, sympathy for Palestinian Arabs is growing, and the Republican Party is becoming the repository of unconditional Israel advocacy.

Among developed nations, the United States has an unusually high proportion of religious believers, and more Christian Zionists than U.S. Jews figure in the Republican Party’s embrace of militant Zionism. In the film, executive producer Sut Jhally makes that point: “In fact, it’s not accurate to call it the Jewish lobby. It is the Israel lobby,” not consistent with the views of most American Jews.

It is difficult to imagine that Americans will become conversant with subtleties of Zionist and Jewish history. One might expect revulsion as the system of political contributions and targeted propaganda to ensure and [manipulate](#) American support is illustrated. Film clips of Israeli violence at checkpoints and demonstrations are followed by Media Education Foundation founder Jhally commenting:

“The more Americans are able to see realities of the occupation with their own eyes, to see routine daily violence, to see repression and humiliation that never make it into mainstream news, the more they will question the image of Israel as this tiny little David up against this bullying Arab goliath, and start to wonder if it’s the outgunned Palestinians who are the Davids here.

“When that starts to become the dominant perception here in the U.S., all bets are off. It all comes down to American popular perception.”

Noam Chomsky ends the film saying, “The U.S. government will support it as long as the U.S. population tolerates it.”

If the image of Israel becomes that of a cruel oppressor, may the shift be as consequential as when Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel (and its depiction of slavery) became part of a march to the Civil War? For Jews, what might a shift of U.S. public opinion about Israel mean? To the extent Israel is identified, naturally, as an indivisibly “Jewish” project – dismantling this tiger isn’t going to be graceful. Injury to Arabs in Palestine, and the manipulation of the United States, in the past Zionist century, will be reckoned.

**Abba A. Solomon is the author of “The Speech, and Its Context: Jacob Blaustein’s Speech ‘The Meaning of Palestine Partition to American Jews.’” The film is available via streaming and DVD at [www.occupationmovie.com](http://www.occupationmovie.com) . The documentary premieres in Massachusetts next month. [This article first appeared at**

**Mondoweiss as**

**<http://mondoweiss.net/2016/03/the-occupation-of-the-american-mind-documented/#sthash.eovxdIin.dpuf> ]**

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## Selling Out Palestinian Rights

Hillary Clinton and other Democrats have led the way in abandoning principles of human rights, democracy and rule of law by pandering to Israel and its powerful lobby, explains Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

In early March, Professor Richard Falk, former United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, wrote an essay explaining that American foreign policy generated by Democratic Party presidents has been much to blame for the disastrous fate of the Palestinians.

The Democrats have allowed themselves to be suborned by Zionist special

interests for reasons we will explore below. It is Democratic officials who also verbally attack any American who stands up for the rights of Palestinians, and do so, if anything, more strongly than their Republican competitors.

Falk worked tirelessly from 2008 to 2014 to bring about justice for the Palestinian people – something that, if achieved, would have raised the esteem of both the U.N. and the U.S. among millions of Arabs. Officials appointed by Democratic President Barack Obama, including National Security Advisor Susan Rice and current U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power, repaid Falk for his efforts with insulting ad hominem attacks.

For instance, Power celebrated Falk's departure from his post by asserting that, "his publication of bizarre and insulting material has tarnished the U.N.'s reputation and undermined the effectiveness of the Human Rights Council. The United States welcomes Mr. Falk's departure, which is long overdue."

It is to be noted that at no time did Professor Falk issue a report, or even make a public statement, that was not based on documented fact and a clear understanding of international law. One suspects that Ambassador Power knew this to be so and that her vitriol against Falk was the act of an amoral political agent of an amoral government.

Professor Falk sees much of the U.S. government's policy in the Middle East as a consequence of a State Department long populated by Zionists along with the power and influence of an Israeli-directed bloc of special interests.

President Obama's own efforts at Middle East policy formulation began, according to Falk, with the rhetorical assertion that the United States is "different because we adhere to the rule of law and act in accord with our values in foreign policy." Yet this claim has always been false, and very quickly, the President's words lost meaning as lobby pressure bent policy (with the singular exception of the Iran nuclear deal) to the will of the Zionist cause.

## **Hillary Clinton**

Watching the distressing kowtowing this past week to that same lobby by Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton has proven Richard Falk undeniably correct. In her speech to the America Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), an organization which, in truth, functions in the U.S. as the agent of a foreign power (Israel), Clinton proclaimed the following:

–That as president she will take the U.S.- Israeli relationship "to the next level," which entails lavishing on that state most of America's latest defensive and offensive weaponry and the negotiating of yet another defense treaty – a "ten-year defense memorandum of understanding."

–This is allegedly necessary because, Israel “faces three evolving threats – Iran’s continued aggression, a rising tide of extremism across a wide arc of instability, and the growing effort to delegitimize Israel on the world stage.” Here she refers to the boycott or BDS movement. These threats make “the U.S.-Israel alliance more indispensable than ever.”

Juan Cole’s rebuttal to Clinton’s assertions is particularly good. He points out that when the situation is looked at soberly, Israel has no conventional security threats, including from Iran, that necessitates billions of dollars of American weapons and a binding defense memorandum. Cole accurately points out that the “rising tide of extremism” is, to a good extent, a function of the U.S. invasion of Iraq (which both Clinton and the Israelis supported), and the dissolution of Syria (which has become a national security goal of Israel). Finally, by describing BDS as a movement that must be suppressed, she is endangering U.S. constitutional rights.

–Clinton extols the U.S.-Israel alliance as one of “shared values.” She describes Israel as “a bastion of liberty.” This is de rigueur propaganda and, for the Palestinians, has no convincing connection to reality.

Clinton then qualifies her dubious assertion by asking, “will we, as Americans and as Israelis, stay true to the shared democratic values that have always been at the heart of our relationship.” She is no doubt including “America” in this question as a reference to the problematic behavior of Donald Trump and his supporters. However, her question, as it applies to Israel, has already been answered.

### **Gideon Levy**

The well-known Israeli journalist Gideon Levy was in Washington, D.C. last week and had an interview with Max Blumenthal. In it he warned of just how far Israel has drifted from “democratic values” as well as how complicit American liberals, such as Hillary Clinton, are in the process of Israeli moral and political corruption.

Levy tells us that “American liberals should know ... that they are supporting the first sign of fascism in Israel. I don’t call it yet fascism, but [the] first signs [are] very clear. ... And America keeps financing it. This should be known and should be recognized by any American, mainly the liberals, who care where their taxpayer money goes, and so much of it.

“I mean, there is no source of hope right now. There’s no alternative to Netanyahu. ... The atmosphere, as I said, is becoming less and less tolerant, and the standing of democracy is minimal and many times very twisted.”

Levy then takes particular aim at the substantial, if unofficial, U.S. support for Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and Golan Heights:

"Occupation is American values? Occupation serves the American interest? Doesn't America see that it pays a hell of a price for this automatic and blind support of Israel and of the occupation project? Is it reasonable that in the 21st century, the United States will finance an apartheid regime in the occupied territories? All those questions should be raised."

Levy is by no means alone at raising the alarm about where Zionism has led Israeli society. For a more detailed treatment of the intolerance and nascent fascism showing its face, the reader can take a look at Israeli Professor David Schulman's "[Israel: The Broken Silence](#)," a review of six exposes on Israeli society and behavior. This has just been published in the April 7 edition of *New York Review of Books*.

Schulman concludes that "The far right in Israel very readily opts for totalitarian modes of thinking and acting, and it's not clear who is left to stop it." It certainly will not be Hillary Clinton.

Who raises objections to the consequences of U.S. complicity in Israel's political disaster? People such as Richard Falk and Gideon Levy do and thereby keep alive some semblance of rational discourse about the place of democratic values in U.S. foreign policy formulation. However, despite their rhetoric, liberal politicians like Hillary Clinton have clearly abandoned those values when it comes to any reference to Israel and its behavior.

What this means is that the substance of Clinton's speech at the AIPAC convention was mere propaganda – an effort to rationalize, or perhaps simply to cover up, deeper and more base motives. Therefore, if supporting "shared democratic values" is not what motivates Clinton's kowtowing, what does?

The answer is naked political opportunism. Here is the formula: (1) American politics runs on domestically garnered money, and lots of it: running for office, just about any office from dog catcher to president, requires constant financial solicitation; (2) special interests, be they economic concerns, professional organizations, or ideologically motivated groups are a major source of these funds; (3) in exchange for their largesse, such interests require political support for their causes.

Here enters, among others, the Zionists, whose deep pockets, ability to shape media messages, and rally voters, both Jewish and Christian, are well known. An alliance with the Zionists is politically profitable while incurring their anger is sometimes politically fatal.

Of course, such an alliance means the abandonment of any objective or even rational consideration of U.S. policy toward Israel and much of the rest of the Middle East. And indeed, the national interest relating to this increasingly dangerous part of the world has long ago been tossed overboard. It has been replaced by the parochial interests of wealthy, well-organized and influential ideologues.

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## Groveling Before AIPAC

The recent AIPAC meeting brought four of the five remaining presidential candidates – all except Bernie Sanders – to Washington to grovel at the feet of the Israel lobby, a depressing scene, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

A depressing sameness characterized the speeches of presidential candidates to the recently concluded exercise in fervid conformity that is called the AIPAC annual meeting. Although the event and the organization ostensibly are dedicated to support for, and friendship with, the state of Israel, in practice the dedication was instead to the policies of the right-wing government that currently holds power in Israel, which is something different.

There was nothing approaching a free and open discussion of what policies would be in the interest of the peace and security of Israel and that a true friend of Israel would support. There was no mention of the occupation that, in the course of nearly half a century, has become Israel's defining characteristic and the single biggest barrier to Israel being able to enjoy a future as a democratic and Jewish state.

The Republican candidates all found somewhat different ways to say they would destroy the agreement that limits Iran's nuclear program. Such destruction would, of course, serve the purpose of the Netanyahu government in helping it to fulminate endlessly about Iran as the "real problem" in the Middle East, taking attention away from every other problem; maybe we would even see a return of cartoon bombs to the rostrum of the United Nations.

But the candidates did not explain how destroying the agreement, which would

mean the Iranians could spin as many centrifuges as they want, enrich as much uranium as they want to whatever level they want, and kick out all of the extra international inspectors provided for in the agreement, would somehow be in the interest of Israeli security. As leading Israelis who have dedicated careers to their nation's security recognize, it would not be.

Perhaps one question of interest regarding the candidates' otherwise drearily similar speeches to the AIPAC meeting was who, in this contest in pandering, could out-pander the rest. Donald Trump made a go of it, evidently erasing some of the suspicions he had aroused among this constituency with earlier sinful suggestions such as that a posture of neutrality would be needed for the United States to do something about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

No such lines were crossed in Trump's speech at AIPAC, and he got a positive reception that would remind some observers of how earlier notorious demagogues could whip up frenzy in a crowd.

But the prize for out-pandering the others should go to Ted Cruz's speech, as measured by sheer shamelessness in using extreme and outright deceitful rhetoric. Speaking after Trump, Cruz made sure that no one would ever suspect him of falling into that disgraceful state known as neutrality or to do anything that might lead to creation of a Palestinian state.

To make doubly sure no one missed the point, in the second sentence of his speech, right after saying "God bless AIPAC" and stating how thrilled he was to be there, Cruz declared that "Palestine has not existed since 1948." And if any resolution on Palestinian statehood were to come to a vote at the United Nations, said Cruz, "I will fly to New York to personally veto it myself."

The thesaurus of extreme terminology at Cruz headquarters must be terribly dog-eared after preparing this speech, including, among much else, the portions about the Iran nuclear agreement. According to Cruz, the agreement "is Munich in 1938" and risks "catastrophic consequences" by "allowing a homicidal maniac to acquire the tools to murder millions" – never mind that the agreement is all about taking tools *away* from the Iranians.

Among the cascade of deceitful references throughout the speech is a bizarre comparison in which Cruz says that the nuclear agreement "gives over \$100 billion to the Ayatollah Khomeini, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism," and that this "dwarfs the \$3 billion we give each year to the nation of Israel," a difference that is "unconscionable" and "fundamentally immoral."

No attention is paid to the fact that U.S. aid to Israel comes straight out of the pockets of American taxpayers whereas frozen assets that have been unfrozen

under the nuclear agreement already belonged to the Iranians and the United States is not “giving” Iran any of this, that the amount of unfrozen assets not already spoken for to settle existing accounts is far less than \$100 billion, and that Ayatollah Khomeini has been dead for 26 years.

The one remaining presidential candidate who did not speak to the AIPAC meeting was Bernie Sanders. Sanders, campaigning elsewhere, instead submitted a written statement that addresses important issues involving Israel. Sanders, who happens to be the only Jew in the presidential race, notes at the outset of his statement that he is the only candidate with personal ties to Israel, having spent time there on a kibbutz as a young man.

The leading issue that Sanders addresses in the statement is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What he says about it is vastly different from what the other candidates, and especially the Republicans, said about it in their speeches. What he says also should be seen as eminently reasonable by those who genuinely want peace to replace that conflict and by those who are true friends of Israel.

It is a well-balanced statement that recognizes that peace “will require compromises on both sides” and will mean “security for every Israeli from violence and terrorism” as well as “security for every Palestinian.” Sanders does not shy away from using the word “occupation,” and he notes that “it is important to understand that today there is a whole lot of suffering among Palestinians and that cannot be ignored. You can’t have good policy that results in peace if you ignore one side.”

The depressing sameness of speeches at the AIPAC meeting suggests that with the election of anyone other than Sanders, there will be a depressing sameness in U.S. policy toward Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict beginning next January. That will mean Israel continuing down the path of apartheid and isolation, with more endless conflict and more shedding of blood of Israelis as well as Palestinians, and Israel moving farther away from ever being a peaceful, democratic, Jewish state.

Barack Obama still has almost ten months to shift that momentum at least somewhat. He already has shown a willingness and ability to defy the rightist Israeli government and the lobby that works on its behalf when he waged the political battle needed to bring the Iran nuclear agreement into existence.

He has given ample indication that he fully understands the underlying issues. He has given other indications of being able and willing to set some new directions notwithstanding the longevity of old, stale, and destructive directions – notably with his changing of U.S. policy toward Cuba. And he never

needs to run in any election again, not even for dog-catcher.

Mr. Obama should, sometime before the end of summer, give a major speech that lays out the main terms of what knowledgeable observers of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have long understood to be necessary parts of any final settlement of that conflict. This would not preclude necessary negotiation of details between the parties, but would lay out the framework for a two-state solution that has been clear for some time.

You might call this an updated version of the Clinton parameters. Then in the autumn the United States should not just not veto, and not just accept, but should sponsor and promote a resolution of the United Nations Security Council that incorporates this framework.

Mr. Obama would be able to do this secure in the knowledge that he can make a case that is strong and truthful on multiple grounds. This step certainly would be very much in U.S. interests, given the damage to those interests of being associated with the continued occupation. It would be in the interests of justice and self-determination for the Palestinian people. And it would be in the interests of Israel, by helping to pull Israel off its current self-destructive path.

The rightist government in Israel would scream, as would the U.S. lobby that works on its behalf. Until and unless there is significant political change in Israel, the combination of religious rationalization, economic greed, and government-stoked fear that has powered the tenacious clinging to conquered territory will still be a major barrier to a peaceful path.

But a change in U.S. direction – if speeches and resolutions are backed up with corresponding use of material U.S. leverage – might at least lead Israeli voters and true friends of Israel elsewhere to see that the days of U.S. abetting of the self-destructive behavior are over, and to acknowledge that the conflict with the Palestinians over land and sovereignty cannot indefinitely be wished or bludgeoned away. And that would mean the new U.S. president, whoever he or she is, would be facing a new situation and new possibilities, different from the one that persists today.

To return in the end to the United States' own interests – as we always should – the slogan that the Trump campaign uses, about making America great again, has some relevance. A really great nation does not display the obsequiousness toward another government that was on display in the arena where AIPAC met, and people who want to lead a great nation should not display it either.

We should ask, as President Bill Clinton did after his first meeting with a

bullying Benjamin Netanyahu, “Who’s the [expletive deleted] superpower here?”

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