



Title: Balancing Power and Principle: An analysis of U.S. involvement in the Israel-Palestine Conflict and Potential Reform Pathways

Name: Lilia Dowlatshahi

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For decades, the U.S. has functioned as Israel's most reliable patron, especially in the Israel-Palestine conflict, extending both diplomatic loyalty and billions in military aid. However, recent shifts in the 2023 response to the war have reignited extensive scrutiny on whether U.S. intervention is compatible with international legal frameworks and humanitarian principles. Taking into consideration the U.S.'s strategic justifications for their steadfast alliance, this brief examines whether the U.S. achieves equilibrium in realpolitik and moral considerations or completely sacrifices its ethos in international law.

II. OVERVIEW (FOR SOME REASON IT WONT LET ME SWITCH FROM ALL CAPS)

THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT HAS PERSISTED FOR MORE THAN 75 YEARS, ROOTED IN OVERLAPPING HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES REGARDING THE HOLY LAND TERRITORIAL DISPUTE. THE U.S. PRIDES ITSELF IN A UNYIELDING ALLIANCE WITH ISRAEL FOR SEVERAL REASONS: REGIONAL PROXY DEFENSES, ROBUST INTELLIGENCE SERVICE NETWORKS FOR COUNTERTERRORISM INITIATIVES, LONG-STANDING BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS, SHARED DEMOCRATIC AFFINITIES,

AND DOMESTIC CONSTITUENCIES SUCH AS THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN ZIONISTS. ADDITIONALLY, THE U.S. HAS INSTITUTIONALIZED ITS ALLIANCE THROUGH MULTIPLE LONG-TERM AGREEMENTS, NAMELY THE 2016 FOREIGN AID AGREEMENT WHICH SIGNED A 10 YEAR MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING PROVIDING ISRAEL WITH 38 BILLION IN MILITARY AID AND THE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WHICH SUBSTANTIVELY PROMOTES BILATERAL TRADE BY ELIMINATING TARIFFS.

HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO SEVERAL U.N. INVESTIGATORS, HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS, AND LEGAL EXPERTS, U.S. AID IS RENDERED AS COMPLIANT TO ISRAEL'S INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (IHL) BREACHES. IN PARTICULAR, ISRAEL HAS ALLEGEDLY VIOLATED THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES OF THE FOURTH GENEVA CONVENTION (GCIV)--THE PRINCIPLE OF DISTINCTION AND THE PRINCIPLE OF PROPORTIONALITY--BY CONDUCTING STRIKES ON DENSELY POPULATED CIVILIAN AREAS SUCH AS HOSPITALS AND SCHOOLS. ADDITIONALLY, ISRAEL HAS BREACHED THE ROMAN STATUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT AND ARTICLE 23 OF THE GCIV BY BLOCKING HUMANITARIAN AID TO GAZA.

BOTH THE U.N. AND EUROPE'S PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY HAVE CONDEMNED THESE CRIMES AND ALTHOUGH THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION ACKNOWLEDGED THAT ISRAEL MAY HAVE VIOLATED IHL DURING A MILITARY OPERATION, THEY ULTIMATELY CONCLUDED THAT EVIDENCE WAS INSUFFICIENT AND CONTINUED THE TRANSFER OF ARMS. CRITICS CLASSIFY THIS APPROACH AS AN ALLEGED VIOLATION OF

COMMON ARTICLE 1 OF THE GCIV WHICH MANDATES COUNTRIES TO ENSURE COMPLIANCE OF IHL FROM THEIR ALLIES. DESPITE GROWING INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS OF A PALESTINIAN STATE AND EVIDENCE OF HUMANITARIAN CRIMES, THE U.S. LATCHES ONTO ISRAEL AS A STABLE DEMOCRATIC PARTNER IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN INFLUENCE IN A VOLATILE REGION.

A. Relevance

Unfortunately, the U.S.-Israel alliance is of ideological and geopolitical contention. What began as collateral damage has turned into the utter destruction of civilian infrastructure and healthcare. The UN Commission of Inquiry concluded that genocide is occurring in Gaza and as of August of 2025, Gaza City confirmed a state of famine directly caused by Israeli blockades. In addition, about 90 percent of the Gaza population has been displaced and at least 67,183 Palestinians have been killed. The circumstances have ignited action from the legal sphere, as demonstrated by the arrest warrants issued against Prime Minister Netanyahu and Hamas officials from the International Criminal Court.

Meanwhile, the U.S. continued to show its diplomatic allegiance by vetoing U.N. security council draft resolutions for a ceasefire, imposing bans on funding the UN's main aid agency in GAZA (UNRWA), permitting Israeli violation of humanitarian law and persisting with armed transfers. Beyond international law, U.S. foreign policy contradicts with domestic statutory frameworks. In particular, the U.S. violates the Leahy Laws which ban military personnel provisions to foreign units that implicate gross human rights violations. These moral and legal vulnerabilities have pitted legislators and the public into deep divisions, challenging the U.S.'s

ability to transcend polarized motives in order to reflect universal human rights doctrine.

III. HISTORY AND CURRENT STANCES

If we trace the conflict to its ancestral beginnings, it was primarily attributed to British imperial policies. Jewish emigration to Ottoman Palestine was catalyzed by the emergence of political zionism—an ideology crystallized by Theodore Herzl's publication: *The Jewish State*. Correspondingly, the Balfour Deceleration which endorsed a Jewish homeland was published and latter enshrined into the British Mandate for Palestine.

During World War 2, the influx of Jewish refugees transformed the demographic landscape of the region, string tension among Arab neighbors. Thus, in 1947, Britain referred to the U.N. for advice and the U.N. proposed the famous two state solution: a partition plan that allocated 56 percent of land to a Jewish state and 43 percent to a Arab State, with Jerusalem governed by international law administrations. However, the solution's current use in the political landscape has been perceived as a rhetorical device, absolving government officials of responsibility; palestinian lawyer and analyst Diana Buttu claims, "it's a form of escapism."

The plan's rejection is evident in the resulting two year war—"Al Nakba"—Arabic for catastrophe. The 1948 war is also known as Israel's War of Independence in which the Palestinian Exodus took place—an event where more than half of the Palestinian population was displaced, most settling in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. President Truman then recognized Israel as a state just 11 minutes after its creation, a pivotal arch in the alliance that would last for decades. Since then, the UN General Assembly has called for the compensation and restitution of these refugees, yet to this day, Palestinians continue to be dispossessed and displaced as a

result of Israel's occupation agenda. Regional tensions intensified once again in 1967. What began as apparent mobilization for war by the Arab states turned into a Six Day War in which Israel dismantled Egypt and Syria's Air forces, conquering control of the Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, Sinai Peninsula, West Bank and Jerusalem. As a result, an Arab Coalition launched an attack on Israel during the holy day of Yom Kippur with the aim to reclaim lost territory; however, their advances were ultimately reversed after Israel secured extensive U.S. military support.

Half a century later, U.S. intervention culminates in the Palestine-Israel Conflict but the focal question remains: are strategic efforts blurring the line between self-defense and humanitarian injustice?

PROBLEM

A. Stakeholders

Considering the conflict is at the heart of geopolitical dynamics both in the region and abroad, the stakeholders include the Israeli government, Palestinian authorities, the U.S. , global civil societies, U.N. agencies and international donor entities. The U.S. government is not only the nexus of military aid for Israel, but stands as a democratic nation that sets precedent for how world powers will use their capacities in times of conflict. Additionally, the Israeli government's far right coalitions control the welfare of civilian infrastructure and write occupation agendas.

Meanwhile, Palestinian Authorities compete for legitimacy and diplomatic representation. Palestinian governance is divided due to a 2007 faction split between Hamas and Fatah, as a result, two administrative entities govern Palestinian

territory: the Palestinian Authority governs the West Bank while the Hamas militant group governs the Gaza Strip, both of which are partially controlled by Israeli officials. The Palestinian Liberation Organization is responsible for the international representation of Palestinians; thus, the lack of clarity not only misinforms neighboring countries but weakens a path to self-determination. Through one proclamation, these governing bodies can give death sentences to civilians, supported by the justification of collateral damage. As a result, U.N. agencies, NGOs, advocacy groups and media information actors continue to report on diplomatic discourse and international sentiment.

B. Risks of Indifference

If no action to taken to amend policy, civilian suffering escalates, international law loses legitimacy, and regional interdependence collapses. Israel's blockades on humanitarian aid led South Africa to petition a case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), claiming that genocide is occurring. ICJ found the claim plausible and agreed that Israel was infringing on Palestinian rights under the genocide convention. As a result, they imposed positive duties and negative restaurants for Israel which were reinforced when Israel was ordered to halt obstructive offensives in the Rafah Governante. Israeli officials have accused these hearings of being "blood libel" and even accused South Africa as acting like a legal safety net for Hamas. This is one of the many circumstances where international humanitarian attention has been dismissed. If these nations continue to manufacture their egos and unfaithfully use their capacities to escape retribution for legal breaches, a dangerous precedent will be set for world powers. Without effective measures to address

these global humanitarian concerns, decades of diplomacy will be dismissed amidst evasive justifications. Wars will seize to focus on borders and militia targets. Most importantly, in times of conflict, nations won't discriminate civilian infrastructure from their agenda, and billions of women and children will pay the price.

C. Nonpartisan Reasoning

Addressing this foreign relations concern not only cements national ethos in humanitarian law but demonstrates our integrity to the U.S.'s statutory legal foundations. The enforcement of national legislation like the Foreign Assistance Act of 1971 and its Leahy Law provisions have been dismissed in the contexts of Israel military funding. The act mandates that U.S. underpins human rights and doesn't fund foreign security forces that indicate gross human rights violations; despite several credible human rights abuse reports, the U.S. continues to fund Israeli militant operations. Moreover, the Biden administration enacted the National Security Memorandum in February of 2024—requiring countries receiving U.S. military aid to evidently comply with IHL. In reference to the statute, a state department report found that it was valid to assess Israel's employment of weaponry as a breach of IHL; nonetheless, they continued to allocate funds to Israel. Ultimately, nonpartisan collaboration is not only an opportunity to forge new resolutions but reinforces the U.S. as a nation that will use its capacities to erase the gray area between combatants and civilian targets—preserving the pillars of IHL rather than perpetuating peril.

IV. TRIED POLICY

Even decades ago, the U.S. had brokered between Middle Eastern nations to cement lasting peace. Their mediation path began with president

Jimmy Carter's effort to end conflict between Egypt and Israel through the David Accords. Within these accords, Israel withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula territory and in exchange, Egypt recognized Israel statehood; however, this project failed to propose a broader resolution to geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East. As Israel-Palestine ties worsened, culminating in the first Intifada (Palestinian uprising), the Oslo Accords were arranged amongst Norway, U.S. Israel and Palestine Liberation Organization leaders. The agreements cultivated a path to a two state solution, granting governance of the Gaza Strip and West Bank to the new Palestinian Authority (PA) for a five year period. However, the refugee crisis and settlement expansion barriers were left unaddressed, leading to the solution's collapse during the second Intifada. The U.S. along with other global powers attempted to propose a new resolution known as Bush's Road Map for Peace which included a three-phase plan to address border disputes and establish Palestinian statehood. Following the common-trend, the solution didn't work as a result of failed commitments on both sides. Furthermore, at the end of the Obama Administration, Secretary of State John Kerry established the six principles necessary for a two-state solution, but the doctrine wasn't applied to any formal negotiations. The most direct and attainable resolution was the Abraham Accords which fostered regional cooperation, moderation and economic growth between Israeli and Arab states.

On today's headlines is Trump's comprehensive 20 point plan which stirs both praise and precarity. The first phase calls for peace of Gaza through deradicalization. The plan begins with stabilizing Gaza through an immediate ceasefire and mandating Israel withdrawal to a yellow line in order to facilitate prisoner and hostage exchanges. Hostages held by Hamas must be returned within the 72 hours of Israel publicly accepting the agreement; in turn, Israel must

return many prisoners and facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid. Then, Palestine would be run by a temporary technocratic and apolitical Palestinian body overseen by Trump's new International Board of Peace. Farther down the line, Trump would lead an economic redevelopment plan and enact an International Stabilization Force (ISF) for, reintegration and military training. Finally, the 20-point plan notes the possibilities of a two state solution, but doesn't promise or endorse Palestinian self-determination. After mediated talks in Egypt, Israel and Hamas formally agreed to the first phase; however many concerns remain: who will command the International Stabilization Force, are their concrete limitations for Israel farther down the line, does Palestine lose the possibility of statehood to international administrations, and what is Israel's far right coalition's response?

V. POLICY OPTIONS

Although Trump's 20 point plan is relatively effective in cementing consideration from critical actors in the conflict, ultimately, it lacks essential details necessary for lasting peace. The following policies are amendments of the 20 point plan that consider logistical barriers:

Amendment to Point 6: Point 6 of the 20 point plan contends that Hamas members who disarm and commit to peace will gain amnesty or safe passage abroad to a "receiving country." However, those receiving countries aren't specified and it's implausible that nations would welcome former Hamas officials. Egypt doesn't even accept women and children from Gaza. Additionally, all member states of the International Criminal Court are bound to not grant immunity to Hamas officials as a result of previous warrants. Moreover, the ideological motives of neighboring countries may admit

former Hamas officials and see them as an asset to their militia, risking re-mobilization and ultimately perpetuating the cycle of terrorism. As an alternative, this amendment proposes that all Hamas officials will be concentrated in a settlement along the Rafah border with basic accommodations. The settlement would be overseen by officials from the Board of Peace and U.N officials in order to both provide shelter and ensure the flow of humanitarian aid until further deals regarding amnesty are brokered with nations.

Amendment to Point 15: Point 15 compensates for the complete obliteration of Hamas governance by establishing a temporary International Stabilization Force (ISF) to effectuate peace-keeping objectives and train vetted Palestinian police to maintain security as institutions are rebuilt. Although, the proposal includes that the ISF would be organized by Arab and international partners in Gaza, it doesn't specify the exact composition of the ISF. This amendment states that the ISF is temporarily constituted by a neutral U.N. administrative body. Additionally, the ISF would install a youth cadet program for youth Palestinians interested in pursuing military careers, channeling their lament into leadership.

Amendments to Cohesive 20 Point Plan

The plan is evidently imbalanced in terms of national profit as exemplified by the fact that Netanyahu has Trump's backing to "do what you have to do" which implies the consent for utter destruction, contradicting the civilian-orientated foundations of the plan. Whereas for Palestine, Trump didn't grant any promise of self-determination, the fundamental aspiration of Palestinians. The amendment states that the U.S.

must involve the Palestinian Liberation Organization in ¾ of talks regarding the conflict to promote a multilateralist approach, and if Hamas doesn't agree to a particular phase of the plan than Israel can issue emergency talks to propose a conventional warfare plan that must be ratified by three international neutral bodies, ultimately avoiding complete annihilation. Additionally, the amendment proposes that if Israel evidently prevents the flow of unconditional humanitarian aid which can be measured by aid agency reports, their will be proportionate retribution such as larger withdrawals from occupied territories.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I examined the historical ancestry, modern applications and policy solutions to the infamous Israel-Palestine conflict. Despite several wars, foreign intervention and resolutions proposed by the U.N, the conflict persists to influence the global political landscape.

Although the Middle East is inherently tumultuous as a result of the contested chain of interdependence, we can frame a path to sustainable peace if nations partially comprise ideological loyalty with legal and moral responsibilities. However, the 20 point plan along with it's amendments will resolve the unrest if all actors faithfully execute their duties with a pragmatic lens rather than a personal one.

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