

Why the Emerging Apartheid State in Israel-Palestine is not Sustainable

By Victor Rothman and Jeff Warner*, May 24, 2018

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The powerful juxtaposition of the U.S. delegation in Jerusalem on Monday, May 14, opening up the new U.S. Embassy while Israeli military snipers picked off and killed 61 Palestinian demonstrators in Gaza again brings the Israel-Palestinian crisis to everyone's attention.

To better understand these two connected events – totally at odds with each other – let's assess the Israeli government's long-term goals, Netanyahu's tactics to reach these goals, and why these goals and tactics are built on an unsustainable house of cards.

The Strategic Goal: Permanent Occupation

According to many distinguished social scientists, such as Professors [Ran Greenstein](#), [Richard Falk](#), [Virginia Tilly](#), [Gershon Shafir](#), [Yoav Peled](#), and [Andy Clarno](#), under Netanyahu's leadership, the Israeli government is making its post-1967 occupations of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem permanent.

This means that Israel's systematic construction of "facts on the ground" effectively precludes a two-state resolution of this conflict. It also results in the incremental creation of an [apartheid state](#). While Israel still brands itself a

democracy, it is actually an [ethnocracy](#). Palestinians residing within its 1948-1967 borders are second-class citizens, while Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank live under various forms of military occupation. As for those in Gaza, these Palestinians are caged in by an indirect military occupation reinforced by a permanent siege.

Even some prominent Israeli politicians have come to the same apartheid conclusion, such as former Israeli Prime Minister [Ehud Barack](#). According to Barack, *"As long as in the territory west of the Jordan river there is only one political entity called Israel, it is going to be either non-Jewish or non-democratic. If this bloc of millions of Palestinians cannot vote, that will be an apartheid state."*

Israel's Primary Tactics for Constructing an Apartheid State

- Cultivating the United States government as its foremost foreign patron, increasingly eschewing Democrats, while aligning itself with the Trump wing of the Republican Party and Islamophobic Christian fundamentalists.
- Relying on the intense lobbying by AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, buttressed by the likes of gambling kingpin Sheldon Adelson and fawning son-in-law Jared Kushner.



- Depending on the U.S. government to provide Israel with \$4 billion in annual military aid, use its veto power at the UN Security Council to protect Israel from international sanctions, and allow \$1 billion in IRS tax-exempt private philanthropy to back settlers.
- Soliciting political support from xenophobic regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly Hungary, Poland, Georgia, and Russia.
- Selling enormous quantities of weapons to two emerging superpowers, China and [India](#).
- Circumventing any direct negotiations with Palestinians, instead cultivating an inside-out strategy based on an anti-Iran alliance with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
- Constructing Jewish-only neighborhoods, town, and cities, – euphemistically called settlements – in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

- Moving Israeli Jews into these heavily fortified, totally segregated neighborhoods, town, and cities, now numbering about 600,000 people.
- Erasing all former 1948-67 state boundaries, called the Green Line, from Israeli maps, media reports, and textbooks, while using the Biblical terms, Judea and Samaria, for these occupied Palestinian territories.
- Building a network of restricted, [Israeli-only highways](#) to link these towns and cities to pre-1967 Israel.
- Maintaining direct and indirect military occupation over these conquered territories.
- Dividing Gaza from the West Bank by forming two rival Palestinian political authorities, one of which, the Palestinian Authority, has numerous police and intelligence agencies [founded, funded, and trained by the United States](#).
- Establishing an extensive public relations effort, dubbed *hasbarah* in Hebrew, to counter criticisms of Israel with labels of anti-Semitism and Jewish self-hatred. Through the Israeli government's [Ministry of Strategic Affairs](#), it also brands opponents, even those who turn to Gandhian tactics, like Gazans, as terrorists.
- Offering free political junkets to Israel for foreign reporters, public officials, and police chiefs.
- Offering young adults from the Jewish diaspora free propaganda-filled trips to Israel through [Birthright](#).
- Lumping all Arab nations together, and then claiming they are universally anti-Israel, harboring deep and often hidden Jew-hatred – even though Egypt, Jordan, and the PLO have fully honored their official peace treaties with Israel.
- Ignoring repeated peace proposals from the entire Arab world over the past 70 years, including the Saudi-initiated [Arab Peace Initiative](#). This proposal is fully supported by the Arab League and non-Arab Muslim countries, including Iran. If Israel agreed to this initiative, the resulting treaties would grant it full diplomatic recognition in exchange for compliance with United Nations land-for-peace resolutions, 224 and 338.
- Unleashing [death squads](#), snipers, and [heavily armed attacks](#), like Cast Lead, on Palestinians who oppose long-term Israeli military occupation.
- Garnering strong support from the Israeli Jewish public through intense nationalism based on Biblical quotations, racism against Arabs, Islamophobia, xenophobia against Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers, and a procession of alleged existential threats, such as Iran, Palestinian protests, and the non-violent Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions ([BDS](#)) movement.

Apartheid Built on a House of Cards

The most important questions going forward are:

- *How long can the Israeli government successfully exercise these tactics?*
- *Can these tactics sustain a long-lived apartheid state?*

Many obstacles lie in the way, and like a wooden block game, one or more of Israel's tactics could crash to the ground, undermining the Israeli government's efforts to maintain an apartheid state. The following scenarios make this clear:

The United States is a declining global power. Its hegemonic role in the Middle East is continually slipping, while the Israeli government's demands for U.S. support continue to grow. More specifically, Iran freed itself of U.S. domination nearly 40 years ago, while the U.S. government's efforts to [woo Syria's Assad](#) totally failed. Meanwhile, Turkey is withdrawing its ambassador from the United States and moving closer to Russia. As for Libya, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, and Afghanistan, U.S. efforts to topple their regimes resulted in weak or totally failed states with new, spreading Jihadist militias. Other authoritarian U.S. allies, like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, present their own problems. Egypt has been unable to quell a long-term ISIS insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula. As for Saudi Arabia, it has successfully curried the Trump administration's favor by buying [billions of U.S. weapons](#), but it has not demonstrated any military capacity to use them, other than participating in deadly U.S.-managed bombing forays over nearby Yemen.

If or when a U.S. attack on Iran finally happens, it will trigger a predictable [global economic crisis and long-term war of attrition](#) radiating out from the Persian Gulf in all directions. These events could transform power relationships among the large powers competing for position in the Middle East, while also generating new political forces within each country, similar to the Arab Spring. As a result, the fragile alliances between the U.S. and its remaining client states could shatter. *By castings its long-fate with the only global power willing to support permanent occupation and apartheid, Israeli will have painted itself into a political corner.*

Loss of Fear. During the Great March of Return, Palestinians in Gaza seem to have lost their fear of deadly Israeli military force. This is no different from parallel developments in other countries, where authoritarian regimes crumpled when oppressed groups no longer ran from their gunfire. This already happened in two other U.S.-supported regimes: South Africa and Iran. In the latter case the Shah's forces slaughtered hundreds of protesters at Teheran's Jaleh Square in 1978, but this only [emboldened the regime's opponents](#). Shortly afterward the Shah had to flee for his life. History suggests that Gazan-style protests, if repeated, will also work in the Palestinian's favor. In this regard, Prof. Richard Falk points out that in most cases when a colonized people rose up, [they eventually prevailed](#).

Indirect Military Occupation. The Israeli strategy of contracting out its military occupation to the U.S.- and EU-subsidized Palestinian Authority (PA) could easily falter. The PA has little respect on the West Bank, and Republican lawmakers have further undermined its authority by [slashing U.S. aid](#) and

reducing funding for the [UN refugee agencies](#) operating schools and clinics in the West Bank and Gaza.

Christian Fundamentalists. The Israeli government's tactic of securing the Trump Administration's support for its long-term occupation faces many barriers. Donald Trump is only supported by a third of the U.S. population, and even less within the American Jewish community. More importantly, Trump and Netanyahu's courting of Christian fundamentalists contains the seeds of its own self-destruction because it is anathema to most American Jews. While Evangelical fundamentalist interpretations of Biblical prophecy support Israeli domination over Palestinians, it also calls for the [mass conversion of Jews](#) to Christianity in order to vanquish the anti-Christ and usher in a messianic era. Could this bizarre and opportunistic relationship backfire because it drives a wedge between Israel and its mainstream supporters within American Jewry and the U.S. foreign policy establishment? Absolutely.

In Jerusalem the Trump administration brought this disconnect to the surface when it chose two Dallas-based mega-church ministers to present the embassy ceremony's opening and closing prayers. [John Hagee and Robert Jeffries](#) are notorious for their anti-Jewish pronouncements, with Jeffries also frequently voicing his antipathy to Muslims, Mormons, Catholics, other non-Christian religions, and gays. According to Ha'Aretz columnist Chemi Shalev, this *"Messianic U.S.-Israel axis showcased at the Jerusalem Embassy ceremony is a gut-punch for most American Jews."*

Changes in the Democratic Party. Considering the Trump and Netanyahu administrations' animosity to the Democratic Party, there is no guarantee that *carte blanche* U.S. government [support for Israeli apartheid](#) will continue unabated after the U.S. Presidential elections of 2020 or 2024. In fact, recent public opinion polls already reveal deep political [cleavages among Democrats](#) when asked about their support for the Israeli government's policies. When Democrats eventually regain control of the White House and Congress, U.S. policies regarding Israel would be in flux and likely [subject to major changes](#).

Alliance with Saudi Arabia. Israeli's new inside-out strategy of dodging Palestinian negotiators and instead wooing Saudi Arabia's autocrats, as well as its Jihadist proxies in Syria, means that [Israel offers aid to Al Nusra](#), an Al Qaeda offshoot. Considering the long antipathy of such zealous Muslim groups to Israel, allying with them because they are the enemies of Israel's enemies – Hezbollah and Iran – is fraught with danger. If regime change succeeds in Syria, these Sunni religious extremists could become a Syrian ruling party whose hostility to Israel goes far beyond Shiite Iran's verbosity.

Economic Inequality. Israel suffers from [extreme economic inequality](#) compared to other industrialized countries, and it is getting worse. Anyone who has visited Israel recently has heard locals complain about outright poverty, low wages, and the high cost of living, especially housing. While the Israeli government has taken advantage of this situation by offering subsidized

apartments to Jewish Israelis willing to live in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank, in the long run its key tools to placate the Israeli public's economic plight are religion and exclusive nationalism. At some point, these ploys may not be sufficient to paper over Israel's growing class divide.

Change will Come Quickly

When, not if, this house of cards begins its collapse, change will quickly appear. Some liberal Israelis and diaspora Jews anticipate that this crisis will finally usher a two-state resolution of the conflict, especially if the U.S. is replaced by another hegemon, such as China or Russia. More progressive Israeli and Palestinian groups, such as the new [One Democratic State movement](#), have come to a different conclusion. They argue that a two-state solution is no longer possible because of Israeli "facts on the ground." For them the only option is transforming an apartheid state into a binational state, such as Belgium or Canada. This is in contrast to other [one state advocacy groups](#), which propose a one-person / one-vote state to supplant Israel and its occupied Palestinian territories.

Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet that assures these outcomes. Considering that the collapse of an apartheid state would coincide with regional or even global warfare, other scenarios, some worse and some better, could easily [remake the entire Middle East](#), including Israel and Palestine.

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