

**THE SLOW COLLISION:
GREATER ISRAEL AT ODDS WITH U.S. DECLINE IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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This summer's Israel-Hamas fighting in Gaza brought the Israel-Palestine conflict to Los Angeles. In addition to a proposed – but tabled -- City Council resolution blaming Hamas for the fighting, there were pro-Palestinian demonstrations, pro-Israel demonstrations, and peace demonstrations organized by our group, LA Jews for Peace. In an attempt to put these demonstrations into a historical and political context, we describe the current situation in Israel-Palestine and the crucial role of the United States government in supporting the occupation and the unfolding of apartheid. We also analyze several scenarios for the Israel-Palestine conflict to resolve itself when, not if, the US government is no longer willing or able to support Israel's long-term settlement program in the occupied territories. In essence, we try to explain why the occupation is not sustainable in the long-run and how activists can best respond to the declining role of the U.S. government.

Greater Israel on the Road to Apartheid: Israel today, from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, is effectively a single state, referred to as Greater Israel by its architects and supporters. [Jeff Halper \(Director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions\)](#) pointed out that this *de facto* single state is quickly developing a system of apartheid in the territories Israel captured in 1967 during the Six Day War. In contrast, the areas within Israel's 1948-1967 Green Line boundaries have legal segregation, but not yet full blown apartheid. Furthermore, the legal structure of this emerging apartheid state differs between the areas annexed by Israel after the Six Day War (East Jerusalem and Golan Heights) and the territories remaining under direct and indirect military control (West Bank and Gaza Strip). All those living in the former are governed by an Israeli civil authority, while the Palestinians living in the occupied areas are ruled by the Israeli military, unlike nearby Israeli settlers who are governed by the same civil authorities running the Israeli state within the Green Line.

To date over 500,000 Israeli Jews have been moved into the neighborhoods of annexed East Jerusalem and into the occupied West Bank. In most cases they are protected by the Israeli military in heavily fortified towns and cities, courteously called "settlements" by the press.

An obvious consequence of the rapid construction of Greater Israel is the deliberate geographical and political demise of the two state solution – an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. This is because a sovereign Palestinian state is incompatible with an Israeli state occupying the same territory and maintaining an

authoritarian military regime that implants and protects hundreds of thousands of Jewish settlers.

There are also political factors that block the emergence of a Palestinian state, most importantly the recent frankness of Israeli officials, particularly Prime Minister Netanyahu. On July 11, 2014, he declared, "There cannot be a situation, under any agreement, in which we [Israel] relinquish security control of the territory west of the River Jordan [meaning the West Bank]." Other political factors include the rapid growth of extremely right-wing Israel political parties and movements, some of which are Orthodox, and all of which have infiltrated the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), as well as their successful intimidation of Israeli moderates still committed to a two-state solution. The most important political factor is, however, the U.S. government's *carte blanche* support for Greater Israel, especially lethal Israeli military attacks designed to weaken Palestinian nationalist aspirations, in particular Cast Lead (2008-9) and Protective Edge (2014).

Despite occasional [disparaging remarks about Netanyahu](#) and press statements declaring that expanded Israeli settlements in the areas intended for the Palestinian state (by numerous UN resolutions and the Oslo Accords) are [unhelpful](#), the day-to-day construction of Greater Israel's "facts on the ground" has the full backing of the United States government, including both Republican and Democratic administrations. Israel's reliance on a great power is not a new phenomenon, as Prof. Avi Shlaim pointed out in his 2001 book [The Iron Wall, Israel and the Arab World](#), "This has always been Israel's *modus operandi*, as it was for the Yishuv, the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine."

In the 1890s Theodor Herzl focused on building a Jewish state under the auspices of the Ottoman Empire. The first major step towards this state came in 1917 when Chaim Weizmann obtained the Balfour Declaration from the British government in the midst of World War I. The USSR and its client Czechoslovakia later provided live-saving military support during the 1948 war. The French subsequently armed Israel for the 1967 war, and the United States has been Israel's primary benefactor ever since.

Jeff Halper made a similar point in his 2005 essay entitled "[Israel as Extension of American Empire](#)." He wrote, "Israel's leading position in this [U.S.] military alliance, has global implications, but is also gives Israel the military strength and political umbrella needed to transform its Occupation into annexation while advancing the Pax Americana over the Middle East."

In this 47 year period U.S. government backing has included extensive financial support, grants and transfers of military hardware and technology, intelligence sharing, diplomatic protection at the United Nations, tax-exempt status for private donations to settler organizations, permission for U.S. citizens to join the Israeli military, and mind-numbing repetition of Israeli government talking points. This support is essential for

Israel to maintain its post-1967 annexations and occupations, including its incremental construction of an apartheid Greater Israeli state in these areas.

U.S. Decline in the Middle East: There is a fly in this ointment, however, the slow and uneven decline of the United State in the Middle East, as expressed by its growing inability to influence events and project power throughout the region. True, the United States has been the dominant power in the Middle East since it supplanted the British, beginning in the 1950s. Throughout this entire period, the U.S. has built an enormous network of military bases, directly and indirectly waged many wars, and supported a host of oppressive regimes, including Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, mostly characterized by neoliberal economic policies that favor a small elite at the expense of the general public.

Many people believe this Pax Americana is permanent because the U.S. still has the ability to unleash massive death and destruction, mostly from the air. But despite this enormous firepower, the United States has been totally unable to transform blood baths into political victories, whether through its own wars or those of its historic proxies, such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.

American decline is evidenced by many military and political failures in this region:

- Its bloated military has not been able to decisively win any war since WW-II, most recently its failed invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Its regional hegemon for the Persian Gulf, Iran, successfully bolted from US domination in 1979, and has been at odds with the United States ever since.
- Its foremost regional ally in the Middle East, Israel, has not been able to use its vast arsenal of American military hardware to assist the U.S. in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, or other areas of Jihadist activity. For that matter, Israel has not even succeeded in defeating two small Islamic forces, Hezbollah and Hamas, despite inflicting enormous death and destruction on Lebanon and Gaza. As “gratitude” for continued U.S support in these assaults, the Israeli government has openly disparaged the American President, Vice President, and Secretary of State. It even attempted to interfere in American elections, supporting Mitt Romney for President in the 2012.
- The United States has employed hundreds of drone attacks against perceived threats in Yemen, Mali, Somalia, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. So far, this high tech version of Whack-a-Mole has not made the slightest difference in these countries, other than assisting the recruiting drives of many Jihadist groups.

- The United States has had few successes in influencing events in the Arab Spring, such as keeping its loyal satrap, Hosni Mubarak in power in Egypt. Meanwhile, its one direct military intervention related to the Arab Spring, Libya, is an unmitigated disaster, including the murder of the US Ambassador by one of the country's many warring Islamic militias.
- Finally, in Syria, the uprising is totally beyond the reach of the United States or its regional allies, Israel, Turkey, Iraq, and Jordan. Instead, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Monarchies have funded the Jihadist opposition to Assad, a tactic that has directly led to the explosive growth and military successes of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS and ISIL) against the US client state of Iraq.
- In desperate efforts to maintain the government the U.S. installed in Iraq, the "coalition" attacks on the Islamic State in Syria have made the U.S. a de facto ally of Assad, Hezbollah, and Iran, while it now totally at odds with its former ally Turkey.

Like the French and British empires that preceded it in the Middle East, the trajectory of U.S. imperial decline is difficult to chart, but will profoundly impact countries and non-state actors across the entire region, from Morocco to Pakistan. When the "American Century" finally draws to a close, events will quickly unravel, and there will be dramatic repercussions in many areas, including Israel-Palestine. The waning of U.S. power means that at some point the U.S. will either be technically unable or politically unwilling to sustain Greater Israel. Israel's eventual loss of support from the region's hegemonic power will become a critical barrier to the long-term formation of a permanent and stable apartheid state.

At present the U.S. government's backing for the construction of Greater Israel is maintained by the power of the Israel lobby. But, [according to Peter Beinert](#), the lobby's power is declining as the older leaders of the Jewish component of the Israel Lobby are replaced by younger Jewish-Americans with more liberal, egalitarian, secular, and humanistic political values. This insight was recently repeated by [Ha'Aretz columnist Ari Shavit who wrote:](#)

However, our common values don't accord with the removal of Arabs from buses in Judea and Samaria, with the undermining and neutralization of the (Israeli) Supreme Court, or with the constant and perplexing settlement drive. An Israel that occupies, settles and discriminates is not an Israel that the United States can continue to back indefinitely. An Israel that insists on behaving like an bull in a china shop will sooner or later lose the support of America's younger generation. This won't happen next week or next month, not even next year. But it will happen. If the head-trippers in Israel continue on their path, the collapse will inevitably come.

These new Jewish American leaders will not blindly accept Israel's continued dispossession and oppression of Palestinians, especially as the cracks in the US foreign policy establishment regarding Israel and Palestine, including the role of the

Israel Lobby, become more public. Furthermore, younger Jewish leaders will be increasingly uncomfortable with the rise of Israel's ultra-Orthodoxy, xenophobic nationalism, and harassment of governmental critics because it so resembles the racism and political repression associated with fascism.

As the influence of the Israel lobby recedes, it will be less able to convince the White House, Congress, and the Pentagon to maintain their unconditional political, military, intelligence, and financial support of Greater Israel.

In addition to the decline of the Israel Lobby, there are other factors slowly undermining the U.S. government's support for Israeli apartheid. Within the foreign policy establishment there is a clear consensus to shift US military forces from the Middle East to Asia, often called "The Pivot to Asia." Other secondary factors include growing Palestinian opposition to Greater Israel, as evidenced by the IDF's inability to defeat Hamas even with full US support, as well as broad international Palestinian solidarity groups undertaking economic and cultural boycotts of Israel. In addition, the divestment movement is finally gaining traction, as indicated by the Presbyterian Church's divestment decision. So far there have been no U.S. Government sanctions against Israel, but the first calls for such sanctions can now be heard, such as in [Chris Hedge's column](#) on Truthdig.com at the beginning of Decisive Edge.

Without the US government's full support, it is extremely unlikely that a politically isolated Israel could sustain an increasingly harsh apartheid regime by itself. Israeli apartheid, even more than the current annexations and occupation, will depend on major military, financial, diplomatic, and media support from an outside power. Israeli prosperity and technology is simply not enough, especially because there is so much economic inequality and discontent in the country.

Furthermore, once the role of the United States weakens, there is no other global power on the horizon -- not the EU, nor China, nor Russia -- that would readily replace the U.S. lifeline to an apartheid Israeli state. While it is likely they would quickly fill voids throughout the Middle East created by the demise of the United States, their priority would be securing petroleum reserves and shipping routes, not propping up a politically isolated pariah state scorned by the region's petrostates.

The Collapse of Greater Israel – Some Scenarios: Long before U.S. government support for Greater Israel withers away, Palestinian resistance will move from demands for a sovereign Palestinian mini-state to campaigns for civil, economic, and political rights within the entirety of Greater Israel. As this struggle for equal rights garners support from progressive Israelis sharing a common egalitarian political and economic agenda, and as well as international support, the stage will be set for the rapid and turbulent collapse of Greater Israel. If we also factor in the long and cyclical history of anti-racist, anti-war, environmental, and anti-poverty movements in the United States,

domestic opposition to the US government's support for Greater Israel could also become a significant factor accelerating the country's retreat from the Middle East.

When this day of reckoning finally comes, several scenarios are likely. The rights-based Palestinian struggle, combined with the loss of U.S. government support, points to a bumpy transition to several alternative one-state formulas: a single, non-ethnocratic democratic state (like South Africa) or a bi-national state. [Ian Lustick explored](#) these options, as did [John Mearsheimer in his 2012 lecture](#) at the Jerusalem.

The reaction to these one-state proposals and campaigns -- mostly Palestinian, but also from alternative Israeli voices, such as Jeff Halper -- for a liberal unitary state, could unleash several wildly different responses among Israelis. Liberal Zionists like Peter Beinart, Ari Shavit, and [Uri Avnery](#), hope that once Jewish Israelis fully understand that a single democratic state -- regardless of the exact model -- would have a non-Jewish majority, they will realize this is a moment for serious compromise. Given their determination to maintain a Jewish majority state to protect them from their fears of a future Holocaust -- as emphasized by Avi Shavit in his 2013 book [My Promised Land, The Triumph and tragedy of Israel](#) -- the Israeli government would reluctantly abandon Greater Israel. It would then be forced to finally accept a sovereign Palestinian state alongside an Israeli Jewish state within its 1967 boundaries. If this scenario prevailed, the Israeli government would have finally complied with the Oslo Accords, the U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, renewed in 2007 and 2013.

Furthermore, the two-state solution would be more robust if it took the form of a Palestine-Israel confederation, as described by [Jeff Halper in 2007](#). If this confederation provided for the free exchange of labor and capital, as the European Union does, citizens of both the Jewish and the Palestinian states would be able to live and work anywhere between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean coast. This would, *in theory*, allow Jews to live in the Biblically significant West Bank, and Palestinians to return to the remnants of their ancestral villages within Israel's Green Line

Besides the above peaceful outcomes emerging from the collapse of apartheid Greater Israel, there are also grim scenarios filled with violence.

The downside of Israel finally implementing a two-state solution is that it would mean the forced transfer of about 150,000 to 500,000 settlers into Israel proper, or leaving them in place to become Palestinian citizens. Either option could spark a Jewish civil war, accompanied by many attacks on Israeli soldiers and atrocities against Palestinians that are certain to trigger equally violent reactions. This scenario is extremely foreboding, and it cannot be dismissed considering the amounts of settler violence against both Palestinians and Israel soldiers in recent years, already carefully [documented by B'Tselem](#), the Israeli human rights organization.

A pariah Israel state may also indulge in a devastating last stand that would lead to wide-scale destruction of everything and everyone within its boundaries. This might be a modern version of the Samson story in which he brought destruction to the Philistines through his own suicide. If Greater Israel's last stand combined with a regional war in which the United States and its other Middle East proxies, such as Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia joined forces, WW III scenarios must be considered a possible outcome.

Another destructive possibility is the collapse of the Israel state and Palestinian communities through a massive out-migration of modern, secular Israelis and Palestinians. This could produce two failed states: on one side a Jewish population of zealous nationalists and ultra-orthodox Jews, and on the other side extremist Islamic Palestinians.

In order to assure that a non-destructive outcome emerges, it is essential that we fully analyze the peaceful rather than apocalyptic outcomes. While we still can, we need to spell-out these peaceful options in detail, and pursue practical ways to promote them in both the US and in Israel/Palestine.

In fact, in a [recent article Noam Chomsky](#) came to these same conclusions and argued that the primary political focus of Americans concerned about Israel and Palestine must be the US government. In his words, "There is every reason to expect it [Greater Israel] to persist as long the United States provides the necessary military, economic, diplomatic, and ideological support. For those concerned with the rights of the brutalized Palestinians, there can no higher priority than working to change US policies, not an idle dream by any means."

And dealing with the larger question, how anti-war activists can oppose the descent of a globally declining US empire into horrific military spasms, [Chalmers Johnson wrote](#), "The failure to begin to deal with our bloated military establishment and the profligate use of its missions for which it is hopelessly inappropriate will, sooner rather than later, condemn the United States to a devastating trio of consequences: imperial overreach, perpetual war, and insolvency, leading to a likely collapse similar to that of the former Soviet Union." Johnson then went on to outline a 10 step political program, including many grass roots initiatives, to finally tame the US global empire before it succumbs to his trio of consequences.

Next Steps: Civic, grass roots efforts can effect how the United States government reacts to its decline in the Middle East, and how that decline affects Israel-Palestine and the entire region. We point to several efforts to assure that the United States will retreat in an orderly way, modeled on the decline of the Soviet Union in 1999, and not resort to a violent last gasp of desperate military adventures to maintain its hegemony. These efforts should also work to assure that Israel-Palestine

transforms into an egalitarian one-state or two-state solution, avoiding mayhem in the process.

- Emphasize BDS sanctions by calling for the U.S. to halt arms sales to the entire region, including Israel, but also countries like Saudi Arabia.
- Follow the lead of [Josh Ruebner \(national advocacy director of the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation\)](#), as well as the [October 2012 Christian Clergy letter to lobby Congress](#), to call for the United States to enforce the U.S. Arms Export Control Act and the Foreign Assistance Act.
- Fuse Israel-Palestine rallies, marches, and vigils with general anti-war actions. The two issues should be treated in a unified, not isolated manner.
- Clarify that sensible U.S. policies toward Israel-Palestine are just one element of sensible policies toward the entire Middle East.

* **An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Los Angeles-based Levantine Cultural Center in August 2014.**

Please send any comments and questions to info@lajewsforpeace.org.