

# Isn't it time for America to re-evaluate its "special relationship" with Israel?

By  
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In another step too far, Israel yesterday announced that it is to build 1,600 new housing units in an illegal Israeli settlement in East Jerusalem. This announcement came just hours after US Vice President Joe Biden met with, and rebuked, Israeli leaders. Following the great embarrassment that Israel has caused their greatest ally, yet again, MEMO explores the relationship between the two countries.

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### 1. Introduction: A call for the normalisation of relations.

A mere eleven minutes after Israel declared its independence in 1948, US President Harry Truman recognised the newly created state.<sup>1</sup> That instantaneous public support has never really wavered and ever since then the two countries have shared a "special relationship", one that is unlike any other. America has stood by Israel through thick and thin; right or wrong; supporting it on all fronts: financially, politically, diplomatically and militarily. However, many observers have for a long time now believed that this has become a toxic association, whereby America's entrenched and unwavering support for Israel is actually doing the United States more harm than good. In 2003 the European Commission conducted a [poll](#) across Europe in which 59% of those interviewed said they felt that Israel, America's staunchest ally, was in fact the greatest threat to world peace.



Seven years on, a slow realisation finally seems to be dawning on Americans that it is time for a serious re-evaluation of their country's "special relationship" with Israel; at last, the discourse is beginning to take place where it really counts, in the United States of America. On 9<sup>th</sup> February 2010 there was an [Intelligence Squared debate](#) at New York University in which the motion was, "The US should step back from its



special relationship with Israel". At the start of the debate the audience poll was 33% in favour of pulling back on the special relationship; by the end of the debate that figure was 49%.

This is by no means a new call. In their book *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt argued that Israel is now "increasingly a strategic liability" (p15) which has done considerable harm to US interests and that, as such, "It is time for the United States to treat Israel not as a special case but as a normal state, and to deal with it much as it deals with any other country..." (p341) In that respect, "treating Israel as a normal state means no longer pretending that Israel and America's interests are identical, or acting as if Israel deserves steadfast US support no matter what it does". (p341) There is nothing particularly radical about this call for the normalisation of relations and yet when the book was published in 2007, the thesis was met with widespread hostility and aggression.

Today, however, public perception has shifted incrementally and powerful ripples seem to be spreading throughout the political, academic, media and public arenas. It seems as though people are far more ready now than ever before to discuss the danger that Israel poses to world peace, and are far more willing to examine critically the role that America plays in supporting the Zionist state. This change seems to have come about largely as a result of the negative public perception of Israel's horrific attack on the civilian population of Gaza during Operation Cast Lead in 2008-9. Perhaps for the first time, people saw Israel for what it was capable of and the lengths it was willing to go to in order to advance its own aims. The result is that more people appear to be more open to having the moral legitimacy of Israel and its actions brought into question, as well as asking why America sits back and lets Israel act with such apparent impunity. Serious discourse on this subject is long overdue and action is required immediately if America is to repair the damage to its international standing and credibility, especially if it hopes to maintain its role as a legitimate global leader.

This report looks briefly at how the special relationship between the two countries manifests itself, how this relationship affects America adversely and where the call for change is coming from.



## 2. How deep is the special relationship and how does it manifest itself?

### The veto

This “special relationship” between America and Israel manifests itself in a number of ways, each of which bears the hallmarks of the influence of the Zionist/Israel lobby in terms of both US domestic and international policies. One of the most apparent and frustrating manifestations of this relationship is witnessed every time a UN Security Council resolution critical of Israel is voted upon; the US will, predictably, use its power of veto to reject any



resolution which may have a negative impact on the Zionist state. The power of veto allows for any of the five permanent members (P5)<sup>ii</sup> of the Security Council to prevent the adoption of a draft resolution, regardless of how much international support it has.

The US government’s continued rejection of UN draft resolutions critical of Israel has, over decades, created much tension with its fellow members of the UN and within the P5 group itself. Since 1989 the US has been the only permanent member that has voted against Security Council resolutions on twelve occasions, out of a total of seventeen. Of these twelve occasions, only two related to issues other than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>iii</sup> In 2009, the US government even abstained from [Security Council Resolution 1860](#), which called for a halt to Israel's military invasion, Hamas rocket attacks, and the opening of the border crossings into the Gaza Strip.

### Economic and Military Aid

*“Israel is the most expensive ally in the history of the human race.”<sup>iv</sup>*

Since its creation, Israel has worked to secure phenomenal levels of financial aid from the US and it is now firmly established as one of the most stable and wealthy economies in the world. In a report by ANIMA<sup>v</sup> in January 2010, Israel was described as a “regional economical power”. Moreover, in the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report published in 2009, Israel was ranked 27 out of 132, and ranked 9<sup>th</sup> for innovative capacity. And yet even with all this independent and stable financial exclusivity in the global market, US tax payers are still made to pay out approximately \$3 billion a year in “unconditional aid” to Israel. It defies logic that Israel typically receives almost one third of the entire US foreign aid budget, despite the fact that



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Israel comprises less than 0.001 of the world's population and already has one of the world's highest per capita incomes. "In other words, Israel, a country of approximately 6 million people is currently receiving more US aid than all of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean combined, when you take out Egypt and Columbia."<sup>vi</sup> In August 2007, the Bush administration signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Israel to "give, not loan" \$30 billion to Israel over the next 10 years. President Obama has agreed to implement this [without any conditions](#).

In 2008 it was estimated that since 1949 the US has distributed almost [\\$114 billion](#)<sup>vii</sup> of direct aid to Israel. Both countries maintain that this aid is necessary to safeguard Israel from neighbouring threats. However, most of this aid was distributed to Israel after the 1967 war, during which Israel showed its military prowess by defeating its neighbours, a move that confirmed its position in history as an illegal occupying power. Furthermore, the threats to Israel have largely come about as a result of its persistent racist and apartheid-style policies, which is why Israel's security has been tested. However, whenever relatively feeble Palestinian attempts are made to resist the illegal military occupation of their land, and reprisal attacks take place, the resistance is cited by Israel as a pretext for further military incursions and the continued – indeed growing – occupation. These Israeli incursions and the illegal occupation are only possible because of US aid, both economic and military.

That aid has ensured that Israel has one of the most powerful armies in the world, equipped with the latest high-tech military hardware, including US F-16 fighter jets (used in the Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip in 2008-9), US Blackhawk and Apache helicopters, tanks and other advanced weaponry that has been utilised to terrify and kill thousands of Palestinian civilians. These are the delivery mechanisms for the latest in lethal ammunition



and bombs, also made and supplied by the United States. An Amnesty International report issued after Operation Cast Lead revealed that the white phosphorous bombs used illegally by Israel to target Gaza's civilian population were in fact [manufactured and sold](#) by the US and paid for with US tax dollars.

What is more intriguing than the astronomical amount of aid itself is the manner in which economic and military aid is distributed to the Jewish state. Whereas aid going to other countries is paid to recipients in quarterly instalments over the year, since 1982 the US has transferred one lump sum at the beginning of each



fiscal year to Israel which begins immediately to attract interest in US bank accounts. The US government is then left to borrow from future revenues, with Israel even “lending” some of this required money back through US treasury bills, thus collecting further interest.<sup>viii</sup>

Most important of all in this bizarre relationship is the fact that there are no preconditions or built-in mechanisms that exist typically in all other aid transactions to prevent US aid being used by Israel to commit human rights abuses. This lack of accountability provides Israel with a free hand to invest US tax payers’ money in the illegal expansion of settlements, the oppressive “apartheid” regime apparatus and the regular inhumane military incursions into Palestinian land, such as the devastating Operation Cast Lead.

Most of this aid violates American law. The **Arms Export Control Act** states that US-supplied weapons must be used only for “legitimate self-defence”. They cannot be used against civilians and must be restricted to “internal security” use. The Israeli war against Lebanon in 2006 and Operation Cast Lead in 2008/9 are two examples of Israeli violations of the terms and conditions attached to the armaments received from the United States. As one [fact sheet](#) reveals, “Israel could not maintain its illegal 40-year military occupation and siege of the Palestinian West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip without these weapons.” Moreover, the US **Foreign Assistance Act** of 1961 stipulates that “*No assistance may be provided under this part [of the law] to the government of any country which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.*” Systematic human rights abuses by Israel have been documented not only by Palestinian and Israeli human rights groups but also by international bodies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA). What’s more, the US government has also documented human rights abuses by Israel. All of this should render Israel ineligible for any form of US aid, be it military or economic.

### **The Pro-Israel lobby – AIPAC - politics and financing politicians**

The special US-Israel relationship also manifests itself in US domestic policy and the way in which pro-Israeli lobby groups work. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) may well be the “most effective lobbyist group”<sup>ix</sup> for Israel in America, but it is also one of the biggest obstacles to peace in the Middle East. It has an imposing stranglehold on both US domestic and foreign policy and has the ability to influence four key areas: **the US Congress**, “where Israel is virtually immune from criticism”<sup>x</sup>; **the US Executive** with its Israeli sympathisers in the White House and reliance on the “ethnic voter machine and ethnic donor machine”; **the media**, with pro-Israel editorial staff in key positions<sup>xi</sup>; and **think tanks and the academic elite**. Israeli policies



continue to make a mockery of US foreign policy, which is saturated by double standards and blatant disregard for human rights and civil liberties.<sup>xii</sup>

Moreover, in the relationship between the US and Israel it has become very clear that “the distinction between the American super-power and Israel, its client, has become blurred”<sup>xiii</sup>. Dr Abdullah echoes the sentiments of policymakers, academia and concerned citizens when he writes:



“While Israel may have been a ‘strategic US asset’ during the Cold War, American writers now believe it has become a ‘strategic burden’.”<sup>xiv</sup>

As a response to this “strategic burden” the J-Street lobby group was formed. A more moderate group than AIPAC, J-Street was created to balance the scales of reason where AIPAC and other pro-Israeli lobby groups are concerned. Although still a pro-Israel organisation advocating “peace, a two-state solution and a secure Israel”, the main difference is the means available to each group to achieve this. In the past, AIPAC and the likes have claimed to be representative of all American Jews and support unequivocally the Israeli state and its occupation of Palestine. In recent years they have drawn close to Christian evangelical fundamentalist groups and neo-cons whose support for the “war on terror” in the Arab and Muslim world does not seem to conform to their professed desire for a “peaceful” solution to the conflict. [J-Street](#) has changed all that by giving a voice to liberal and moderate American Jews who do not support Israeli policies blindly. Through J-Street’s lobbying and advocacy, 33 “sympathetic candidates” took their seats in the US Congress last year; it seems as if AIPAC is not the only Israel lobby group shaping American policy these days.

### 3. How is the US-Israel alliance harming America?

Despite a seemingly cosy façade, Israel’s relationship with America is taking a heavy toll, with several obvious fronts where Israel is doing America far more harm than good. For example, major spy scandals have been exposed over the past decade or so, and have involved the state of Israel spying on its main sponsor and ally, the United States of America. A few other examples of the damage done to the US by Israel are examined below:



- A. The damage done to America’s global standing and reputation as a beacon of democracy.
- B. America’s loss of political credibility in the eyes of the world.
- C. The financial burden of maintaining a friendship with Israel, and
- D. America is perceived as being more vulnerable to attack as a result of its association with Israel.

**A. The damage done to America’s global standing and reputation as a beacon of democracy.**

For decades America and Israel have been associated with one another in people’s minds and perhaps, for a while, that did not seem to be such a bad thing from an American perspective. After all, who wouldn’t want an ally such as Israel; a wealthy, developed, nuclear nation? On the face of it, we are told that the two countries share similar values and ideals in a way that binds them inextricably, but how much similarity really exists between the two? And is this similitude something of which America should be proud or ashamed?

Many of its features about which Israel boasts are self-declared accolades that are false and have been proven to be products of its own PR lobby. This includes the myth that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, the illusion that they have the most moral army in the world (“purity of arms”) and the audacity (the Hebrew-Yiddish word *chutzpah* sums it up perfectly) of inviting investors, holidaymakers and others to visit a land that is not really theirs to invite people to.

i) Israel is *not* the only democracy in the Middle East.

According to the [Israeli Embassy](#) in Washington “Israel is the sole democracy in the Middle East” and we all know how much America values the concept of democracy. After all, one of America’s primary objectives in invading countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, so it would have us believe, has been to bring democracy to those nations. However, if being a democracy is a genuine foundation on which to build an alliance, then where is America’s alliance with Hamas? Is it not the case that Hamas was voted into power in a free and fair election in January 2006? An election that some commentators declared to be fairer than that which saw George W Bush re-elected in 2004. On what basis does Israel still claim to be the only democracy in the Middle East?

The American refusal to engage with the democratically elected Hamas government sends the troubling message that America only promotes and supports democracy if electorates vote the way the US wants them to vote. That undermines the credibility of US claims about taking democracy to other parts of the world. America’s refusal to take part in talks with Hamas on the grounds that it is a “terrorist” organisation does not ring true: was it not the US which encouraged reconciliation talks with the once-ostracised Sinn Fein, the





political wing of the IRA? And wasn't the IRA in its entirety once described as a "terrorist" organisation? Indeed, wasn't the IRA's bombing campaign against the British government, in Northern Ireland and on mainland Britain, funded almost entirely by donations collected by NORAID, an Irish American group? The US insistence that Hamas must disarm and abandon their manifesto before talks can take place serves only to stall peace talks with all sections of the Palestinian community. The IRA did not disarm nor were they made to abandon their visions of a united Ireland before talks began and even today Sinn Fein holds on to that objective.

Supporters of Israel also proclaim that there can be no dialogue with "religious fundamentalist" groups such as Hamas, and yet both Israeli and US officials engage in dialogue and do business openly with extremist and religious fundamentalist Jewish settlers. One of the fundamentalist (and very extreme) leaders is Avigdor Lieberman, who was made Deputy Prime Minister of Israel by Benjamin Netanyahu. He is an extremist Jewish settler but is still permitted to interact in the political arena and be part of a coalition that governs the state of Israel.

Furthermore, Israel's claim to being a democracy in the true sense of the word is acknowledged as being less than legitimate. Writing in the Financial Times (24 February 2010), Henry Siegman said, "The democracy Israel provides for its (mostly) Jewish citizens cannot hide its changed character. A democracy reserved for privileged citizens while all others are denied individual and national rights and kept behind checkpoints, barbed wire fences and separation walls manned by Israel's military, is not democracy." Mr. Siegman is the former Senior Fellow and Director of the US - Middle East Project, Council on Foreign Relations; he now writes about the Middle East and believes that no peace will be possible until Hamas is brought into the process.

ii) Israel's is *not* the most moral armed forces in the world.

The Israel Defence [sic] Forces (IDF) have for years nurtured what would now appear to be a myth; the so-called "Purity of Arms": *The soldier shall make use of his weaponry and power only for the fulfilment of the mission and solely to the extent required; he will maintain his humanity even in combat. The soldier shall not employ his weaponry and power in order to harm non-combatants or prisoners of war, and shall do all he can to avoid harming their lives, body, honour and property.* That is part of the IDF's Code of Conduct. However, any illusions that the Israelis may have had regarding the moral standards adopted by their armed forces were blown away by the IDF's shameful and illegal behaviour during Operation Cast Lead. The deliberate targeting of civilians, children, women, hospitals, UN buildings, schools, homes and funerals; the use of white phosphorus against a civilian population; the use of Palestinians as human shields and many other infractions are just a few



of the acts that undermine the Israeli claim. Listing the transgressions and crimes of the Israel Defence Forces would take up more space than is available here; one need only refer to the UN's Goldstone Report for a snapshot of the decidedly immoral – and very illegal - tactics of Israel's military machine.

iii) The lure of Israel is one of a stolen, blood-soaked land.

The attractions of Israel which may have appealed to their American sponsors have included travel agency advertisements which boast of the beautiful, pristine beaches, luxury hotels and holiday resorts that the country has to offer. Many such advertisements for "Israel" feature the Dome of the Rock Mosque in occupied Jerusalem. It is now increasingly acknowledged that these gems are not Israel's to offer and the beautiful land that holidaymakers are invited to visit was



in fact stolen from the Palestinians and is soaked with their blood. The illegal Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank; the building of illegal Jewish settlements; the uprooting of olive trees and citrus groves and the building of Israeli cultural venues such as the "Museum of Tolerance" over a Muslim graveyard or the night clubs occupying old mosques, all reveal the very sinister reality behind Israel's glossy veneer. In that sense, Israel could be called a "Dorian Gray" state.

iv) Israel's growing catalogue of human rights abuses.

America prides itself on being a staunch protector and promoter of human rights. However, this reputation is being undermined by its close association with Israel, which is becoming one of the worst human rights violators in the world. While Israel tries to deflect attention away from itself by pointing fingers at Iran or other, usually Muslim, countries, this tactic will no longer work. Israel's catalogue of abuses is too great and too public to be ignored any more. It has been named and shamed on many occasions by renowned human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, and numerous [international aid agencies](#) have condemned Israel for its offences, including its ongoing and illegal siege on Gaza. Israel tries to set up Iran as the greatest threat to the region and world peace whereas in reality, according to increasing numbers of people, Israel is the main threat. Israel decries the fact that Iran may be trying to build nuclear weapons while Israel's own nuclear arsenal is the elephant in the room, as it was when the US was condemning Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction". While criticising Iran for human rights violations, Israel not only shrugs off criticism of its own



abuses, but also continues to pursue policies that shame anyone even half-serious about the welfare of fellow human beings.

America has enough domestic problems to contend with without taking on the problems of another country but Israel pushes it into an ever more dangerous confrontation with Iran. By alluding to their supposedly common interests and goals, Israel pushes its own agenda on the US in an effort to make it the American agenda as well. Thus does America feel obliged to stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel, which is portrayed as the victim in the Middle East conflict. The reality, of course, is very different, and America is not being true to its founding principles such as democracy and human rights when it aligns itself with the occupier instead of the occupied.

Successive US administrations appear to overlook the terrible track record of abuses by the Israeli state. What have they done about the illegal arrest, detention and torture of innocent Palestinian civilians, including the [torture of women and children in Israeli jails](#)? What about the illegal siege that Israel is imposing on Gaza which is imprisoning and strangling a population of over 1.4 million people? What about the environmental hazard that Israel is causing on a daily basis by the dumping of raw sewage and other pollutants into Palestinian water and soil? [Amnesty International](#) published a report last year which revealed that over 90% of the water in Gaza is unfit for human consumption. Israel is also guilty of burning, uprooting and destroying over a million [olive trees](#) over the years. The list goes on.

In allying itself with a country almost universally acknowledged to have committed war crimes and committing increasingly serious human rights abuses, America risks losing all credibility on the world stage and will continue to do so as long as it keeps turning a blind eye and considers Israel beyond reproach.

### **B. America's loss of political credibility in the eyes of the world.**

The traditional image that America is the dominant partner in the US-Israel relationship has been turned on its head in recent years. America's apparent inability to control its ally has prompted questions about who really has the upper hand. It is becoming increasingly evident that Israel is taking a lead both in terms of forcing its own political agenda on the Americans, and in terms of refusing to listen to reason. When US President Barack Obama [demanded a complete freeze on settlement construction](#) in the West Bank and East Jerusalem Israel simply said no and, in fact, continued to [plan and build settlements in direct defiance of its main ally](#). In raising the issue of settlements in spring 2009 and then backing down after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ignored his demands, former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski<sup>xv</sup> said that Obama's



administration “strengthened the hard-line elements in Israel and undercut the more moderate elements on the Palestinian side”. Following that, there have been no consequences arising from Israel’s defiance of America, no talk of sanctions or any other measure against them, measures which would surely have been meted out immediately against any other country that disregarded with such contempt an American president’s call. On the contrary, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton travelled to Jerusalem to repair the dent in US-Israeli relations, heaping praise on Netanyahu for showing “restraint” in settlement construction, despite the fact that that restraint fell well short of Obama’s original demand.



Not only should the Israeli government as a whole be looked at with a critical eye but also the individual politicians who make up the Israeli parliament, the Knesset. The American people should be aware of who they are dealing with, from Avigdor Lieberman, a war-mongering member of the racist, nationalist party Yisrael Beiteinu, to Benjamin Netanyahu, of whom it is enough to point to the record of human rights abuses and horrors perpetrated against the Palestinians by armed forces under his overall command.

### **C. The financial burden of maintaining a friendship with Israel.**

The high cost of maintaining Israel as an ally has already been outlined above but what impact is this having on the American psyche? In an era where Americans are struggling in a global recession, how do American citizens feel knowing that their government is funnelling billions of their hard-earned tax dollars to the wealthy and developed state of Israel? Do they actually know about this drain on their resources? America has given almost \$60 billion to Israel in the last decade through a combination of economic aid (\$28.9 billion) and military aid



(\$30 billion.)<sup>xvi</sup> Instead of that American money going towards American schools, hospitals and infrastructure, it is going to Israel where it is being spent to prop up a brutal apartheid-style regime. It is being spent on weapons which are then used against unarmed civilians. It is being spent on the construction of illegal settlements and on maintaining the state apparatus of a government which is employing collective punishment against an entire nation.

And why is the US doing this? What is in it for the American people? Israel is by no means a poor, struggling third-world country. On the contrary, it is constantly boasting about its status as one of the most highly advanced and modern nations in the world. Why could America barely provide for its own citizens in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina and yet it can send billions of dollars abroad to be spent on weapons and Israel's apparatus of occupation and oppression? Americans have every right to be extremely angry about the way their government is providing financially for Israel rather than for them. Wouldn't that money be better spent in the first instance in addressing the situation of Americans living below the poverty line, the high levels of unemployment, the massive levels of homelessness and trouble with the healthcare system?

Furthermore, this aid is creating another problem for America. The US claims that it is against the continued establishment of illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian soil and yet the very aid that America gives Israel helps to pay for those illegal settlements (at an estimated cost of around \$100 billion). American money is therefore paying for the very practices that the US is claiming to be trying to stop. This shows America to be either disingenuous or very foolish. Either way, that financial aid is undermining the very peace process that the US claims it is trying to get going.

**D. America is perceived as being more vulnerable to attack as a result of its association with Israel.**

America's foreign policy has been largely cited as the reason it has come to be seen by many as an increasingly legitimate target for attack. Following the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> many Americans were asking the question, "Why do they hate us so much?" That question was answered, in part, by messages from Osama bin Laden in which he referred clearly to America's support for the Israeli regime as a key reason for the US becoming a target.

In *The Israel Lobby...*, Professors Mearsheimer and Walt argue that, "Backing Israel so strongly helps fuel America's terrorism problem and makes it harder for the United States to address the other problems it faces in the Middle East." They refer to a Zogby poll of people from six Arab nations who, when they think of



America, first think of “unfair foreign policy”; the most frequent answer given to the question “what can America do to improve its image?” was “change Middle East policy” and “stop supporting Israel”. (p69)

It is inevitable that when you look at the oppressive, racist and brutal policies of successive Israeli governments, criticism will also fall upon its closest ally; the country that is bankrolling Israel; the country selling weapons to Israel; the country blocking attempts to hold Israel to account by use of its UN vetoes or by blocking attempts to have the Goldstone Report taken to its natural conclusion.

Israel claims that it shares America’s aims in the fight against terrorism, but it is itself a major reason why a large number of terrorist threats exist in the first place. The more that America associates itself with Israel the more that Americans are putting their reputation, morals and safety at risk.

#### **4. The call for a change in policy towards Israel; where is it coming from and how is it manifesting itself?**

America’s relationship with Israel is certainly not doing America any favours. Israel has been openly accused by the UN of committing war crimes and possibly crimes against humanity, offences for which it now faces the prospect of prosecution. Its building of illegal settlements, the construction of the separation wall and other similar policies have been found to be in blatant contravention of international humanitarian and human rights laws and it is widely acknowledged to be one of the most despised states in the world today. It has been compared to the discredited South African apartheid regime but has quickly gone beyond even that pariah in its excesses; and yet it is a state with which the US chooses to ally itself. Arrest warrants have been sought and issued in the last few months for several Israeli government officials and military personnel on the basis of war crimes allegations, and many are now afraid to travel abroad. It is an old adage that “birds of a feather flock together” and America should look closely at who its friends are.

Deepening frustration with Israel is manifesting itself in various forms and an increasingly vocal number of people are calling for the Zionist state to be held accountable for its actions and for America to put an end to its incomprehensible acceptance of its crimes and treat it like any other state. This call is being championed by numerous individuals and organisations within the student movement, a whole host of NGOs established specifically for this purpose, and campaigns such as the BDS (Boycott, Sanctions and Divestment) movement, as well as a growing number of Jewish individuals and organisations all of whom share this aim.



**A. The student movement.**

University campuses have always been hotbeds for political activism and forces for real change. The anti-apartheid movement was largely grounded in student politics and the mass protests against the Vietnam War were famous for their student body base. Grassroots movements have a way of taking hold and becoming the real engine for social and political change and that is what appears to be the case with the movement that is pro-justice for Palestinians.

During the attack on Gaza in December 2008 - January 2009, many campuses were mobilised to support the Palestinians. Demonstrations, talks, sit-ins and, perhaps most memorably, a string of university occupations were organised. Students in at least 24 universities around Britain, including Oxford, Cambridge, Kings College London and the London School of Economics, occupied lecture theatres, rooms and halls on campus in support of those in Gaza. This sort of activity was the beginning of a resurgence of student activism of an intensity not seen for decades. Eventually, many University Vice-Chancellors simply had to agree to many of the students' demands.



This is an ongoing campaign and students on campuses to which Israeli officials or sympathisers have been invited to speak are staging protests and demonstrations. Such non-violent demonstrations have prompted at least one shameful response: in February 2010, eleven students at the University of California were arrested for heckling during a speech by [Michael Oren](#), the Israeli Ambassador to the United States. When America would see its own citizens arrested rather than

address the very real concerns of those citizens, it is surely a shameful state of affairs.<sup>xvii</sup>

This anti-Israeli sentiment has spread far beyond students themselves. There has been a rallying cry, for example, for individuals and institutions to support the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI). This group issued a “call upon our colleagues in the international community to comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions as a contribution to the struggle to end Israel’s occupation, colonization and system of apartheid”. This is to be achieved by refusing to participate with such institutions at any level, withdrawing funding for such institutions and so on. The [purpose](#)



is “to isolate Israeli academic institutions due to their entrenched complicity in the state's regime of occupation, colonization and apartheid against the Palestinian people”.

Similar groups include the [U.S. Campaign for the academic and cultural boycott of Israel](#) (USACBI), which argues that, “These non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people’s inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law”. This includes “Israel ending its occupation of Palestine, dismantling the wall and abiding by the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes in accordance with UN resolution 194”.

### **B. Jews against Israel’s Zionist regime.**



One increasingly active sector is that of anti-Israel groups set up and run by Jews. For a long time any Jewish person who dared to speak out against the Israeli government was branded as a “self-hating Jew”, even “anti-Semitic” and “racist”, but such unjust slurs have been made so often that they are beginning to lose their sting. When Judge Richard Goldstone published his findings in the UN’s Goldstone Report, because he had dared to speak out against the Israeli regime he was branded as a self-hating Jew by many Zionists. At one time, such a smear may have held some credence but, increasingly, people are seeing this for what it is; a shallow attempt to discredit and besmirch the character of anyone who speaks out against oppressive Israeli policies. However, there are

now so many Jewish people speaking out against the Israeli government that it is hard to accept that they are all “self-hating”. Those courageous souls willing to risk such abuse deserve to have their voices heard. A whole host of Jewish voices are standing against the actions of the Israeli government, including Judge Goldstone, academic Avi Shlaim and Holocaust survivor Hedy Epstein. Even John Donovan, who is a Jew, argued in the Intelligence Squared debate noted above, for a normalisation of relations with Israel; he is far from alone.

Jewish organisations are also taking a stance against the policies of the Israeli government. They include Jews for Justice for Palestinians, [B'Tselem](#) and [Neturei Karta](#), an international group of Orthodox Jews who go so far as to refuse to even “recognize the existence or authority of the so-called ‘State of Israel’”. Even ex-soldiers in





the Israel Defence Forces are taking a stand against the actions of their government and groups such as “Breaking the Silence” are speaking out against Israel’s military actions.

### US Congress

Despite all the talk of the strength of the pro-Israel lobby in American politics, there are American politicians who are finally speaking out and taking a stance against Israel. In January 2010 a [letter](#) was sent to President Obama signed by 54 members of the US Congress which urged him to do what he could to bring about “immediate relief for the citizens of Gaza” by pushing Israel (and Egypt) to end the immoral blockade.

### **CONCLUSION**

Having looked at the evidence for this “special relationship” and seemingly unbreakable bond between the US and Israel, the pattern that emerges is that this is a one-way relationship. It is clear how Israel benefits from America but not so obvious how – or even if - America benefits from Israel.

This relationship is long overdue for a serious reassessment. Leading academics and political thinkers are calling for President Obama to act as the president he promised to be when he took office. Israel has made the US look weak and unsure of itself by ignoring Obama’s call for an end to the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements on the occupied West Bank. Israel’s actions make a mockery of any US attempt to claim the moral high ground on international issues.

What, it must be asked, can Israel offer to the US in return for all its support and aid that the Arab states cannot? Does it really revolve around the power of the pro-Israel vote in America? When the AIPAC website describes the US-Israel relationship as “vital”, one is entitled to ask, vital to whom?

A mutually beneficial relationship would be just that - mutually beneficial – but for America the almost umbilical link to Israel brings more damage than benefit. Israel *complicates* matters for the United States. The challenge facing the American people is to extricate themselves from the stranglehold that Israel has on their politics, media and administration, and restore their nation’s standing in the world before it is too late.



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- <sup>i</sup> <http://www.israelemb.org/US-Israel-Relations/US-israel-Relations.html>
- <sup>ii</sup> The 'P5' are China, France, the United Kingdom, the USA and Russia
- <sup>iii</sup> [Once in 1990 relating to Panama and the second time in 2002 relating to Bosnia](#)
- <sup>iv</sup> <http://lemming.mahost.org/abr/israel.htm>
- <sup>v</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Network of Investment Promotion Agencies. The report analysed 27 countries in the EU, including 9 other 'partner countries'.
- <sup>vi</sup> M. Bowles (March/April 2002) '[US Aid to Israel: The Lifeblood of Occupation](#)' Left Turn
- <sup>vii</sup> S. McArthur (Nov 2008) 'A Conservative Estimate of Total Direct U.S Aid to Israel: Almost \$114 Billion' Congress Watch, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, pp 10-11
- <sup>viii</sup> See: [http://www.wrmea.com/us\\_aid\\_to\\_israel/index.htm#STRATEGIC](http://www.wrmea.com/us_aid_to_israel/index.htm#STRATEGIC) for more information on this subject.
- <sup>ix</sup> A.B Kopanski and M. Saleh 'The Role of the Israel Lobby' in 'American Foreign Policy and The Muslim World' pp.143 - 164
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.* p 154
- <sup>xi</sup> <http://www.counterpunch.org/weir02262010.html>
- <sup>xii</sup> Kopanski and Saleh p.163
- <sup>xiii</sup> P287, D. Abdullah 'America's Palestinian Policy: An Outsider's Perspective' p. 269-288.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid* p.270
- <sup>xv</sup> Z.Brzezinski (Jan/Fen 2010) 'From Hope to Audacity: Appraising Obama's Foreign Policy' Foreign Affairs pp. 16-30
- <sup>xvi</sup> These are the figures cited in the debate

