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Obama Rewards Israel's Bad Behavior

By Sheldon Richman
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Benjamin Netanyahu has been perhaps the most anti-Palestinian Israeli prime minister of a large rogue's gallery dedicated to driving the aggrieved Palestinians out of the land they and their ancestors have lived in and worked for millennia. This oppression — which has included ethnic cleansing, savage war on the people of the Gaza Strip, routine brutality and humiliation, and expanding illegal Jewish settlements on land conquered through aggressive war — has been underwritten and encouraged by the U.S. government since 1948.

It has been rare indeed for an American president to express opposition or even irritation with an official Israeli act of brutality — and even then the consequences have varied between the symbolic (and short-lived) and nonexistent. The lip-service calls for Israel finally to leave occupied Palestinian land (the two-state solution), like President Barack Obama's latest, count for nothing because no one believes the U.S. government is an honest broker that cares about injustices against the Palestinians. (Obama did not mention the Palestinians in a meeting with Netanyahu this week.)

It is no exaggeration to say that the U.S. government rewards Netanyahu for his regime's bad behavior. For example, as Zaid Jilali [reports](#) at *The Intercept*, "Shortly before Netanyahu took office, [474,000 Israeli settlers](#) were living in these territories. By the end of 2014, the last time the Israeli government released comprehensive statistics on the matter, that number had grown to around [570,000](#)." Yet U.S. military aid to Israel not only continues; it increases.

Israel's rulers have no intention of recognizing the rights of Palestinians to their lives, liberty, and property. Past efforts that appeared conciliatory, such as Yitzhak Rabin's Oslo Accords, were actually aimed at thwarting proposals to have the Palestinians in the occupied territories become citizens of the self-declared state of the Jewish People (the one-state solution). The other alternative to the two states, formal apartheid, is deemed as politically inexpedient.

Today the U.S. government continues to stand firmly in Israel's corner, regardless of what the right wing says. The U.S. government has given Israel more than \$3 billion a year in military aid for decades, though this basic assistance was often exceeded for alleged special reasons. Now the Obama administration has agreed to pay Israel a record [\\$38 billion](#) over 10 years. Much of this money, unsurprisingly, benefits the American military-industrial complex, and soon all of it will go to American firms.

Ironically Israel probably has never been so secure (which is not to say it ever faced an offensive existential threat). The Palestine Liberation Organization, Arab League, Iran, and [arguably Hamas](#) long ago offered to recognize Israel. (Netanyahu moved the goalpost by demanding that they recognize Israel *as* the state of the Jewish People.) The chaos in the Levant serves the Israeli state's interests, which is why Netanyahu has long been receptive to American neoconservative proposals to undermine secular Arab governments with the anticipation that [jihadists would prosper in the resulting instability](#).

Top Israeli officials have not been shy about expressing their preference for violent Sunni sectarians (yes, al-Qaeda) over Shiite Iran and its secular Syrian ally Bashar al-Assad. (Until recently, Obama has shared that preference to an extent.) This is telling in light of the incontrovertible fact that Iran, which has an old Jewish community that freely practices its religion, is no threat to Israel whatever. Iran has had [no nuclear-weapons ambitions](#) and has signed a strict anti-nuclear-weapons agreement with the West in order to have decades-old sanctions lifted. Israel, meanwhile, is the Middle East's monopoly nuclear-weapons state, which (unlike Iran) refuses to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and thus (again unlike Iran) is subject to no international inspections. Moreover, recently leaked emails from former Secretary of State Colin Powell reveal that [Israel's 200 nuclear warheads are targeted at Iran](#). It is Israel that threatens Iran, not vice versa. (See my writings on Iran [here](#).)

The upshot is that no good grounds exist for U.S. military aid to Israel, much less a significant increase. Nevertheless, instability and the invention of an Iranian threat are useful to the powers that be because the more dangerous the Middle East appears, the more forgiving Americans are likely to be about Israel's daily dehumanization of the Palestinians.

Israel of course remains an American political football, with Democrats and Republican trying to outdo each other in their slavish allegiance to the (so-called) Jewish State. (Zionism

is [nationalism masquerading as Judaism](#).) Republicans, with Donald Trump leading the way (his [AIPAC speech](#) rivals that of the most fanatical Zionist), brand Obama the most anti-Israel president ever — which one can see is an absurd lie. So it's no surprise that [Republican Senators pledge to increase aid to Israel](#) over its record level. (For the typical complaints about the new aid package, see [this](#).)

Meanwhile, a big group of Democratic senators, including Elizabeth Warren and Hillary Clinton's running mate, Tim Kaine, joined Republicans (88 senators in all) in signing a [letter published by AIPAC](#), the chief [Israel lobby](#), urging Obama to veto any "one-sided" UN Security Council resolutions regarding "settlements or other final status issues." The letter said such resolutions would "make it more difficult for Israelis and Palestinians to resolve the conflict," but that concern is phony since Israel has repeatedly scuttled negotiations by insisting that it has a right to keep taking the very Palestinian land that is supposedly the subject of negotiations.

According to *Haaretz*, the senators' letter was "[initiated and sponsored](#)" by AIPAC, "apparently spurred by the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem and Israel's ambassador to the U.S., Ron Dermer." Israel and its American lobby fear that after the U.S. election Obama might move for a Security Council resolution on Israel-Palestine.

The American ruling elite's support for Israel is driven by imperial political and economic interests, as well as electoral financial considerations. But it aligns neither with the freedom and security of the American people ([a growing number of American Jews do not identify with Israel](#)) nor with the cause world peace and justice.