



The Council on Foreign Relations, the Israel Lobby, and the War on Gaza

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For many decades, there has been a continuing dialogue about U.S. military, financial, and diplomatic support for Zionist Israel. However, even in the progressive and left media there has been a lack of discussion of the lesser known political and economic forces that have enabled this support. One key, but often ignored, source has been the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the think tank of monopoly-finance capital, also known as Wall Street's think tank.

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The CFR is the world's most powerful private organisation. It is the ultimate networking, socialising, strategic planning, consensus-forming, and foreign policy lobbying institution of the dominant sector of the U.S. capitalist class. As a think tank and policy center, it is the most important U.S. locus of the deep state exerting influence behind the scenes. In the United States, it mainly focuses on directing the federal government, but has power in many areas of life in the United States, such as elite universities, finance capitalist firms, other think tanks, nonprofits, Congress, top corporations, and the mainstream media. While some of its activities are semisecret, for members only, much of what it does can be revealed by perusing its website; reading its journal, *Foreign Affairs*; examining its annual reports; and following the activities of its members and leaders.¹



Caption reads: "Honouring agreements by burying them..."

¹ ↪ Laurence H. Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust: The Council on Foreign Relations and United States Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977); Laurence H. Shoup, *Wall Street's Think Tank: The Council on Foreign Relations and the Empire of Neoliberal Geopolitics, 1976–2019* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019); Laurence H. Shoup, "Council on Foreign Relations and United States Imperialism," in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, vol.1, Immanuel Ness and Zak Cope, eds., 2nd edition (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

Over recent years especially, the CFR has developed a close relationship to the Zionist state of Israel and has influenced the formulation of U.S. foreign policy to reflect this. In effect, the CFR has been and remains part of what has come to be known as the “Israel lobby” in U.S. political life. With the development of the current crisis in the Middle East, affecting not only that area but the entire world, this is an appropriate time to examine the complex of events, institutions, and people involved in the creation and evolution of our current crisis. The constant and false claims by Israel and the Israel lobby contend that any critique of their policies and activities is a manifestation of “antisemitism,” in effect shifting the focus from the actions of Israel to the motives of those criticising it. Therefore, this analysis will begin with a discussion of Judaism and Israeli ethnonationalism also known as Zionism.

Judaism and Zionism

Judaism is an ancient religious and cultural identity, an inclusive, diverse, and multifaceted religion open to all. It is rooted in faith, with cultural and ethical, as well as religious, expressions. The observant live in many nations and

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embrace a variety of practices and beliefs. After murderous antisemitism in Europe reached a peak during the Holocaust of 1939–45, many Jews decided to try to protect their lives through immigration to another part of the world, Palestine. Many adopted an ethnonationalist political ideology called Zionism. Since its

origin in the late nineteenth century, Zionism’s reason for being has been to establish and maintain a Jewish settler colonial homeland in Palestine. It is exclusive, a homeland for one group of “chosen people.”

Zionists have been systematically dispossessing the Palestinian people from their land since the 1920s, but especially since the state of Israel was established in 1948. They have constantly, relentlessly, and violently reduced the living space

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of Palestinians, denying them their national rights. This and other Zionist policies have created a racist, discriminatory apartheid system where Jews are privileged and have more rights than others. Muslim, Arab, Christian, and other Israelis are second-class citizens whose rights are not fully enshrined in law. Despite the fact that many have lived there for centuries, Palestinians in the occupied territories

have virtually no rights in a system correctly labeled as apartheid.²

The extreme right-wing political Zionism of Menachem Begin’s Herut (“Freedom”) Party dedicated to the violent imposition of a Jewish state in Palestine, and the progenitor of today’s Benjamin Netanyahu-led Likud Party, was identified as early as 1948 as “closely akin” to the Nazi and fascist parties of Europe by a group of Jewish intellectuals, which included Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, Sidney Hook, and Seymour Melman. In a letter to the New York Times, this group pointed out that the mass violence against mainly peaceful Palestinians, the destruction of free trade unions, ultranationalism, racial superiority, and the creation of a right-wing “leader state” were key facets identifying such militant, political Zionism as the “latest manifestation of fascism.”³ This could be viewed as a supreme, if bitter, irony: a country ostensibly created due to genocide against Jewish people began to adopt features of fascism directed against the resident Palestinians, gradually maturing into the attempted genocide we see today.

² ↪ Amnesty International, “Israel’s Apartheid against Palestinians: A Cruel System of Domination and a Crime Against Humanity,” February 1, 2022, [amnesty.org](https://www.amnesty.org).

³ ↪ Isidore Abramowitz, Hannah Arendt, Abraham Brick, Jessurun Cardozo, Albert Einstein et al., “Letter to the New York Times,” New York Times, December 4, 1948, [marxists.org](https://www.marxists.org).

How should we explain U.S. support for this project? Israel and the United States share a history of settler colonialism, ideas of “Manifest Destiny,” white supremacy, and the extermination of Indigenous peoples. The United States gradually has developed into a nation with a professed goal of eliminating the vestiges of slavery, white supremacy, and suppression of Indigenous peoples. Plenty of injustice remains, but the aim is to live up to the image of a multi-ethnic, limited democracy, where all citizens are treated equally, whatever their ancestry and gender identification. In other words, complexity and exceptions exist, and the people’s struggles to expand democracy and social justice are ongoing. Because of their shared history of settler colonialism, however, it is understandable that Israel and the United States would become allies. Nowhere else in the world is Zionism enshrined as an unquestioned, positive ideology across so many powerful institutions—including the most important and powerful U.S. think tank, the CFR.

The following is a critique of the activities of the ethnonationalist state of Israel (similar to criticism of German Nazi ethnonationalism historically, or Hindu ethnonationalism or U.S. ethnonationalist white supremacy ideology today), and not a critique of Judaism as a religion. As the South African justice minister stated in regard to their case against Israel

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before the International Court of Justice, his country is citing the “actions of the state of Israel,” not those of the Jewish community.⁴ The allegation is aimed at changing Zionist Israel’s mistreatment of the Palestinians, something that many Israelis and

Jews worldwide also criticise. Thus, the frequent charges of “antisemitism” levelled at those who criticise Zionist Israel are incorrect, false, and without foundation.

The Current Situation: Attempted Genocide While the World Watches

A central geopolitical division in today’s world is the divide between the U.S.-led Western “rules-based international order” and the China-Russia “multipolar order.” These two narratives and orientations are struggling with each other for influence and power, especially in the Global South. Western/U.S. support for Israel’s current attempt at a “final solution” through the ethnic cleansing and outright genocide of millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank has hugely complicated this world-spanning geopolitical battle. U.S./Western support for Israel’s fascist-like policy toward the Indigenous people of Palestine is a huge embarrassment for the West and has resulted in a massive loss of “soft power,” the willingness of a nation to voluntarily cooperate with another nation.

Israel has one of the strongest military forces in the world, ranked eighteenth by Business Insider.⁵ As this is written in mid-February of 2024, its occupying forces, using U.S.-supplied airplanes, bombs, and artillery, have overwhelmingly struck hospitals, residences, refugee centers, schools, places of worship, and escape routes, killing and injuring in an ongoing war about 100,000 Palestinian civilians since October 7, 2023, when Israel was attacked by Hamas. More than half of the Palestinian dead are women and children, and approximately 85 percent of all of Gaza’s homes have been razed to the ground, leaving the great majority of Gaza’s over two million people with no place to live except tents. Israel controls access to Gaza and is systematically limiting the amount of food, water, fuel, medical supplies, and other necessities allowed into this small strip of land, resulting in near starvation for hundreds of thousands, and preventing essential medical care for those wounded by the Israeli military. The obvious aim is to punish, displace, and expel two million Palestinians from their homeland, something that has happened to many of them before. The Hamas offensive

⁴ ↪ Rob Rose, “South African Jewish Community Unnerved by Israel Genocide Case,” Financial Times, January 26, 2024, 3.

⁵ ↪ Sinéad Baker and Thibault Spirlet, “Ranked: The World’s Most Powerful Militaries in 2023,” Business Insider, December 18, 2023.

resulted in about 1,200 Israeli deaths and hundreds of seized hostages to be exchanged for Palestinians arrested by Israel.

Israeli leaders have also made brazenly genocidal statements. In fact, some top Israeli officials have explicitly called for the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza. These include:

- Prime Minister Netanyahu invoked a Biblical reference commanding: “Do not spare them, put to death men, women, children and infants.”⁶
- President Isaac Herzog gave the military the green light to attack Palestinian civilians as legitimate targets: “It is an entire nation out there that is responsible.... It is not true this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved.... They could have risen up.”⁷
- Major General Ghasan Alian of the Israeli military threatened: “There will be no electricity and no water [in Gaza], there will only be destruction. You wanted hell, you will get hell.”⁸
- Yoav Gallant, Defence Minister stated: “I have ordered a complete siege of the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel.... We are fighting human animals and we will act accordingly; we will eliminate everything.”⁹

These statements indicate a course of mass displacement, collective punishment, and expulsion of civilians—war crimes authorised and implemented by the top leaders of the Zionist Israeli state. The right wing of Israel’s current government is open about its advocacy of violence-induced migration out of Gaza in order for Israelis to seize the land and settle there. As national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir stated in January 2024: “We need to encourage Gazans to voluntarily emigrate to places around the world.”¹⁰ This massive Israeli crime has become the most transparent attempted genocide in world history, broadcast nightly on television news shows. The horrors of prior genocides largely were disclosed after the fact. Despite the attempts of Israel to ban journalists, today virtually the entire world is watching this carnage and can recognise who is responsible. A key question is whether this exposure will create a new reality, a moment of rupture with the current global capitalist system.

South Africa Somewhat Successfully Petitions the World Court

Many countries have rightly expressed horror at the state of Israel’s genocidal actions, and the war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed against Palestinians. This now amounts to a massive humanitarian catastrophe. In late

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December 2023, after months of Israeli bombardment and mass slaughter of Palestinian civilians in Gaza—with the support of the United States and other western nations—South Africa brought a case in the International Court of Justice (the World Court, or ICJ), charging that Zionist Israel’s assault constitutes an attempt at genocide. Concretely, this stated that Israel’s actions “are genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent...to

⁶ ↪ Noah Lanard, “The Dangerous History Behind Netanyahu’s Amalek Rhetoric,” Mother Jones, November 3, 2023.

⁷ ↪ Paul Blumenthal, “Israeli President Suggests Civilians in Gaza Are Legitimate Targets,” HuffPost, October 13, 2023.

⁸ ↪ Gianluca Pacchiani, “COGAT Chief Addresses Gazans: ‘You Wanted Hell, You Will Get Hell,’” Times of Israel, October 10, 2023.

⁹ ↪ Emanuel Fabian, “Defense Minister Announces ‘Complete Siege of Gaza,’” October 9, 2023.

¹⁰ ↪ Mike Brest, “Israeli Leaders Condemn Ben-Gvir’s Pro-Trump Comments,” Washington Examiner, February 5, 2024.

destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnic group.” South Africa requested that the court order a halt to Israeli actions. In late January 2024, in a preliminary ruling (a final ruling may take years), the ICJ refused to dismiss the case, as Israel had demanded. It ruled, in an overwhelming decision, that Israel must “take all measures within its power” and “ensure with immediate effect” that its military does not commit genocidal acts, including causing the unnecessary deaths of Palestinians. Additionally, Israel must “take all measures within its power to prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide in relation to...the Palestinian group in the Gaza Strip.” It must also take measures to enable the provision of “humanitarian assistance,” preserve evidence, and submit a report in one month on efforts to implement the court’s orders. The court further called on Hamas to immediately release the hostages abducted during their attack on October 7, 2023.¹¹

As this is written in February 2024, it is clear that the Israeli and U.S. governments will ignore this ruling and the catastrophic situation in Gaza will continue. Zionist Israel is also rejecting the order to “punish” those who have incited genocide. Since the prime minister, defence minister, president, and other top Israeli officials are clearly guilty of incitement, this order will likely have influence only on global public opinion. Similarly, since the court did not order—and Israel has refused to implement—a ceasefire, the unnecessary mass killing and injuring of Palestinian civilians has continued, even increased. Because the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands all provide military aid to Israel, they are complicit in these genocidal acts and could be brought to the court at a future date.

The role of the United States remains central. Since President Joe Biden and his advisers could lay down the law to Zionist Israel and force a solution (two-state or unitary), what explains their continued full support for Zionist Israel? Various explanations have been offered, such as collective guilt about the suffering of Jewish people historically, or the fact that Biden has declared that he is a Zionist. These are unconvincing. Something more fundamental is involved. This consists of four elements: (1) the Zionist Israel lobby in the United States, (2) the U. S. imperial geopolitical strategy to attempt to dominate the strategic area of the Middle East through a militarised Israeli client state, (3) multinational corporate interests aligned with Israel, and (4) the role of campaign contributions in U.S. elections. All of these involve the CFR.

The CFR and the Israeli Lobby: Interconnections

The Israel lobby is vast, consisting of many more organisations, some with specialised functions. It is not centralised. The most revealing account of the nature and influence of this lobby is by two U.S. academics, John J. Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Steven M. Walt of Harvard University, in their book, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*.¹² In detailing this lobby, Mearsheimer and Walt focus on the better known elements of this complex, including organisations such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC); the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations (CPMAJO); the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; the Anti-Defamation League (ADL); the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA); the Middle East Forum; the Zionist Organization of America; and Christians United for Israel.¹³ It is important to note that Mearsheimer and Walt do not identify the CFR as part of the Israel lobby, when it is, in fact a central player. This could be because both of these scholars have been

¹¹ ↪ International Court of Justice, Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), January 26, 2024.

¹² ↪ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

¹³ ↪ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 113–17.

members of the CFR since at least 1986 (in the case of Walt) and 1994 (in that of Mearsheimer).¹⁴ Since both are longtime CFR members, and because they are criticising the Israel lobby, it is likely that they did not want to include the Council as part of the lobby. There is also the question of policy differences within the CFR, which will be discussed below.

First, let us review the CFR's connections to these key organisations. Mearsheimer and Walt explain that “as with other

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special interest groups, the boundaries of the Israel lobby cannot be identified precisely, and there will always be some borderline individuals and organisations...hard to classify.”¹⁵ They then list the groups cited above and the key organisations along with one individual, Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chair of the CPMAJO.¹⁶ Hoenlein

has been a member of the CFR since at least 1986.¹⁷

Other than the CFR, AIPAC is the most powerful organisation in the Israel lobby. It focuses on lobbying and funding politicians from the two major parties and both chambers of the U.S. Congress while the CFR focuses more on the executive branch.¹⁸ There are key connections between the CFR and AIPAC. The Israel Lobby describes how AIPAC was transformed from a relatively weak, low-budget operation into a large and powerful one after 1975. Much of this transformation took place under the leadership of Thomas A. Dine, executive director of AIPAC from 1980–93. Dine was at the time a member of the CFR, and remains a member today.¹⁹ AIPAC raises a lot of money to maximise its influence, including funding candidates to run against progressives who are critical of Israel.

The ongoing war on Gaza has stimulated vast fundraising by AIPAC to try to counter the negative publicity coming from reporting on the mass slaughter of Palestinian civilians by the Israeli army. One report indicates that \$90 million has been raised recently for lobbying in the United States. A variety of wealthy U.S. Americans have been tapped for this \$90 million, including a number of finance capitalists who are members of the CFR. These include Council member Stephen Schwartzman of Blackstone private equity, who, with his partners and employees, has recently donated at least \$6 million to AIPAC.²⁰ Schwartzman has long been close to the apex of the Council, as his former partner, Peter Peterson, was chair of the CFR from 1985–2007.²¹ Josh Harris of Apollo Global Management, Lloyd Blankfein of Goldman Sachs, and Mark Penn of the Stagwell private equity group are other Wall Street barons and CFR members who have written big checks to AIPAC for their lobbying efforts on behalf of Israel.²²

An examination of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy finds that it is also quite close to the CFR. Robert Satloff, its executive director, is a longtime member of CFR. As of 2018, fourteen of the seventeen-person board of advisors

¹⁴ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 1986, 167; Annual Report 1994, 148; Annual Report 2000, 152, 158; Annual Report 2007, 104, 110; Annual Report 2017, 60, 68 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations).

¹⁵ ↪ Mearsheimer and Walt, The Israel Lobby, 113.

¹⁶ ↪ Mearsheimer and Walt, The Israel Lobby, 113–17.

¹⁷ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 1986, 158; Annual Report 2000, 148; Annual Report 2007, 101; Annual Report 2017, 55.

¹⁸ ↪ Laurence H. Shoup, “The Council on Foreign Relations, the Biden Team, and Key Policy Outcomes,” Monthly Review 73, no. 1 (May 2021): 1–21.

¹⁹ ↪ Mearsheimer and Walt, The Israel Lobby, 119; “International Advisory Board: Thomas Dine,” Vaclav Havel Center, havelcenter.org; Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 1978, 117; Annual Report 1986, 155; Annual Report 1994, 142; Annual Report 2000, 145; Annual Report 2007, 98; Annual Report 2018, 53.

²⁰ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2018, 48–71; Amos Barshad, “Inside the Israel Lobby’s New \$90 Million War Chest” The Lever, February 1, 2024.

²¹ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2018, 42.

²² ↪ Barshad, “Inside the Israel Lobby’s New \$90 Million War Chest”; Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2018, 48–71.

(sixteen men and one woman) were CFR members. Three of these (Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, and James Stavridis) were former directors of the Council, and at least two others (Condoleezza Rice and Michael Mandelbaum) served as staff members there.²³

The ADL website states “We stand with Israel,” claiming that it “works to support a secure, Jewish and democratic State of Israel.” This organisation’s dual purpose is to confuse people by conflating opposition to Zionism with antisemitism, and to spy on Israel’s critics in the United States. The current CEO of the ADL, Jonathan Greenblatt, and its national director, Abraham Foxman, are both members of the Council.²⁴

The website of JINSA (the A, which previously stood for “Affairs,” was recently changed to “of America”) states that it is “dedicated to advancing U.S. national security interests in the Middle East, of which a critical pillar is a robust U.S.-Israel security relationship.” JINSA believes that Israel is the “most capable and critical U.S. security partner in the 21st century.”²⁵ In September 2023, the organisation’s Gemunder Center produced a report advocating for the need for a U.S.-Israel Mutual Defence Treaty. JINSA has a large number of staff, experts, directors, and advisors, mainly retired military men who are not connected to the CFR. There are, however, a number of CFR members who are also part of JINSA, along with two Council staff and one former director. The staff members in common are Elliott Abrams and Ray Takeyh, both senior fellows for Middle East Studies at the CFR and “experts” at JINSA. The CFR former director is Admiral James Stavridis, a former NATO Supreme Allied Commander, who heads a U.S.-Israel Security Task Force at JINSA. Six Council members are also in JINSA leadership: Ronald Lehman, Reuben Jeffery, Sander Gerber, Joseph Lieberman, Devon Cross, and J. Kenneth Blackwell.²⁶

The Middle East Forum was founded and is still headed by longtime CFR member Daniel Pipes, who is currently president of the organisation. The Israel Lobby reported that in 2002, Pipes established a “Campus Watch” to encourage students to report on and intimidate individuals at any university or college who could be considered hostile to Israel.²⁷

The Zionist Organization of America is a far-right body that denounced South Africa’s case before the ICJ as “absurd.” It has featured speakers such as Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Texas senator Ted Cruz, along with Israeli leaders.²⁸ It

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does not appear to be connected to the CFR. Similarly, Christians United for Israel apparently has no connections to the CFR. It is run by Pastor John Hagee and his wife, Diana Hagee. Their past work has included training Christian students how to “make the case for Israel” so that “they can say more than just God gave

Israel the land.”²⁹

²³ ↪ The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, “About: Board of Advisors,” washingtoninstitute.org; Shoup, Wall Street’s Think Tank, 60–61; Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2007, 108; Annual Report 2018, 42–43, 48–71.

²⁴ ↪ James Bamford, “The Anti-Defamation League: Israel’s Attack Dog in the US,” The Nation, January 31, 2024; Anti-Defamation League, “ADL and Israel,” supportadl.org; Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2007, 99; Annual Report 2018, 54, 56.

²⁵ ↪ Jewish Institute for National Security of America, “Our Mission,” jinsa.org.

²⁶ ↪ Jewish Institute for National Security of America, “Our People,” jinsa.org; Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2018, 48–71, 94–95.

²⁷ ↪ Mearsheimer and Walt, The Israel Lobby, 30, 179; Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 1990, 201; Annual Report 2000, 154; Annual Report 2018, 64.

²⁸ ↪ Zionist Organization of America, “ZOA Condemns ICJ’s Unjust, Unwarranted, Dangerous ‘Provisional Measures’ Decision against Israel,” February 5, 2024, zoa.org.

²⁹ ↪ Mearsheimer and Walt, The Israel Lobby, 178–79.

The CFR and the Israel Lobby: The Council as Part of the Lobby

Surprisingly enough, not only is the CFR part of the Israel lobby, Zionist Israel has its own Israeli CFR exactly patterned on and cooperating with its U.S. counterpart, even publishing a journal called the Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs. The Israel Council on Foreign Relations was founded in 1989 by David Kimche, formerly Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ambassador-at-large, and deputy director of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency. “Based on models of the New York Council on Foreign Relations and British Chatham House,” Wikipedia states with respect to the Israeli CFR, “the Council is not affiliated with governmental or academic institutions.... Participants come from a wide cross-section of the most influential spheres of Israeli society.” The Israeli CFR operates under the auspices of the World Jewish Congress, the president of which (since 2007) is billionaire Ronald S. Lauder. Lauder and his family members are longtime members and major contributors to the U.S. CFR. Lauder is a vocal supporter of Israel’s ultraconservative Likud party and has close ties to Netanyahu, its right-wing leader.³⁰

Reviewing the strong links of the leadership and staff of the CFR to Israel, one is struck both at the high-level connections and the lack of any ties to people with different perspectives. Although the CFR says it is “nonpartisan,” this obviously does not apply to Zionism and Israel. Starting with the top leadership (chairmen and presidents) in recent years, four individuals have made statements on Israel. Rubin, former Goldman Sachs leader and Secretary of the Treasury, was the Council’s cochair from 2007 to 2017 and is currently chairman emeritus. He has been a major donor for many years, including making a single donation of at least \$1 million to the CFR in 2006–7.³¹ In an opinion piece in August 2023, Rubin stated: “Throughout my career, I have and will continue to proudly support the world’s only Jewish nation: the state of Israel,” adding that it is “clearly antisemitism” to single out Israel for a boycott.³² Rubin’s statement ignores the fact that criticising the policies of the Zionist state is not the same as criticising Jews or the Jewish religion.

The current chairman (since 2017) of the Council is David Rubenstein, the billionaire cofounder of the Carlyle Group, a private equity firm. He is also a longtime major donor to the CFR, having given at least \$5 million dollars in 2006–7 alone.³³ In November 2020, Rubenstein teamed up with real estate developer Larry Silverstein to raise money for Israel by selling Israeli bonds. Their sales event was described as “an exclusive Israel Bonds real estate event industry viewed by over 1,000 participants from the U.S. and Canada.”³⁴

Richard N. Haass, former director of policy planning for the U.S. State Department, served as president of the CFR from 2003 to 2023. In a late October 2023 op-ed in the Financial Times, Haass stated that he was writing due to “my commitment to Israel and the U.S.-Israel relationship,” adding that it was “just and necessary” to “hit Hamas hard.” He also argued that Israel could not give full rights to the Palestinians, as this would “end Israel’s Jewish character.”³⁵ He did advise Israel’s leaders and soldiers to always distinguish between Hamas and the people of Gaza in order not to lose world sympathy—wise advice that has obviously been ignored.³⁶

³⁰ ↪ “Israel Council on Foreign Relations,” Wikipedia, accessed March 12, 2024; “Our President: Ronald S. Lauder,” World Jewish Congress, worldjewishcongress.org; Michael Massing, “Deal Breakers,” American Prospect, February 21, 2002, prospect.org; Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2000, 107, 150; Annual Report 2007, 63, 71, 103; Annual Report 2018, 60.

³¹ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2007, 71; Annual Report 2018, 1, 42.

³² ↪ Robert Rubin, “Financial Institutions Targeting Israel Is Unacceptable,” Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, August 9, 2023; Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2007, 71.

³³ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2007, 71.

³⁴ ↪ Israel Bonds, “Real Estate and Financial Leaders Larry Silverstein and David M. Rubenstein Engage in Exclusive Israel Bonds Virtual Discussion,” November 12, 2020, israelbonds.com.

³⁵ ↪ Richard Haass, “Israel’s War Must Distinguish between Hamas and the People of Gaza,” Financial Times, October 27, 2023.

³⁶ ↪ Haass, “Israel’s War Must Distinguish between Hamas and the People of Gaza.”

Finally, Michael Froman, who became Council president in mid-2023, spoke at a meeting of the U.S.-Israel Business Initiative in Washington, DC, in late 2015. Froman stated approvingly that a prior trade agreement signed between the two nations was “intended to show the world that the bond between our two nations runs even deeper than security matters” and forms part of a “strong partnership.”³⁷ Froman, then the U.S. Trade Representative during the Obama Administration, added that trade between the United States and Israel had been growing rapidly over a period of three decades.³⁸

Turning to an examination of prominent CFR directors, the same pattern of strong support for Israel and Zionism emerges, with no sympathy or support for the Palestinians. The late former Council Director Kissinger was one prominent example. Kissinger got his start in foreign policymaking in the mid-1950s as an employee of the CFR. This is where he met the Rockefellers and other powerful people who could help him advance his career. Soon, he was known as an “ardent Zionist” who backed Israel unequivocally. As the top U.S. foreign policymaker during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, for example, Kissinger arranged for a massive airlift of U.S. military equipment to help Israel. This was the start of a program of large-scale military aid from the United States to Israel that continues to the present moment.³⁹

The case of Jeane J. Kirkpatrick is similar. A longtime CFR leader, after being Ronald Reagan’s UN ambassador, she was brought in as a Council director from 1985 to 1994 and vice-chair during 1993–94. She is identified in The Israel Lobby as part of the neoconservative element of the lobby.⁴⁰

If we look at examples of Zionists among the senior staff at the CFR, four “experts” come to mind. One is Elliott Abrams, a longtime member and senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council. His tenure there was interspersed with stints as a top official in various administrations.⁴¹ Like Kirkpatrick, he is identified as part of the neoconservative element of the lobby, but also has other connections to Israel, such as being the chair of the Tikvah Fund, which finances a think tank and university in Israel. As mentioned above, Abrams is also on the board of directors of JINSA.

Martin Indyk, another CFR senior fellow and “expert” who goes in and out of government, is the “Lowy Distinguished Fellow in U.S.-Middle East Diplomacy” at the CFR. Indyk was educated in Australia and Israel. He considered immigration to Israel, but later decided to support it by becoming a U.S. citizen.⁴² He has been a continuous member of the CFR since at least 2007.⁴³ Initially, he began working for AIPAC as deputy research director. Because the studies coming out of AIPAC were not taken seriously, in 1985 Indyk joined with Barbi Weinberg, an AIPAC director and the wife of AIPAC chairman emeritus Lawrence Weinberg, to form the Washington Institute of Near East Policy. She became the president of the institute, and Indyk the executive director. As outlined above, there were and are many other connections between the two organisations. The overall purpose of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy is to convince Americans that U.S. and Israeli interests are one and the same. Indyk has been the U.S. Ambassador to Israel twice and served as a Middle East expert in the State Department.⁴⁴

³⁷ ↪ “Remarks by Ambassador Michael Froman to the U.S.-Israel Business Initiative,” Office of the United States Trade Representative, Washington, DC, December 4, 2015, ustr.gov.

³⁸ ↪ “Remarks by Ambassador Michael Froman.”

³⁹ ↪ “Henry Kissinger, Ardent Zionist ‘Beloved by America’s Ruling Class’ Dies at Age 100,” Middle East Monitor, No

⁴⁰ ↪ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 128–32.

⁴¹ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, *Annual Report 2007*, 94; *Annual Report 2018*, 94; Council on Foreign Relations, “Elliott Abrams: Expert Bio,” cfr.org.

⁴² ↪ Martin Indyk interviewed by Barbara Kay, “3211—Martin Indyk Part 1,” MosaicTVShow, YouTube, posted April 5, 2011.

⁴³ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, *Annual Report 2007*, 101; *Annual Report 2018*, 58.

⁴⁴ ↪ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 165, 175–76, 258; Israel Policy Forum, “Leadership: Martin S. Indyk,” israelpolicyforum.org.

Max Boot, the CFR's Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Senior Fellow for National Security Studies, has served in this role for at least fifteen years. He is a neoconservative identified as an "ardent pro-Israel figure."⁴⁵

CFR member Farah Pandith is an adjunct senior fellow at the Council. She has filled roles in the administrations of both Bush presidencies as well as in the Obama Administration, where she was selected as the first "Special Representative to Muslim Communities." What is especially noteworthy and ironic is that she also serves as a senior advisor at the ADL, part of the Israel lobby.⁴⁶

The CFR is a large organisation, and so, this is only the beginning of the full story. What is clear is that this powerful, prestigious, and influential organisation is doing a great disservice to the United States and its people by being strongly biased in favor of Israeli Zionism and what that country has done—and continues to do—to the Palestinian people. The U.S. backing of genocide is both a political blunder and a moral catastrophe.

The CFR and Israel: The U.S. Strategic Perspective

In 2016, two longtime Council members and senior fellows, Robert D. Blackwill and Philip H. Gordon, produced a CFR strategic report called *Repairing the U.S.-Israel Relationship*.⁴⁷ The two authors stated that they "care deeply" about the U.S.-Israel relationship and wanted to maintain it.⁴⁸ They concluded that the United States reaped a number of benefits:

(1) Despite the arguments of some of Israel's critics, the United States profits substantially from the relationship. Israel is the United States's closest strategic partner in the world's most unstable region and shares valuable intelligence with Washington on terrorism, nonproliferation, and regional politics. (2) The United States derives important military benefits from the partnership in areas such as military technology, intelligence, joint training and exercises, and cybersecurity. (3) Despite its relatively small population, Israel is the largest Middle Eastern investor in the United States, the third largest destination for U.S. exports in the Middle East, an important research and development partner for the U.S. high-tech sector, and a source of innovative ideas on confronting twenty-first-century challenges such as renewable energy and water and food security.⁴⁹

This is the dominant perspective within the CFR and the broader Zionist Israel lobby, both of which support Israel as a way to maintain "full spectrum" domination/hegemony in an "unstable region" through cooperative security, international institutions, and open markets backed by actual military force and the threat of force. The area of West Asia/the Middle East is very important in the world power calculus due to its oil and gas supplies and key trade routes, and, thus, the CFR and other powerful groups have a foreign policy focused on control. It is interesting, however, that Mearsheimer and Walt, the authors of *The Israel Lobby*, are advocates of a different foreign policy approach, one that does not depend upon Israel or the control of other nations. Their recommendations focus on what they call "offshore balancing." This policy calls for a withdrawal from onshore military facilities like bases, and a focus instead on offshore capabilities.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ ↪ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 177; Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2007, 90; Annual Report 2010, 67; Annual Report 2018, 94.

⁴⁶ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, "Expert Bio: Farah Pandith"; Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2018, 64, 94.

⁴⁷ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 1994, 140, 144; Annual Report 2007, 96, 100; Annual Report 2018, 49, 55, 94.

⁴⁸ ↪ Robert D. Blackwill and Philip H. Gordon, *Repairing the U.S.-Israel Relationship*, Special Report No. 76 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2016), 3.

⁴⁹ ↪ Blackwill and Gordon, *Repairing the U.S.-Israel Relationship*, 4.

⁵⁰ ↪ See, for example, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing," *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2016.

The CFR, Israel, and U.S. Economic Interests

Important CFR-linked monopoly financial capitalist corporations such as Wall Street's Blackrock and Blackstone have significant interests in the Israeli economy. Blackrock is the world's biggest asset manager, to the tune of about \$10 trillion in assets, a figure larger than every nation's GDP outside of the United States and China. Larry Fink, its longtime CEO, was a CFR director from 2013 until 2023.⁵¹ Blackrock president Robert Kapito said in 2018 that his firm would be expanding its footprint in Israel because it "is a very important market...an incredible technology hub."⁵² Blackrock also has a strategic partnership with the Altshuler Shahan investment house in Israel.⁵³

In 2021, private equity firm Blackstone opened an office in Israel in order to tap into the technology industry there.⁵⁴ Other CFR-connected corporations also have major investments in the country, including the Carlyle Group, which was cofounded by current CFR chair Rubenstein.⁵⁵

As CFR president Froman stated in late 2015, by that point in time Israel was already "home to the operations of over 2,500 U.S. firms employing over 72,000 Israeli citizens.... The U.S. is a vital market for Israeli firms and innovators. Last year alone, Israelis were granted nearly 3,500 U.S. patents—that's more than all the other countries in the Middle East and all the countries in South Asia combined."⁵⁶

To mention a few additional examples, Chevron, Caterpillar, Intel, and Hyundai are major corporations with investments in Israel that were the targets of recent divestment efforts.⁵⁷ A full exposé of such investments and operations is needed, but beyond the scope of this article. A focus on just one such investment—the case of Chevron—is, however, revealing. Chevron is the largest California-based corporation and one of the leading world's oil and gas companies. It is a longtime corporate member of CFR at the highest level.⁵⁸ Chevron began large-scale operations in Israel in 2020 when it

This exposes another reason (besides taking their land) why the United States and Zionist Israel want to keep the Palestinian people in colonial bondage, and even expel them from the area. They do not want any challenge to wealth they can gain from their exploitation of offshore gas resources.

took over U.S.-based Noble Energy, which had discovered gas off the coast of Palestine in 2000. Chevron's own website points out that "the company's activity in Israel is focused on exploration, discovery, reservoir development, and the production, transmission and supply of natural gas to its customers in Israel and the Eastern Mediterranean region," adding that "The large volumes of natural gas found in Israeli

waters can supply the country's energy needs for decades to come."⁵⁹ A New York Times report gave additional details, explaining that Chevron operates the Tamar platform, located on the gas field by the same name and sitting about twelve miles offshore from the Gaza Strip. The Times article also stated that "Chevron is now the key player in Israel's energy industry" and central to the Israeli economy, typically supplying the fuel for about 70 percent of its electric power

⁵¹ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2018, 2, 42.

⁵² ↪ Shiri Habib-Valdorn, "Blackrock Set for Israel Expansion," Globes, May 2, 2018, en.globes.co.il.

⁵³ ↪ Habib-Valdorn, "Blackrock Set for Israel Expansion."

⁵⁴ ↪ Barshad, "Inside the Israel Lobby's New \$90 Million War Chest."

⁵⁵ ↪ The Carlyle Group, "Carlyle to Acquire LiveU to Further Accelerate Global Growth," news release, July 20, 2021; Ingrid Lunden, "Carlyle Confirms Acquisition of Live Video Streaming Company LiveU," TechCrunch, July 20, 2021.

⁵⁶ ↪ "Remarks by Ambassador Michael Froman."

⁵⁷ ↪ Sarah Ravani, "Hayward Votes to Pull Stock Tied to Israel," San Francisco Chronicle, January 27, 2024.

⁵⁸ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2000, 92; Annual Report 2007, 48; Annual Report 2018, 72.

⁵⁹ ↪ Chevron Israel, "Who We Are"; "The Establishment and Development of Israel's Natural Gas Industry," israel.chevron.com.

generation, as well as profiting from gas sales to Egypt and Jordan.⁶⁰ This exposes another reason (besides taking their land) why the United States and Zionist Israel want to keep the Palestinian people in colonial bondage, and even expel them from the area. They do not want any challenge to wealth they can gain from their exploitation of offshore gas resources.

The CFR and Major Donors to Political Campaigns

Finally, the important role that campaign finance plays in the U.S. political system needs to be mentioned. Elections in the United States are very expensive and campaign contributions are only lightly regulated. This gives the CFR, the Israel lobby, corporate interests, and the wealthy huge advantages in the competition for votes in a relatively open system.

Many of the top campaign donors to the Democratic Party and President Biden (as well as big donors to prior presidents) are pro-Israel and members of the Council. One list of top donors who collectively brought in millions to the 2020 Biden campaign includes eleven CFR members: Blair Efron, Marc Lasry, Jonathan Soros, Joshua Steiner, Robert Rubin, Jarrod Bernstein, Susan Levine, Penny Pritzker, Tom Nides, Dianne Feinstein, and Fred Hochberg.⁶¹ Other key political fundraisers were longtime CFR members, such as billionaire Michael Bloomberg.⁶² During the 2020 election cycle, the Bloomberg Industry Group was by far the largest single donor (almost \$94 million) to the Biden campaign.⁶³ Bloomberg is a strong supporter of Israeli Zionism. In a speech to AIPAC in March 2020, he slammed Senator Bernie Sanders for boycotting AIPAC conferences. Bloomberg promised that he would “always have Israel’s back” and would “never impose conditions on military aid” to Israel.⁶⁴

AIPAC and other pro-Israel lobbying groups spend heavily to reward their friends and punish those who oppose them. To cite but one example, pro-Israel PACs spent nearly \$50 million in direct political contributions and independent expenditures in the 2022 election cycle alone, and now plan to spend even more in 2024—something that definitely gets a politician’s attention.⁶⁵

Conclusion

At one level of understanding, it must be concluded that a corrupt and undemocratic U.S. political system has allowed a small, wealthy group of well-organised and well-funded people—the Zionist Israel lobby—over a period of many decades to make key decisions that caused immense harm both to millions of people and to our common ecological system that fosters life on our earth. It is notable that not one sector of the Israel lobby has criticised the current war on the Palestinian people of Gaza. Jewish people outside the Israel lobby, such as Jewish Voice for Peace, have, however, honourably protested this genocide, pointing out that the Palestinians are under attack by today’s fascists, just as the Jews in Europe were under the Nazis. Only a few in Congress, such as Sanders, have spoken out, and U.S. corporations in Israel have maintained their presence.

⁶⁰ ↪ Stanley Reed, “Chevron Restarts Gas Production on Platform near Gaza Strip,” New York Times, November 13, 2023.

⁶¹ ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2018, 49–71; Marc Rod, “Prominent Jewish Donors Among Top Biden Bundlers,” Jewish Insider, November 3, 2020.

⁶² ↪ Council on Foreign Relations, Annual Report 2000, 143; Annual Report 2007, 96; Annual Report 2018, 50.

⁶³ ↪ “[Top Contributors, Federal Election Data for Joe Biden, 2020 Cycle](#),” OpenSecrets, [opensecrets.org](#).

⁶⁴ ↪ Jihan Abdalla, “Bloomberg Speaks at AIPAC as Sanders, Warren Skip Conference,” Al Jazeera, March 2, 2020; Ron Kampeas, “Mike Bloomberg, Speaking at AIPAC, Attacks Bernie Sanders for Boycotting Israel Lobby’s Conference,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, March 2, 2020.

⁶⁵ ↪ Mat Schumer, “Pro-Israel PACs Poised to Spend Big to Unseat Progressive Members of Congress in 2024 Election Cycle,” OpenSecrets, December 7, 2023, [opensecrets.org](#).

All war and preparations for war result in massive fossil fuel use that is a major cause of growing climate chaos. The power of the Israel lobby, including the CFR, has resulted in a small client state being able to twist and dominate the Middle East policies of the world's largest imperial power. Despite supplying the armaments, backup military power, diplomatic support, and funding for a genocidal war, Washington is prevented from telling Zionist Israel to stop its cruelty and follow a policy of democracy and justice for the Palestinians. Instead, the United States gives Israel a blank check, with the negative results that all the world is now observing. The Zionists have created an authoritarian, theocratic, ethnonationalist, fascist-like state that is both unitary and totally oppressive and violent toward its minority populations, who are seen as outsiders, "others." This is the true nature of ethnonationalism wherever it occurs.

It is evident that a two-state solution is dead, and a single unitary state has in fact already been created by the United States and Israel. The clear solution to the existence of two cultures and peoples on one piece of land is a fully democratic state where all people are equal, with equal rights and responsibilities. With its overwhelming economic, political, and military power, the United States could force such a just solution, but this is prevented by its own perceived imperial interests and the Israel lobby.

But at a deeper level, what does this genocidal war on Gaza say about the nature and direction of those in charge of today's world? What alternatives are now in the offing?

The ghastly carnage produced by the U.S.-Israeli war on the people of Gaza has unveiled the barbaric and corrupt face of the current global capitalist order. The "full spectrum dominance" imperialists and their clients are now attempting to normalise genocide, including the mass murder and expulsion of Indigenous people and the massive destruction of nature—in other words, psychopathic savagery—as a "solution" to the contradiction between the Zionist settler state and the Palestinian people. What we are seeing is one of the greatest crimes of this or any age. If we lived in a world that valued human life, what is happening to Palestinians in Gaza would be considered so morally depraved that its authors would be seen as beyond redemption. Those promoting this policy evidently think that once this genocide has been accomplished, the rebuilding of war-making ability and the reconstruction of Gaza will fatten corporate profits from all the military spending, construction, engineering, and resettlement of Gaza by the Israeli Zionists, as well as expanded settlement on the West Bank by these settlers. They also assume that progressive people worldwide will be convinced by television ads or statements of corrupt, bought politicians that their own basic progressive values relating to human life, ecological sustainability, substantive equality, and social justice do not apply to the Palestinians. They assume that we will not notice the complete lack of democracy illustrated by the fact that the vast majority of people in the United States and other Western nations have been demanding "ceasefire now" for many months, while those in charge ignore this demand and continue the massacre.

It is also becoming clear that the U.S.-dominated "rules-based international order" is now on life support, nearing collapse. It is striking how nearly all of those in power in the NATO nations allied with Israel—whether in power or in opposition, left, right, center—continue to support Israel's attempted genocide. They have little interest in following the most basic of rules: do not massacre and starve innocent civilians. They also generally refuse to address the key underlying drivers of this current crisis: the limitless growth system of capitalism, global economic and class apartheid, the lack of real democracy, increasing militarism, the ongoing destruction of life sustaining ecologies, patriarchy, and white supremacy. We are moving into an age of barbarism and catastrophe, with Palestinians as the current victims. Is the U.S.-Israel violence in Gaza just the first experiment in considering all of humanity valueless and disposable?

But amid this horror of this tragedy, there are hopeful signs that this murderous system might soon be challenged and eventually overthrown by a global people's movement. Recognition is growing that we live under a capitalist system that needs to expand constantly on a finite earth, pushing all of humanity toward possible extinction through climate chaos, serious pandemics, and wars that could turn nuclear. Hundreds of millions, even billions of people worldwide have been deeply moved by observing the immense suffering caused by today's ongoing genocide. As mentioned, prior genocides were kept hidden, but this one has been exposed partly due to the ability of the Palestinians to tell their own stories through social media and citizen journalism, circumventing the filters of the mostly pro-Israel mainstream media. As a result, large numbers of protests of all kinds are taking place, and the beginning of open resistance can be seen. Perhaps this new mood of massive anger will be sustained and result in a serious impact to the perceived legitimacy of the criminal culprits. The withdrawal of support for a system is often an initial step toward significant change. Hopefully, a turning point in world history has been reached. However, as always, the future is not predetermined, and depends on the continued outrage, mobilisation, organising, and forging of unity and action on the basis of the popular interests of the working-class majority, aimed at creating a peaceful, cooperative, collective, and human-centred future for all people.

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