

NATO AND THE ISRAELI MILITARY

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has expanded its military jurisdiction outside of Western Europe. As the Cold War was winding down, the U.S., which controls most of NATO, promised then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO would “not move a centimeter to the East.” However, since that time NATO has dramatically expanded both operations and membership—including an effort to make Israel the first non-European member of NATO, a move that could have dire consequences for many in the region, but especially Palestinians.

Since 1994, Israel has been part of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), a group of countries in the Middle East and northern Africa, which coordinate and promote diplomatic and military policies of NATO. Though only one of seven countries in the MD, its relationship with NATO has been unique. Israel is the first non-European member to finalize the Individual Cooperation Program (ICP) that allows NATO and Israel to engage in joint military exercises and sharing of intelligence including studying Israeli military tactics in the occupied areas. In 2005, Israel joined NATO’s Parliamentary Assembly; a political body that helps set policy agenda. An informal pledge was made to extend an invitation to the Palestinian Authority as an observer - a pledge never fulfilled. Without Palestinian input, NATO has secured close ties to the Israeli Army despite its maintaining the illegal occupation and numerous human rights violations.

In September 2009, the UN Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict exposed war crimes committed by the Israeli military during its 2008-2009 assault on Gaza, including killing civilian men, women and children and using white phosphorus chemical weapons [1]. Shortly after its publication, NATO’s Military Committee Admiral Di Paola visited Israel to study military’s tactics and methods for NATO’s war in Afghanistan. NATO was particularly interested in “Israeli intelligence gathering capabilities and methods” that the Israeli military used in civilian population centers—methods used to commit human rights violations. [2]

For years, right wing Israeli politician Avigdor Lieberman has advocated for Israel’s full NATO membership to strengthen Israel’s military. These calls have gained wider acceptance as the Arab Spring has shaken Israel’s diplomatic and military stability in the Middle East. In February 2011, the German newspaper Die Welt printed an editorial by the president of the World Jewish Congress stating “Israel needs real guarantees for its security... European NATO member states - including Turkey - must admit Israel into the Western alliance” because doing so would send a strong message to Arab Spring countries “not to take on Israel.” [3] Officially, NATO has not expressed interest in being involved in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. However, the secretary-general for NATO did tell the press in September of 2011 that NATO could become involved in the conflict if a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace plan was reached, both parties requesting NATO enforcement of the plan, and the United Nations endorsed the military action. (The Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told visiting US Congressmen that the security of the future Palestinian state would be handed to NATO under US command.) [4] On the surface these conditions appear evenhanded, but it is unrealistic to assume impartiality by NATO considering NATO’s ties with Israel, and the dominance of NATO by the US, which has close ties with Israel, giving the state \$3 billion in military aid each year.

Israeli membership in NATO could result in being a threat to peace throughout the Arab world. Promoting collective security, NATO affirms that an attack on one member is an attack against all its members. If Israel were to become a member and attacked (even in self-defense), then a NATO response could be triggered having devastating consequences for the region, but especially for Palestinians, who are always the biggest losers of land and lives in Israel’s wars.

G8 SUPPORT FOR THE OCCUPATION OF PALESTINE

The G8 states continue to support the Israeli state and fund their apartheid policies. The U.S. government’s annual \$3 billion in military aid to Israel is only part of a pledge to give \$30 billion over the next ten years. In 2007, elements of the Palestinian National Authority, in cooperation with the World Bank and IMF, proposed the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP). This plan encouraged cuts in social services, the opening of markets for foreign investment, and export-led development in the West Bank. As the economy of the West Bank becomes increasingly orientated towards the needs of Western powers and a small elite class of Palestinians, the majority of Palestinians are pushed further into poverty. These same policies continue to the present day. Palestinians are being isolated and starved by the illegal siege of the Gaza strip, while more Palestinian land is confiscated to build settlements, Israeli-only roads and the Apartheid Wall. While Palestinians are forced into ghettos, watch their olive trees uprooted, their environment destroyed, their family members killed and their livelihoods erased, Israel’s colonial power grows and its brutal acts become more brazen - all because the “leaders” of the world encourage and abet Israel’s behavior as it falls in line with their own policies of exploitation.

The G8 has consistently supported the Israeli position. During the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the G8 blamed Hezbollah and Hamas for the conflict affirming Israel’s right to “defend itself” and as usual making only a half-hearted appeal for Israel to exercise “utmost restraint.” At the 2010 Summit, the G8 debated the blockade of Gaza, but issued a typical toothless statement - calling Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip “unsustainable.” There was no condemnation of the blockade from G8 countries that all continue to politically and financially support Israel’s illegal, collective punishment of the people of Gaza.

The G8 has consistently urged the Palestinians to return to peace talks, while failing to stop the establishment of new, and expansion of existing, Israeli settlements. While the G8 continue to reaffirm the “two-state vision” and “the Roadmap” as “the best way to achieve a permanent peace and an end to the occupation”, Israel has failed to comply with already established international law and UN Security Council resolutions, especially those that speak to the Palestinians’ inalienable Right of Return and the illegality of Israel’s military occupation and continued settlement building. During the 2011 G8 summit in France, the G8 focused yet again on encouraging the failed peace talks over the Palestinian statehood bid by saying that “negotiations are the only way toward a comprehensive and lasting resolution to the conflict.” As reported at the time - “It called for a return to the peace process, but did not mention the ongoing violations of [previous] agreements by Israeli authorities.