

**Militarization of Palestinian Aid**  
**Nora Lester Murad and Alaa Tartir**  
**Aid Watch Palestine**

**“Aid” in Context of Israeli Violations**

Palestinians’ need for aid is a direct result of a decades-long military occupation and conflict with Israel. Aid to both Israel and Palestine is militarized, which is furthering and prolonging this conflict rather than addressing its root causes.

At the macro level, aid to Palestine is militarized because it is a function of most western governments’ unqualified support for Israel. The latter includes impunity for Israeli violations of Palestinians’ rights. The provision of military aid, military trade, and other forms of economic, cultural and political exchange strengthens Israel’s ability to occupy, colonize, and dispossess Palestinians. Aid directly subsidizes the costs of Israel’s militarized aggression to Palestine, while international political support protects it from the consequences of non-compliance with international law, thus making aid actors complicit in Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights (Murad, 2014).

One of the great ironies of these aid mechanisms is the widely adopted approach to see it as “normal” for the United States to provide military support to Israel while also providing “aid” to Palestinians to mitigate the impact of Israeli military action. In fact, the United States government has provided US\$124.3 billion in bilateral (mostly military) assistance to Israel, making it the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign assistance since World War II (Sharp, 2015: summary). American aid to Israel is an integral part of its military strategy in the Middle East and American investments have helped Israel develop one of the most technologically sophisticated militaries in the world (Sharp, 2015: 1). In contrast, the United States has provided approximately US\$5 billion in aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) since its establishment.

Critics of American military aid to Israel argue that it is violating US domestic law. In their review of policy implications and options, the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation quotes the US Foreign Assistance Act as saying,

“No assistance shall be furnished under this chapter or the Arms Export Control Act [22 U.S.C. 2751 et seq.] to any unit of the security forces of a foreign country if the Secretary of State has credible evidence that such unit has committed gross violations of human rights.”

Ruebner (2012: 18-19) goes on to say,

“The Arms Export Control Act (AECA) (P.L. 90-629), which conditions and restricts the sale and leasing of U.S. defense articles and services, limits the use of U.S. weapons solely for internal security, for legitimate self defense, for preventing or hindering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and of the means of delivering such weapons, to permit the recipient country to participate in regional or collective arrangements or measures consistent with the Charter of the United Nations.”

American military aid to Israel may also violate Common Article One of the Geneva Conventions, which obligates third states to ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances (Dörmann and Serralvo, 2015). Others note that arms sales to Israel may be illegal because Israel, which is widely recognized as a nuclear power, has not signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Treaty, 1968).

Finally, aid channeled to the Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank violates basic rules of international law and thus hinders possibilities for a lasting peace.

Palestinian civil society has called for a military embargo on Israel. This appeal is not limited to the United States; the United Kingdom has also been under scrutiny for trading arms with Israel, including weapons that evidence confirms have been used in human rights violations:

“In the six months prior to the attack on Gaza in the summer of 2014, the UK government granted licenses worth £6,968,865 for military-use exports and £25,155,581 for dual-use equipment. The licensed items included combat aircraft components, drone components, anti-armor ammunition and weapon night sights. Meanwhile, the UK’s Watchkeeper surveillance drone has been developed under a £1 billion joint venture contract awarded by the Ministry of Defense to Thales UK and Israel’s Elbit Systems, allowing the UK military to benefit from technologies that have been ‘field tested’ on the occupied Palestinians. (Wearing, 2015: 3).”

Even in the best-case scenario, the net effect of international aid to Palestinians is questionable. Its value is greatly undermined by the fact that Israel’s military action has been subsidized by the United States and others and these actions have been granted political immunity by the international community. Palestinian critics of aid therefore maintain that Western donors are complicit in Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights, despite efforts by donor governments to distinguish their political actions from their aid policy, suggesting that aid policy is somehow “neutral.”

### **Fragmentation and Militarized Aid**

Israeli policies have fragmented the Palestinian community into several different legal/institutional components, all of which are in some way militarized. Because of this fragmentation, aid to Palestine is also politicized and militarized in different ways. Aid policies and practices contribute directly to this political fragmentation and social disintegration between the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Palestinians, who make up 20% of the population of Israel, are essentially colonized in a state that officially designates them as having fewer rights than the Jewish population. Western aid to Palestinian citizens of Israel, which is limited and subject to Israeli restrictions, generally focuses on strengthening Palestinian ability to claim their rights as minorities. This focus reinforces Palestinian citizens’ ties to Israel while simultaneously weakening their connections to the rest of the Palestinian community in the Arab world. By entrenching Palestinians’ identity in this way as a “minority” rather than as an indigenous people, western aid to Palestinians strengthens Israel’s territorial claims. In this way, aid to Palestinian citizens of Israel is politically and institutionally part of western support for Israel’s vision, regardless of what those same countries may say rhetorically about their support for Palestinian rights in international law.

The three million Palestinians in the West Bank also experience politicized and militarized aid. But these mechanisms are more complicated. The Oslo Accords (1993) and the Paris Protocol (1994) established a hegemonic political and economic model within which all “development” in the occupied Palestinian territory takes place. Researchers Tartir and Wildeman have explored the neoliberal interests that underpin the World Bank framework guiding Western aid policy toward the occupied Palestinian territory. They note that World Bank prescriptions “...do not take into account the history and human reality of Palestinians struggling to survive for decades under a violent military occupation” (2012: 1). Tartir and Wildeman also maintain that the World Bank over-

estimates the capacity of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to engage in demanded reforms, given that the PA lacks sovereignty.

In the West Bank, aid policy has distinct implementation plans according to three areas designated by the Oslo Accords – Area A (under Palestinian Authority control), Area B (under joint Israeli-Palestinian control, and Area C (under Israeli control). The greatest controversy is in Area C where Israel enforces (and most donors comply with) an illegal planning regime that denies Palestinians access to their own natural resources and to their right to development (Diakonia, 2013). By being unable or unwilling to challenge Israeli militarization in Area C, international donors are contributing to the sustainability of the status quo.

While discussion of the political status of Jerusalem was postponed by the Oslo process, the practical reality of Israeli annexation of Jerusalem and forced transfer of Jerusalem's native Palestinian population has been largely ignored by international aid policy. The virtual collapse of the Palestinian economy in East Jerusalem renders the city essentially unlivable for Palestinians (Arafah, 2016). Effectiveness of both humanitarian aid (e.g. to Palestinian families whose homes have been demolished by Israel) and development aid, which is limited by Israel's explicit Judaization policy, is totally undermined.

Aid policies and implementation in the Gaza Strip is another and different case. The Israeli blockade, which is now ten years old, makes the Gaza Strip nearly totally dependent on international aid. No materials or people can enter or exit Israeli checkpoints without Israeli military permission. The system of aid is increasingly controlled by Israel, not the United Nations, thus adding aid to the arsenal of weapons through which Israel can increase its power and control over Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In fact, the lack of adequate reconstruction after the 2008-9, 2012 and 2014 Israeli attacks is due to the militarized and securitized nature of the aid and the context within which it is delivered (or not). Notably, having this aid delivered in a highly securitized context makes it easier for donors to cover their failures using the excuse of "security."

Approximately five million registered Palestinian refugees also receive aid through a dedicated United Nations agency, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA, 2016). According to critics, UNRWA's ambiguous protection mandate has prompted debate about the extent to which UNRWA protects Palestinian rights or weakens their ability to claim their rights through other bodies and mechanisms (Farrah, 2010).

### **Bilateral Aid to the Palestinian Authority**

Military assistance to Israel is not the only way that international actors subsidize the Israeli occupation of Palestine. European donors, the United States and Canada provide significant bilateral assistance to the Palestinian Authority. In a scathing critique, Tartir says about 30% of international aid is directed to the \$1bn/year Palestinian security sector, which is not accountable to the Palestinian people and is increasingly authoritarian.

Since 2005, the United States and the European Union have supported sector reform, but "...the central tenet of this project has been the entrenchment of security collaboration between the PA and Israel," not the security of Palestinians (Tartir, 2016). That the PA and Israel work together on security means that a substantial amount of aid to the PA security sector is as much for Israel as it is for Palestine. Aid also makes it easier and cheaper for Israel to provide security for its settlements - illegal under international law and in the eyes of the world and the US. The aid thus compromises the security of Palestinians by funding the interests of their occupier. "Collaboration" under occupation in reality means dominance of the oppressor. Tartir also notes that both Amnesty

International and Human Rights Watch have documented the Palestinian Authority security forces' excessive use of force and noted PA limits on freedom of speech, political participation and mobilisation (Tartir, 2016).

So, on one hand, there is Israeli occupation and colonization that receives militarized aid. On the other, there is the Palestinian Authority, which receives ODA and spends it in a highly limited space within a securitized "development" process. So, aid in the Palestinian context is driven by a hegemonic security rationale, designed to address Israeli security concerns, in ways that make Palestinians increasingly insecure (Tartir, 2015). The power asymmetry between the colonized and colonizer translates into benefits to the more powerful actor and therefore sustains an anti-peace status. Mandy Turner has suggested that the intention of Western "peacebuilding" interventions includes counterinsurgency. In other words, aid seeks to pacify Palestinian national liberation aspirations in Israel's interest (Turner, 2014).

Investigations into the militarization of aid highlight two main questions: (1) What should be done when a liberation movement is forced to transform itself into a subcontractor to the colonizer as a result of this militarized aid? and (2) Is it possible that militarized aid can result in authoritarian tendencies giving dominance to security establishments and personnel at the expense of other sectors (e.g., health, education, manufacturing) and at the expense of democracy? In the case of Palestine, aid has not only failed to address the poverty, employment and empowerment gaps, but has also help create new insecurity and illegitimacy.

### **Aggression is a Crime That Should Not Be Funded By Aid**

The use of aid to promote or support aggression is not only inappropriate and counter-productive, but arguably illegal. The purpose of our global governance system, i.e. the United Nations, is, first and foremost, "to maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace" (Charter of the United Nations, 1945: Chapter 1, Article 1.1) Three basic humanitarian principles – humanity, neutrality impartiality– are enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/182 (1991) and have been reaffirmed in innumerable UN resolutions and declarations (OCHA, 2009: 4).

While many Palestinians and internationals consider Palestine an exception to aid norms, the problem of militarized aid is widespread. The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States says that 30% of Official Development Assistance is spent in fragile and conflict-affected contexts (IDPS, 2011:1). The European Parliament reported that in 2013 over-two thirds of the humanitarian assistance recorded by the OECD was directed to long-lasting crises (European Parliament, 2016: 3). This data raises significant questions about aid. Either international aid is having no effect on the perpetuation of conflict (and failing to stem the increase in humanitarian need), or, alternatively, international aid contributes to increasing conflict.

The report of the UN Secretary General on the World Humanitarian Summit takes a predictably diplomatic tone. However, a careful reading reveals acknowledgement that lack of political will is at the heart of aid ineffectiveness. It says: "...Addressing people's humanitarian needs requires more than increasing levels of assistance. It necessitates a far more decisive and deliberate effort to reduce needs, anchored in political will and leadership to prevent and end conflict." (UNGA, 2016: 1).

There is ample evidence in literature and practice of the relationship between aid and the perpetuation of conflict. Palestine offers one of many examples of how aid violates the principle of “Do No Harm” that is fundamental not only to the credibility of aid, but also the post-World War II international system.

Aid must not promote or enable aggression either actively or passively. In Palestine, aid for ostensibly “purely good” purposes such as food, health, education, and water and sanitation, is implemented inside a complex aid regime that serves the expansionist political interests of Israel and its allies among donor countries. A recent study by Aid Watch Palestine found that 78% of aid to the occupied Palestinian territory ends up in the Israeli economy (Hever, 2016), thus subsidizing between 18-30% of the costs of the occupation. Tartir and Wildeman also note that forced economic integration with Israel makes the Palestinian economy vulnerable. Israel has often withheld funds (with American support) as punishment for Palestinian policies it dislikes, including Palestinian pursuit of internationally enshrined rights through United Nations mechanisms (2012: 1.)

In one blatant example, international aid utilizing the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, to which the United Nations is a party, has been criticized as giving legitimacy to the illegal Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip (Murad, 2015/16) and assisting Israel by giving international cover for Israel’s promotion of its own economic and military interests.

## **Conclusion**

Aid to Palestinians is militarized on at least four levels:

- 1) Military aid and military trade with Israel has been normalized, despite proof that such assistance is being used to violate Palestinian rights under international law;
- 2) The Oslo two-state framework, within which Western aid is implemented, reflects the political and military interests of the United States, Europe and the World Bank-led neoliberal consensus, instead of democratically determined Palestinian interests;
- 3) Development and humanitarian aid to Palestinians, whether it is funneled through international or Palestinian Authority institutions, is structured to protect Israel’s colonial monopoly at the expense of Palestinian security and self-determination; and
- 4) Humanitarian aid through civil society, both international and Palestinian, is conditioned by anti-terrorism policies that exacerbate internal conflict, including armed conflict, in violation of principles of impartiality and neutrality.

Aid supporting Israel would not inherently violate Palestinian rights if aid actors (in their political and aid roles) held Israel accountable for compliance with international law. However, impunity granted Israel by international actors has had the effect of empowering its aggressive policies, resulting in what appears to be a shocking hypocrisy: donor governments and aid actors allowing Israel to deny Palestinian rights while providing aid to Palestinians in ways that ensures Israel’s continued dominance.

## **Reclaiming Aid for Human Rights: Policy Recommendations**

The militarization of aid to Palestinians invalidates the legitimacy of aid as a credible humanitarian or developmental intervention. For international aid to reclaim its potential as a contributor to the realization of human rights, it must be aligned with effective political accountability mechanisms that pressure all parties to comply with international law and respect human rights.

The global civil society boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign has had a demonstrable impact on Israel's ability to pursue unaccountable military development (Juma' and Mantovani, 2016). All concerned parties should study the potential of strategic sanctions as a way to pressure Israel to comply with international law. The most immediate and obvious action is to demand for a total military embargo on Israel and all parties until this has been achieved.

This securitized and militarized aid has a dramatic impact on the everyday life of Palestinian people and their quest for freedom and self-determination. Evidence suggests that this form of aid is anti-developmental, especially in situations of foreign military occupation. In the case of Palestine, it has limited rather than enhanced the capacity of Palestinian people to claim their right to self-determination. The long-term effect is increased instability and the likelihood of further militarism and violence.

Empowering Palestinians means equipping them with the tools to resist Israeli settler colonial rule and enhancing their capacities for solidarity, resilience and steadfastness. International aid actors must recognize and accept that development under military occupation and colonization means first and foremost a process of confrontation to realize rights, including the right to self-determination.

## References

- Arafeh, Nur. (November 2016). Economic Collapse in East Jerusalem: Strategies for Recovery. Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network. Available at <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/economic-collapse-east-jerusalem-strategies-recovery/>
- Diakonia International Humanitarian Law Resource Centre. (2013). Planning to Fail: The planning regime in Area C of the West Bank: An International Law Perspective. Available at <https://www.diakonia.se/globalassets/documents/ihl/ihl-in-opt/planning-to-fail.pdf>
- European Parliament. (May 2016). Funding gap: A challenge for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), Briefing. Available at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/582030/EPRS\\_BRI\(2016\)582030\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/582030/EPRS_BRI(2016)582030_EN.pdf)
- Farah, Randa. (December 2010). Uneasy but necessary: The UNRWA-Palestinian Relationship. Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network. Available at [https://al-shabaka.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/uneasy-necessary-unrwa-palestinian-relationship\\_0.pdf](https://al-shabaka.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/uneasy-necessary-unrwa-palestinian-relationship_0.pdf)
- Hever, Shir. (2016). "How Much Aid to Palestinians Reaches the Israeli Economy?" Aid Watch Palestine. Available at <http://www.aidwatch.ps/content/how-much-aid>
- Dörmann, Knut and Jose Serralvo. (2015). International Review of the Red Cross, 96 (895/896), 707–736. Generating respect for the law doi:10.1017/S181638311400037X
- International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS). (2011). The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. Available at [http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/media/filer\\_public/07/69/07692de0-3557-494e-918e-18df00e9ef73/the\\_new\\_deal.pdf](http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/media/filer_public/07/69/07692de0-3557-494e-918e-18df00e9ef73/the_new_deal.pdf)
- Juma', Jamal and Maren Mantovani. (August 24, 2016). "The 'S' in BDS: Lessons of the Elbit Systems Campaign," Al-Shabaka policy brief available at <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/s-bds-lessons-elbit-systems-campaign/>.
- Murad, Nora Lester. (2017 forthcoming). "For Palestinians, All Donor Commitments are 'Unfinished Business'" Aid Watch Palestine for the IBON Global Synthesis Report.
- Murad, Nora Lester. (2015/16). "Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism: Smoke and Mirrors?" Journal of Palestinian Refugee Studies, pp. 59-66.
- Murad, Nora Lester. (2014, October). "Donor Complicity in Israel's Violations of Palestinian Rights." Al-Shabaka Policy Brief. Available at <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/donor-complicity-in-israels-violations-of-palestinian-rights/>.
- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Policy and Studies Branch. (2009). Compilation of United Nations Resolutions on Humanitarian Assistance. Available at <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4a8e5b072.pdf>
- Ruebner, Josh. (2012). "U.S. Military Aid to Israel Policy Implications & Options," US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation. Available at [http://www.endtheoccupation.org/downloads/Policy\\_Paper\\_print.pdf](http://www.endtheoccupation.org/downloads/Policy_Paper_print.pdf).

Sharp, Jeremy M. (June 10, 2015). "U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel." Congressional Research Service, 7-5700, RL33222 at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33222.pdf>.

Tartir, Alaa. (2 December 2016). "How US security aid to PA sustains Israel's occupation," in Aljazeera at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/11/security-aid-pa-sustains-israel-occupation-161103120213593.html>

Tartir, Alaa, (2015). The Evolution and Reform of Palestinian Security Forces 1993-2013. Stability: International Journal of Security and Development. 4(1), part. 46. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.gi>

Tartir, Alaa. (2015). Securitised development and Palestinian authoritarianism under Fayyadism, Conflict, Security & Development, 15:5, 479-502, DOI: 10.1080/14678802.2015.1100016 To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2015.1100016>

Tartir, Alaa and Jeremy Wildeman. (October 9, 2012). Persistent Failure: World Bank Policies for the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Al-Shabaka Policy Brief. Available at <https://al-shabaka.org/summaries/persistent-failure-world-bank-policies-for-the-occupied-palestinian-territories/>

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. (July 1, 1968). Available at <http://disarmament.un.org/treaties/t/npt/text>

Turner, M. (2015) 'Peacebuilding as counterinsurgency in the occupied Palestinian territory', Review of International Studies, 41(1), pp. 73–98. doi: 10.1017/S0260210514000072.

United Nations General Assembly (23 August 2016). "Seventy-first session Item 70 (a) of the provisional agenda\* Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination," A/71/353. Available at <https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/sites/default/files/media/A-71-353%20-%20SG%20Report%20on%20the%20Outcome%20of%20the%20WHS.pdf>

UNRWA. "Palestine Refugees," <https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees> (accessed 20 December 2016).

Wearing, David. (July 2015). Arming Apartheid: UK Complicity in Violations Against the Palestinian People. London, War on Want. Available at <https://www.caat.org.uk/resources/countries/israel/2015-07-02.arming-apartheid.pdf>