

**EUROPEAN STATES AND ISRAEL:
POLITICAL RELATIONS BY THE END OF THE COLD WAR**

Mahmoud Zahra, PhD

Lecturer in Ancient World Civilizations

Al Quds University, Jerusalem

E-mail: msafadi44@gmail.com

***Abstract:** The goal of the paper is to focus on the political, rather than the military/security or economic relationship, between the European states and Israel. Descriptive method is used to identify various circumstances and factors that surrounded, influenced and impacted European-Israeli relations. The author argues, that European-Israeli political relations have strengthened and deepened despite occasional obstacles and difficulties. This relationship is characterized by long-term stability in the context of shared strategic objectives as well as more transient volatility around tactical and situational changes.*

***Key words:** Europe, Israel, Palestine, international relations*

***JEL Code:** F50*

INTRODUCTION

The history of European -Israeli relations does not begin with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, but appears already as early as the formation of the Zionist movement in the end of the nineteenth century. The founder of the Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl, succeeded in meeting and seeking the support of the Emperor of Germany, Wilhelm II, in 1898. This marked the beginning of the support and nurturance found by the Zionist movement in many European countries, especially Great Britain. The Zionist movement sought to transform the dream of a (national homeland for the Jews) in Palestine into a material reality after the British Foreign Minister, Lord Arthur Balfour (Balfour Declaration), issued his declaration in 1917 pledging to lend official support to do exactly that. This promise was embodied in fact in 1948.

Before delving further into this topic, it is necessary to emphasize an important fact that cannot be ignored: the foreign relations and policies of European nations, Eastern and Western, bear varying levels of historical, political, legal and moral responsibility for the fate of the Palestinian people. This is true from the emergence of what has become known as the (Palestinian cause), and, simultaneously, the establishment of the Zionist project and then its state, which is called "Israel".

In this article we investigate the relationship between Israel and Europe in both its Western and Eastern regions.

The goal is to focus on the political relationship, rather than the military/security or economic relationship, between the European states and Israel. The paper focuses specifically on political relations since the Nakba of 1948 until the collapse of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. In order to deal with the subject in a precise and methodical way, we have taken a historical approach to study the stages of the formation and development of the relationship between Europe and Israel since the 1948 war, the occupation of large parts of historic Palestine, and the Nakba of the Palestinian people. We also take an analytical descriptive approach to evaluate the various circumstances and factors that surrounded, influenced and interacted with European-Israeli relations.

In order to better understand these relationships, I will seek to answer several important questions:

1. What is the historical and political background of the Israeli position on Europe?
2. What have been the changes in the attitudes of European states (Eastern and Western) towards Israel?

3. What is the nature of the positions of both parties towards the other?

1. Historical and political background

The European-Israeli relationship should be distinguished from the history of racism and persecution suffered by Jews in Europe, although that legacy of hostility and hatred is often referred to in political debates and discussions about the modern Israeli state. Through a significant period of European history, Jewish minorities were severely persecuted, with Jews being forced to live in “ghettoes” or migrate from one country to another.

This history culminated in the confiscation of Jewish properties by the Nazi regime in Germany and its occupying forces and the Nazi holocaust, characterized by the mass deportation, incarceration and murder of Jews in Europe.

Upon the defeat of fascism in Europe, this history served as a compelling argument in favor of the Zionist movement and its desire for a “Jewish state” in Europe, as well as its analyses about the inevitability of antisemitism. Therefore, sympathy with the Zionist movement as a means of providing security to Jewish people through the establishment of the state of Israel became widely pronounced throughout European political discourse. Supporting the establishment of the Israeli state was advocated as a means of ameliorating European guilt and complicity in the crimes of the fascist powers.

The Zionist movement gained particularly strong support among Jews and others in those countries most severely affected by the Nazi occupation. It portrayed to the world that the best solution for the so-called “Jewish problem” was the establishment of a Zionist state in Palestine. The rights and even the existence of the indigenous population of Palestine were secondary or tertiary in these discussions, if they were even considered or acknowledged at all.

Zionism, the founding ideology that underlies the Israeli state, is a form of European nationalism, a generally right-wing trend particularly prominent in the first half of the twentieth century. This European nationalist (and pro-colonialist) framework therefore gave credence to the Zionist and later Israeli claim of responsibility for all Jewish people in the world.

Israel’s status as a settler colonial project in the Arab region meant that it lacked the secure borders and strategic depth necessary to assure its security and stability in the region. This it looked to further strengthen its ties outside its borders in order to do so through strategic alliances.

In fact, Israeli itself is a creation of Western capitalist ideology, a self-defined democratic state and an outpost of “European civilization.” In addition to Israel’s self-identified status as an extension of Europe, the Arab boycott of the state.

Due to its lack of natural resources, Israel was historically dependent on foreign aid and support, including that provided annually by the United States or by European states, most prominently Germany, labeled as a form of reparations for Nazi crimes against Jews. This aid played an important role in this period in maintaining the Israeli state and preserving its security.

2. The European Position in Flux

Europe’s official support for the Israeli state after World War II was in many places more profound among the European left rather than the right. It is well-known that in 1947, the Soviet Union and the Eastern European states voted for the partition of Palestine, with the exception of Yugoslavia, which abstained at that time. These countries were among the first to declare their recognition of the Israeli state after the declaration of its founding, and Czechoslovakia and Poland sold arms to Israel that were used to fight Arab armies – and Palestinian civilians – in the 1948 “Nakba”.

It was clear at the time that European official and popular sympathy with Israel was indisputable, characterized as a form of anti-fascism. The European left was more concerned with the danger posed by the European right than by Israel, and it also failed to thoroughly analyze the colonial and settler colonial nature of the Zionist project or prioritize the interests and concerns of indigenous

Palestinians. In France, for example, which was then a major power without significant involvement in the situation in Palestine, the French Socialist Party was more concerned with analyzing the approach of the French right to the State of Israel. This should not be separated from much of the French left's failure to take a clear position of strong opposition to French colonization in Algeria.

France provided nuclear technology and built the first nuclear reactor in Israel, in addition to other military assistance.

This came in addition to the aid provided by Germany as a form of reparations for Nazi atrocities and by other European states. Furthermore, Israel signed its first economic agreement with European countries in 1964, further developing the alliance in terms of trade and economic exchange.

Left unspoken in most European discussion on Palestine was the fact that the indigenous Palestinian people was not involved in, nor responsibility for, European crimes against Jews, particularly the Nazi holocaust. However, Palestinians bore the brunt of the so-called "European reparations" for these atrocities, punished for a crime they did not commit. Instead, the issue of indigenous Palestinians and their rights was treated, at most, as a purely humanitarian concern to be handled by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

Before the Six-Day War in June, 1967, (The war was between Israel and Arab countries: Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq) there was not yet a clear European foreign policy in either the East or the West, particularly around the question of Palestine. The postwar era had not yet fully stabilized, and the core task of the emerging European Cold War alliances was primarily to promote economic and military integration amongst their member states.

The Six-Day War in June, 1967 Reshuffles the Cards

The 1967 war and accompanying Israeli occupation of the remaining Palestinian territories marked an important turning point in European foreign policy. It also marked the actual beginning of an establishment of a new approach by the European socialist states toward the Palestinian cause. The most important aspect of this shift was the severing of diplomatic relations with Israel by all of these states with the exception of Romania.

In the Western European context, the June 1967 war highlighted the differences in approach among European powers. While Germany and the Netherlands supported Israel, France under De Gaulle blamed Israel for the war, marking a unique stand among the Western European states.

The war, for France, was important for several reasons: Israel claimed that it attacked because it faced an existential threat as a state in the region, and it also claimed that the war was in fact (a defensive war). De Gaulle was not convinced by this argument, the French government took a position prior to the war that it would lay responsibility with the party who fired the first shots. It noted that international law does not allow states to wage aggressive wars by claiming that other states actually want to wage a war against them. France emphasized Israeli responsibility for the war and occupation of the rest of the Palestinian territories, a distinguished position at the time. Speaking to the United Nations after the war, de Gaulle said: "DO you think the Palestinians will be silent? Certainly, there will be a rebellion against the occupation and they will demand statehood. And, in return, there will be those who are called terrorists".

Some researchers considered that the 1967 war was not only a turning point for the European-Israeli relationship and a decisive point in the Arab-Israeli conflict but also the reason for the Western European states to establish a common foreign policy. Prior to this, the member states of the European Economic Community adopted individual positions without any coordination, especially France (as mentioned), which found itself in an opposing position to that maintained by Germany. In addition, the Dutch government publicly praised the defeat of the Arab states and the victory of the Israeli army, even as France publicly declared its opposition.

In the early 1970s, the Western European countries expanded in their new position as the world's largest trade bloc, they determined the need to coordinate foreign policy among their members. Thus, a system of political cooperation was established through the European Commission, with Israel one of the main areas of concern (along with Eastern Europe).

In Eastern Europe, the Warsaw Pact declared the following positions in 1976, reflecting a growing consensus in the United Nations:

1. Affirming support for the struggle of the Arab states to reach a just political solution in the Middle East.

2. Affirming that this solution requires the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the Arab lands occupied in 1967 and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. These include the right to establish a state and to ensure the independent rights of all states involved in the conflict. In addition, this requires ending the state of war between the concerned Arab countries and Israel.

The 1980s : Between Retreat and Progress

The changing European position towards Israel began to develop after the 1967 war. This position was reinforced at the 1980 Venice conference, which defined the European position on the resolution of the Palestinian cause as follow:

a. Calling for the withdrawal of Israel from the territories occupied in 1967 and ending the Israeli occupation. (This plank did not address the details of the proposed withdrawal nor whether it was to include all of the occupied Arab lands.)

b. Respecting the sovereignty and independence of all states in the region and their desire to live in peace with secure borders, including the importance of maintaining the security of Israel.

c. Recognizing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination on their own land, and not considering the Palestinian issue as a humanitarian refugee problem only.

In the 1970s, the European Community's support for Palestinian rights was neither immediate nor guaranteed. The European position developed rapidly but in a generally positive direction, culminating in the 1980 Venice Declaration.

The European Community recognized that the "Palestinian problem" was not just a refugee issue, that the Palestinian people have a legitimate right to self-determination (statehood) and that the Palestinian issue is "central" to resolving the conflict in the region. It is clear that the European Community's foreign policy in the 1970s was not entirely reliant or tied to American priorities, and that this period was a Palestinian moment. Even "Time" magazine published a six -page article entitled "Palestinians: Key to Peace in the Middle East".

However, the ensuing decade (the 1980s) proved to be a difficult one for the Palestinians. The United States' hegemony put an end to independent directions in European foreign policy, giving Israel enough support to strike at Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981, invade Lebanon and force the PLO into exile in 1982. This period was also accompanied by a rising crisis in the socialist Eastern European countries.

The European Community welcomed new U.S. initiatives, which it described as providing an opportunity "to resolve the Palestinian issue peacefully." The actions of U.S. President Ronald Reagan in this period to secure European support essentially hammered the nail into the coffin of the independent foreign policy of the European Community, bringing it firmly back into the American orbit.

However, the first "Intifada", which broke out in 1987, sparked a new impetus toward addressing the Palestinian issue internationally.

The "Intifada" was highly influential on the views of European policymakers, lending strength to the PLO and giving it increased international credibility and recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The majority of European states, especially the Eastern European countries, had friendly relations with the PLO and at least some of its factions. They increasingly found it once again difficult to ignore the situation in the occupied territories once the Palestinian uprising once again brought the issue to the forefront.

At this point, the PLO was still not formally recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people by the European Community. At the time of Arafat's declaration on 15

November, the 19th Palestinian National Council in Algeria agreed to UN resolution 181 of 1947, thus recognizing the partition of Palestine. It also approved the inclusion of UN resolution 242, dealing with the question of Palestine as a primarily humanitarian issue, as part of the international law argument supporting its declaration of the establishment of a Palestinian state on Palestinian land with Jerusalem as its capital.

The European Community responded to the Declaration of Independence with a clear, balanced statement on 21 November 1988. The statement declared that “the Group attaches particular importance to the decisions of the Palestinian National Council in Algeria, which reflect the will of the Palestinian people to affirm their national identity, towards a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict.”

After the United States announced the opening of a meaningful dialogue with the PLO, the European Community took advantage of the occasion of the Madrid Summit to issue a lengthy declaration on 27 June 1989. The statement recalled its traditional position and called for “an urgent appeal to the Israeli authorities to put an end to repressive measures, the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 605, 607 and 608 and respect for the provisions of (The Geneva Conventions) as well as holding elections in the occupied Palestinian territories.

At the same time, radical changes were taking place within Europe itself. The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 paved the way for the reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990, marking the beginning of a new era. With the collapse of the global bipolar system with the fall of the Soviet Union and German reunification, the geopolitical landscape of the European continent was substantially changed.

3. The Israeli position on Europe

In his book (De Gaulle and Israel) Daniel Amson notes that Menachem Begin believed that France was at the center of the Israeli relationship with Europe. “We have nothing to adopt as an alternative to France, especially in Europe if we lose it, what will remain? Germany!!!! May God keep us from them” he is quoted as saying. This conversation was four and a half decades ago, but if Begin came back today to examine this situation, he may have a different take after the development of the Israeli-European relationship.

Israel has been able to build political relations at the highest level with European states across the board. Those countries which imposed a diplomatic boycott in past decades (particularly in Eastern Europe) are today the closest to Israel. But the question remains: What is the Israeli position on Europe until the collapse of the socialist bloc in the early 1990s?

First, After the end of World War II, the Israeli government and its supporters emphasized European guilt over Nazism and historic crimes against European Jews to bolster support for Zionism in Palestine. The Israeli state explicitly and implicitly relied on arguments related to reparations, guilt and collective responsibility to present a public argument for maximum political and financial support. This was true even if the emerging European-Israeli alliance at a state level in reality reflected a stronger confluence of capitalist or colonial interests, despite the emotionally charged public discourse supporting that alliance.

Second, Israel has never been enthusiastic about an independent role for Europe in a negotiations process to end the Arab-Israeli conflict separate from the leadership of the United States. As was the case in the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel, the main patron was always the United States. This was echoed in Madrid and later in Oslo and other negotiations between the PLO and Israel.

Third, Israeli state interests view Europe as a pivotal economic ally, but also tend to view Europe as a political ally that is unreliable and more distant than the U.S.

4. The European position on Israel

As noted in the prior historical review, neither Eastern nor Western European states established a unified position on Israel and Palestine until the period of time under discussion here. Therefore, we can summarize the most important aspects of this position, many of which have been referred to previously.

1. European public sentiment tended to support the establishment of the Israeli state as a form of atonement for Nazi atrocities against Jews in Europe. This sympathy may not have guided state policy, but it played an important role in bolstering public opinion to support the Zionist movement.

2. The 1967 war and the occupation of the remaining Palestinian territories was the occasion for a significant change in the position of the socialist bloc. Some key Western European powers, such as France, also took a critical position towards Israel during this time.

3. European powers noted the negative Israeli reaction to independent European political initiatives to resolve the Palestinian issue. Therefore, Western European states accepted a secondary or complementary role to the involvement of the United States.

4. The European position overall emphasized the importance of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories since 1967. If Israel had done so at the time, it would potentially have been possible to resolve the conflict.

CONCLUSION

The late Palestinian scholar Edward Said consistently linked Zionism and imperialism in his writings. This insight mirrored the recognition of some Zionists that Zionism developed under the "formal and informal sponsorship of European imperialism." Zionist leaders like Theodore Herzl and Chaim Weizmann, who attempted to convince European powers that European Jews could form a group of "white settlers" in the region to cooperate with and serve European imperial interests. The Zionist movement took the form of settler colonialism, much as was the case in Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia and Algeria.

Israeli literature frequently defines the European-Israeli relationship as a "love-hate" relationship, a "schizophrenic" approach or a bond that suffers from "cognitive dissonance," which is characterized by both growing warmth and developing conflict.

In the most severe form of this "love-hate relationship," one hand may simultaneously distance these states at a diplomatic-political level while the other hand intensifies close cooperation on a variety of economic, military and security fronts.

On several occasions, Israeli and European officials have raised the potential of Israel joining the European Union, including Italian President Silvio Berlusconi in 2010 and Lithuanian Prime Minister Andreas Covilius later on. Indeed, in a poll conducted by Ben-Gurion University in 2011, 81 percent of Israelis expressed support for Israel's entry into the European Union.

This confirms that, on the whole, European-Israeli political relations have strengthened and deepened despite occasional obstacles and difficulties. This relationship is characterized by long-term stability in the context of shared strategic objectives as well as more transient volatility around tactical and situational changes. At times, the possibility of rupture seems close, especially when it appears at a surface level that a substantial conflict is developing at a diplomatic level. However, time and time again, further strategic developments have put this possibility quickly to rest.

Over the years, the strategic alliance around economic interests has been central to understanding the relationship, even as it has become overlaid in later years with rhetoric about terror or extremism. "We are the first line of defense in a turbulent region that is constantly facing the risk of sliding into chaos, and a vital area of our energy security because of the fact that Israel is our first line of defense," said former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar in an article in *The Times*. "We are excessively reliant on oil from the Middle East. The region forms the front line in the war against extremism. If it falls, we will fall with it."

REFERENCES

In English

Golan, Arnon, "European Imperialism and the Development of Modern Palestine: Was Zionism a Form of Colonialism?" *Space and Polity*, vol. 5, no.2, 2001.

Gresh , Alain, Writer and journalist, 30 years editor in chief at” Le Monde diplomatique” Paris, 20/9/2018.

The Time, "Former Spanish PM: If Israel Goes Down We All Go Down", Jose 'Maria Aznar, 18/06/2010, London.

Pijpers , Alfred, paper "The EU and the Palestinian - Israeli conflict: The limits of the CFSP"11 September ,2007.

In Arabic

Barakat, Nizam, "The Israeli Position and the European Role in the Settlement", Al- Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, Beirut, 4 November, 2010.

Hutaite , Amine, Study Secretary, "European-Israeli Military and Security Relations and their Impact on Foreign Policy" Beirut, 2010.

Ismail, M, Mohamed Hisham ,Study Secretary "The European Union Position on the Palestinian Issue in the Period 1993 – 2009” The Arab Center for Research and Studies, Doha, November 2011.

Khoury ,Areej Sabbagh, and authors, "The Question of Palestine and the Future of the Palestinian National Project, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies , Beirut, March 2016

Palestinian Encyclopedia Website) <https://www.palestinapedia.net>(September 16, 2013.

In Hebrew

Cypel , Sylvain writer and journalist, 20 years was the Head of International Section at “Le Monde diplomatique”, Paris 19 / 9/2018

Landau, Noa "Curses and Blessings: The Tough Truth about Israel-EU Relations", Ha'aretz, 25 May 2018.

Massive Workshop: Relations between Israel and the European Union, Tel Aviv University, Dr. Maya Sion, Zidkiyahu, 2014.

Wikipedia, The EU - Israel Relations.

Shkid, Roni, "Behind the Kaffiyeh - The Conflict from the Palestinian Point of View," Yedioth Ahronoth, Hemed Books, Israel 2018, p. 72