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How Foreign Policy is Manifested through Diplomatic Discourse: An Analysis of US Ambassador Rhetoric at the UN Regarding Israeli Settlement Expansion

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How Foreign Policy is Manifested through Diplomatic Discourse:
An Analysis of US Ambassador Rhetoric at the UN Regarding Israeli Settlement Expansion

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Abstract

This thesis examines American ambassador discourse at the United Nations Security Council from 2012 to 2019 regarding the ongoing issue of Israeli settlement expansion in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. While Israel's settlement activity technically breaches international law as well as several UN resolutions, there is no binding aspect of the framework of international law that could compel Israel to cease its violations. This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that the United States often protects Israel from criticisms of its occupation regime in front of the international community. Previous research spanning several decades has revealed an evident bias in the US' foreign policy towards Israel. It is thus not the intention of this thesis to explain *why* the US adopts this policy, but rather *how* it is manifested in one particular way: through rhetoric in UN Security Council meetings. Although extensive scholarship has been dedicated to the US' foreign policy and involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there has not been much attention paid to the particular strategies behind American rhetoric and discourse when discussing the issue of the Occupation. In this study, I conducted a rhetorical analysis of eight Security Council meeting records between 2012 and 2019, paying particular attention to the speeches delivered by the respective American ambassadors and the manner in which they discuss the issue of Israeli settlement expansion. This project found a correlation between American ambassador rhetoric in the Security Council and the foreign policy of the presidential administrations under which they operated. While the rhetoric during the Obama era evidenced some tension in its attempt to demonstrate balance, that of the Trump era instead displayed un-nuanced support. This study contributes to the ongoing research dedicated to the US' position vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and displays just one way in which the US reveals its often tilted foreign policy to the rest of the world.

Introduction

“First, I believe it is important to be clear on serious matters. So allow me to be clear on the relationship between the State of Israel and the United States of America. In the past, the United States has always supported Israel, the United States supports Israel today, and the United States will always support Israel going forward.”

– US Ambassador Kelly Craft to the UN Security Council, September 20, 2019.

Foreign policy describes an individual state’s set of political objectives vis-à-vis other states and international actors. Such objectives may include securing economic and trade relationships, foreign direct investment, political endorsements or military alliances during a time of conflict. Foreign policy is crafted by governments and displayed to varied audiences, such as other world leaders, political elites, lobbies, citizens from the involved countries and the domestic population. Not only does foreign policy impact states and state governments, but also the respective citizenry at large, as it can influence sectors like trade, business, food, education and general social welfare and security. Thus, foreign policy is able to dictate state behavior and consequently impact populations all over the world. For this reason, states meticulously calculate their foreign policy demonstrations. How is this done? One way is through planned speeches and public announcements, like President Clinton’s 1998 speech at Kigali Airport in Rwanda, where he expressed his regret to survivors of the Rwandan genocide for not publicly acknowledging or responding to the crisis at its onset four years prior (Clinton Digital Library 2020). Another demonstration of foreign policy may be through monetary or military aid, a recent example being President Biden’s numerous requests for Congress to send assistance to Ukraine, which now amounts to around \$20 billion since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (Congressional Research Service 2022). Other manifestations of foreign policy may involve organized diplomatic visits or government-hosted dinners, such as French President Emmanuel Macron’s well-publicized 2022 visit to the US that included both a private dinner with President Biden and the First Lady, as well as another lavish state dinner on a separate day (Diamond 2022). These few examples represent just some of the many ways that foreign policy objectives are displayed and performed by a government. Another way through which foreign policy can be demonstrated is by engaging in diplomatic discussions, particularly at the international forum of the United Nations.

One way that the US evokes its foreign policy is through its envoys sent to the UN to discuss particular international issues and diplomatic affairs. Here, foreign policy is expressed directly to the audience of the UN and its respective national ambassadors. In this forum, the ambassadors remain attentive to their respective national interests while operating within the UN system and its diplomatic customs, like making appeals to cooperation, security or international law. Such ‘national interests’ reflect state foreign policy and can be identified in US envoy speeches delivered to the UN that are transcribed and recorded, though often not heard by the general public. In this manner, the ambassadors craft their rhetoric within the UN to cater to both the audience present at these meetings as well as the audiences from a distance that remain vigilant to what they are saying.

One sector of the UN through which American ambassadors provide speeches and commentary is the Security Council, the 15-member body that is primarily responsible for protecting international peace and security (United Nations 2022c). The Security Council conducts monthly meetings regarding a wide range of topics dealing with global crises. Some topics that have been addressed during these meetings include terrorist threats, issues relating to sanctions, non-proliferation and weapons of mass destruction, as well as specific topics relating to security threats in nations throughout the world. This study focuses specifically on Security Council discussions about Israel’s settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It focuses on the Security Council due to it being the only UN body that can authorize sanctions, the use of force and other forms of punishment against actors that pose a threat to international peace (United Nations 2022c). Further, this study concentrates on Israel’s Occupation because it serves as a threat to Palestinian security and has been occurring for over fifty years despite its illegality under international law. This fact in itself renders the Occupation to be a distinct global issue, as it is one that has endured despite years of developments in human rights and international justice.

This study investigates US speeches at the Security Council regarding just one specific aspect of Israel’s Occupation: its ongoing settlement expansion and land theft from Palestinians. Although Israel’s settlement activity violates international law—as acknowledged by the United Nations—it continues today due in part to the support Israel receives from its influential ally of the US. It has been argued by many that Israel is able to avoid punishment for its breaches of international law due to the protection and support it receives from its American allies at the

international forum (Lütgenau 2007; Milton-Edwards 2009). The US' position as a leading member and influential voice at the UN signifies the importance of its discourse there, and particularly its discourse related to Israel's Occupation and settlement activity. The issue of Jewish settlement expansion warrants its own research case due the fact that it has been denounced by many nations around the world as well as the UN itself, and that it seemingly conflicts with core American values like the maintenance of civil rights and democracy. Thus, there is an apparent paradox between the continuation of Israeli settlement expansion and its illegality – a puzzle that reflects both the power and limitations of 21st century diplomacy.

This study analyzes the rhetoric of US Ambassadors in UN Security Council meetings whose agendas addressed Jewish settlement expansion. Using close-reading, the study examined eight transcripts, one from each year during the second Obama administration and the Trump administration (2012-2019). Each selected meeting record reflects Israeli settlement activity as a meeting topic, and includes statements from American ambassadors along with several other national ambassadors. This particular source of UN transcripts can reveal the ways in which the executive branch's foreign policy may be reflected in other bodies and through other voices. Thus, this theme of diplomatic discourse is worthwhile to examine because it is connected not only to domestic political trends but also to surrounding political, economic and social contexts of the international system. Further, this project's research complements preceding scholarship exploring US support of Israel by filling in detail about diplomatic discourse within UN meetings. For instance, scholarship spanning the past two decades has tended to address both the US' and the UN's influence on the occupation, but does not focus specifically on the influence of the US' diplomatic rhetoric (Sarsar 2004; Milton-Edwards 2009; Qaddoura et. al. 2019; Imseis 2020).

This study's corpus was selected from the years during the second Obama and the Trump administrations in order to examine the rhetoric and observe the tactics used to deliver certain connotations. The findings confirmed expectations about the two administrations. While obvious support for Israel was found common between the two, a key difference was reflected in Obama's attempt to demonstrate commitment to international justice and Trump's lack thereof. Essentially, these observations reveal how diplomatic rhetoric is influenced by foreign policy objectives. So, how is foreign policy manifested through diplomatic rhetoric in an international forum? What does it reveal about an administration's own diplomatic values? Does rhetoric

delivered at the UN always reflect official policy? Does it always express commitments to international law, or does it address other priorities? Is diplomatic rhetoric crafted to be relayed to a specific audience? The observations presented in this study seek to illuminate these inquiries and provide some answers to this phenomenon of diplomatic discourse.

Methodology

This study involves political rhetorical analysis to discover how rhetoric is influenced and crafted to advance certain interests. In general, foreign policy rhetoric is aimed at justifying or communicating content about foreign policy, such as its goals or outcomes, to persuade a wide variety of audiences (Lacatus and Meibauer 2021). In this study, I employed rhetorical analysis on a series of diplomatic texts in order to analyze how rhetoric is crafted to demonstrate a particular position. This project used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data analysis, which involved the use of close reading strategies as well as a self-made digital database to consolidate and compare the occurrence of rhetorical trends. The primary sources used for this project were verbatim transcripts of United Nations Security Council meeting records drawn from the UN Digital Library. While most Security Council members spoke during each meeting, this study focused primarily on the rhetoric of the respective United States ambassadors, with occasional glances at other national ambassadors for contrast. The Security Council was chosen for analysis because it is the only UN institutional body that has any authoritative power over its member states.

As this project's focus was on the issue of Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories, it only looked at meeting records titled: "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question." The time frame of the meeting records fell in the years between 2012 and 2019, resulting in a total of eight records – one from each year. The eight records were sampled based on the following criteria: a) They contain at least one reference to Israeli settlement expansion in the introductory text and b) The United States ambassador speaks during the meeting. This particular time frame was chosen for analysis because it spans evenly across two presidential administrations, that of Barack Obama and that of Donald Trump. Two administrations were chosen in order to see how widely they can diverge, partly based on their representation of opposing political parties (Democrat and Republican, respectively) and partly

on each of their distinct positions on international diplomacy. While President Obama tried to demonstrate democratic ideals of international cooperation and justice, President Trump “advertised against core liberal values assumed to form the foundation of US foreign policy” (Lacatus and Meibauer 2021). Essentially, these two opposing stances on traditional diplomacy provided for this project to examine variations of the diplomatic rhetoric during the two administrations.

To examine the rhetoric, I conducted close reading of the eight sampled meeting records and noted my observations in an informal database table. Prior to my analysis, I began the data table by noting some trends or rhetorical tactics that I expected to observe in the transcripts, such as instances of deflection or references to Palestinian culpability. During my analysis, I adjusted categories in my database. Supplementing the table, I gathered a list of key words and phrases that were used by the US ambassadors to describe Israeli settlement expansion. After finalizing my data table, I examined the findings in relation to major political events related to the Israeli Occupation, or to US political developments, happening around the same time.

The approach I took is modeled on methods used in preceding research on political rhetoric (Fall, Scherzinger, D’Acquisto). One study of Security Council meeting records by Juliet Fall analyzes how particular figures of speech, literary tools and rhetorical devices—*anaphora*, *hyperbole*, *metaphor* and *synecdoche*—are used within authoritative discourses by delegates’ speech. For example, Fall’s rhetorical method revealed how a Russian ambassador used devices such as *metonymy* and *synecdoche* for comic effect in order to mock and discredit his Ukrainian counterpart’s claim to territory. Another study by Johannes Scherzinger focused on a range of specific words in 1995-2017 Security Council speeches, such as *genocide*, *humanitarian crisis*, *Responsibility to Protect*, *regional security*, *democracy*, *Human Rights* and *terror/terrorism*. Upon merging the speeches with Security Council Resolutions from the same time span, he found that certain phrases encouraged diplomatic action while others did the opposite and instead hurt the speaker’s intentions behind their rhetoric. Examining specific tactics, such as *passive voice*, has traced the effects on diplomatic decision-making, as Germana D’Acquisto did in her 2017 study on the diplomatic discourse of UN resolutions concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These three studies therefore serve as models for this study’s approach to exploring the implications of political rhetoric.

Literature Review

The Function of Rhetoric in Diplomacy

A number of scholars from just the past five years have examined the impact of diplomatic discourse on key global issues (D'Acquisto 2017; Fall 2020; Scherzinger 2022). From their respective analyses, each scholar found a direct correlation between the speaker's rhetoric and underlying political agenda. Juliet Fall's 2020 article focuses on the impact of diplomatic rhetoric on claims for territorial entitlement and found that discourse within institutional bodies does in fact wield influence on global politics, diplomatic power and claims to territory. In a similar fashion, Johannes Scherzinger's 2022 study found that a speaker's choice of words as well as the omission of certain words can both influence and impede political action. This phenomenon was also explored in 2017 by German D'Acquisto, who found that verbose and ambiguous rhetoric used in the UN Security Council often yields ineffective and insignificant political action. Each of these studies perform their own version of textual analysis, yet all of them reach a similar conclusion: diplomatic rhetoric is purposefully and strategically chosen in order to either reach a political outcome or to prevent a particular outcome from ensuing.

Fall's findings derive from her rhetorical analysis of Eastern European and American delegates in the United Nations Security Council in discussing Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian region. Upon doing close reading of Security Council meeting records, Fall finds that the different rhetorical tools used correlate to the respective intentions of the speakers. Her study demonstrates how carefully orchestrated rhetoric can function as a powerful political tool. This conclusion is reflected in the work of Scherzinger, whose text analysis found that in addition to rhetoric being able to influence a political objective, it can also have the opposite effect and disrupt the speaker's intentions. Scherzinger builds on the theory of *rhetorical entrapment*—where rhetoric is structured to advance an actor's interests—to create his own theory of *rhetorical hollowing*; the actor's use of rhetoric decreases their chances of realizing their desired outcome due to the erosion of their specific rhetoric's impact over time. In other words, rhetorical hollowing occurs when the use of a word, phrase or term fails to compel other actors to pursue the speaker's interest. He found that when an envoy used the term *Human Rights*, there was an increased chance of the authorization of force whereas for the term

Terrorism, there was a lower chance for diplomatic intervention. Scherzinger therefore argues that these results point to the presence of both entrapment and hollowing in diplomatic rhetoric, and that the use of some terms may be counterproductive in asserting an actor's political agenda.

An earlier text analysis conducted by D'Acquisto found that the use of weak and generic rhetoric to describe the Arab-Israeli conflict often leads to ineffective diplomatic undertakings. Her study investigated the implications of diplomatic discourse in her 2017 journal article "A Linguistic Analysis of Diplomatic Discourse: UN Resolutions on the Question of Palestine." D'Acquisto explores the discourse of UN Resolutions concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict from 1947 to present day. Even while emphasizing linguistic over political aspects, the study demonstrates how words can convey certain connotations. D'Acquisto observes the prominence of the passive voice and strategies of modality by UN speakers to *propose* rather than *encourage* action. She contends that such linguistic strategies are more symbolic than influential in enforcing or inciting diplomatic action. Finally, she advocates that in order to limit such ambiguity and enact meaningful change within the institution of the United Nations, the diplomatic discourse must be more concise and forward.

International Law and Israel's Occupation of Palestine

Several scholars have pondered the inconsistency between Israel's violations of international law and the state's apparent immunity from legal consequences (Imseis 2020; Lütgenau 2007). One example comes from Ardi Imseis' 2020 article, "Negotiating the Illegal: On the United Nations and the Illegal Occupation of Palestine, 1967-2020." Imseis articulates the reasons why international law fails to fulfill its objective when it comes to the Israel-Palestine conflict, arguing that the UN has focused on the legality of Israeli's violations of *humanitarian law* without addressing the *legality* of its occupation regime as a whole. From this position, Imseis contends that there is a "fundamental chasm" present within the United Nations reflected in its failure to consistently and clearly take a position on the legality of Israel's occupation (Imseis 2020, 1057). She highlights the paradox of the UN's commitment to international law that she explains is at odds with its treatment of Israel. Imseis attributes this contradiction to a lack of definitive action and consistency in the Organization's treatment of Israel's occupation. Proposing the "international rule by law framework," she suggests that the promise of justice through international law is repeatedly proffered to global subaltern classes

(like indigenous Palestinians) “under a cloak of political legitimacy furnished by the international community,” yet is never fully made manifest (1056). Imseis concludes that the UN’s consideration of Palestinian legal rights remains only nominal, as the Organization has depended only on the method of negotiation to bring the occupation to an end rather than definitively challenging its legality.

Stefan Lütgenau’s anthology *Human Rights and a Middle East Peace Process* centers around the complex nature of the conflict and the necessity to seek something other than a ‘political solution’ to it. This book presents the proceedings of a 2005 conference between several contributors who illuminate the importance of human rights in establishing Israeli-Palestinian peace. The overall work claims that the conflict will continue to produce violent repercussions unless human rights and humanitarian law are made central to the peace process. The various contributors claim that a prominent obstacle to resolving the conflict is the resistance of negotiators to include human rights standards in negotiating frameworks. They contend that Israel’s ongoing occupation is an “intermediate stage” between war and peace—not an end in itself— and therefore must strongly adhere to the framework of international law in order to ensure a peaceful end. The authors dedicate much of the book to explaining the standards of international law in order to argue that an appeal to law will overcome the power disparity between the two sides of the conflict, and will allow for more effective negotiations.

The anthology also points to the US’ role in the conflict and the continued exploitation of international law by the Israeli government. One particular contributor, Raji Sourani, identifies one limitation present in the framework of international law: its inability to impose legal consequences on violator states. In addition to this, he remarks on the influence of international actors in the conflict and their ability to lighten the power of international law. Sourani highlights the US as Israel’s primary supporter, which often allows the Israeli government to avoid criticism of its human rights abuses “unquestioned, unchallenged, and consequently unpunished.” He leads to further discussion on the US’ role in the matter, and how it bears a huge responsibility in permitting Israel to continue its violations of international law. Sourani asserts that without American support – such as their sizable aid budget – Israel would have difficulty justifying its actions to the international arena.

The United States at the United Nations

Many studies dating from the early 2000s have analyzed the presence of the US within the UN in relation to the Israeli Occupation. Several of these scholars relay the consensus that the US shapes its foreign policy at the United Nations to serve the strategic interests of Israel, which in turn serves America's own strategic interests as well (Sarsar 2004; Milton-Edwards 2009; Moten 2018). Saliba Sarsar's article "The Question of Palestine and United States Behavior at the United Nations" examines US voting patterns with regard to Israel's occupation. Sarsar finds an "overwhelming voting coincidence" between the US and Israel in the General Assembly, where Israel votes in line with the US in exchange for diplomatic and political support on other issues. In order to highlight the mutual diplomatic assistance that the two countries offer each other, Sarsar also reflects on the "liberal use" of the US' Security Council veto to support Israel.

Sarsar's analysis is echoed by other scholars. For instance, Beverly Milton-Edwards' book, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A People's War* argues that rather than use its diplomatic leverage and power to push for Israel to a negotiated solution for peace, the US instead shields Israel from criticisms at the United Nations. She quotes the claim that the US acts as "Israel's attorney," highlighting the US' often unqualified support of Israel at the international level (Milton-Edwards 2009, 167). Abdul Rashid Moten's article written almost a decade later concurs with this idea. Echoing the metaphor that the US behaves as "Israel's lawyer" at the UN, Moten demonstrates how the US consistently prevents the Security Council from adopting resolutions that condemn Israeli settlement expansion (Moten 2018, 18). Moten acknowledges the fact that it is contradictory for Americans to condemn Israel for its settlement activity in the occupied territories, since it is essentially the US government who pays for establishing and expanding them. He illuminates how the US' continuous aid to Israel protects the Israeli government from criticism against their illegal conduct. Moten thus highlights how the US' partiality in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is reflected in its tremendous aid budget that funds Israel's illegal settlement activity in the occupied territories. This idea is also reflected in Milton-Edwards' work, which asserts that "American money has bought Israeli might over the occupied Palestinian people." Thus, Sarsar, Milton-Edwards and Moten each articulate how US support for Israel is made manifest in the realm of the international forum at the UN.

Background

Emergence of Israel

Israel, the United States and the United Nations have been interconnected since the founding of the Jewish state. The establishment of the State of Israel simultaneously rose alongside that of the United Nations. This time also marked the United States' rise to becoming a major global power and leader of the international system. Before the formal establishment of Israel, there was the spread of Zionism throughout Europe, which consequently influenced the greater migration of Jews to Palestine. Zionism is defined as an international movement originally for the establishment of a Jewish national or religious community in Palestine and later for the support of modern Israel ("Zionism Definition & Meaning" 2022). The origins of this movement date back to the late nineteenth century following a pattern of persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe. Zionism as a political movement later developed with the establishment of the World Zionist Organization in 1897.

Although many prominent European Jews did not support the movement initially, it was given more credibility upon Great Britain signing the Balfour Declaration in 1917 ("Zionism" 1999). The Balfour Declaration was a letter written by the Foreign Secretary to a Jewish British Lord that supported "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people," promising that Great Britain would use its "best endeavors" to realize this goal for the Jews (Terry 2016). At the same time that the Balfour Declaration was issued, over 80 percent of the population in Palestine was predominantly Arab, with a mix of Muslims and Christians (Terry 2016). Palestine was occupied by British forces near the end of 1917 and was placed under British military government administration (Mattar 2004, 1761). The Arabs in Palestine strongly opposed the Balfour Declaration, but it nevertheless became a prominent factor in expanding the Zionist enterprise.

Even before its official establishment, the United Nations played a role in the development of Israel's statehood. Forerunner of the United Nations, the Council of the League of Nations, approved Britain's mandate for Palestine in 1922, effectively replacing its military administration with a civilian administration ("Palestine" 2022). Included in this mandate was a preamble that involved the Balfour Declaration, thus giving it even more credibility. After the mandate allowed for the continuation of Jewish migration to Palestine, such Zionist efforts

gained even more momentum following the Second World War. During this time in Europe, Germany's Chancellor Adolf Hitler was inciting a genocide against the Jewish population, the Holocaust. The shocking scale of this persecution led to heightened pro-Zionist sentiments from world leaders – particularly from the United States – who wanted to express their sympathy for the Jewish population (“Zionism” 2003).

The United Nations—which included the United States as one of its leading founding members—was involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict from its onset. The United Nations was founded in 1945 in order to “maintain international peace and to foster international cooperation” following the aftermath of a tumultuous global war (“United Nations [UN]” 2003). In the pursuit of such international cooperation, the newly-established United Nations sought to address the emerging tensions between Israelis and Arabs in Palestine. In 1947, the organization passed an official resolution that established the partitioning of the region into an Arab and Jewish state (“Palestine” 2022). The Partition Plan was received well by Zionists, who now had an official recognition for a Jewish State. On the other hand, it was opposed by Arabs, who understood that the so-called Jewish State would give the Jewish minority control over the Arab majority (“Palestine” 2022).

Israeli Independence and Occupation of Palestine

Both the United Nations and the United States government showed their support for Israel upon its declaration of independence from British oversight. On May 14, 1948, the British government officially terminated the mandate in Palestine. Immediately thereafter, the State of Israel declared its independence (Mattar 2004, 1767). Its independence was recognized by several world leaders, with the United States being the first, just eleven minutes after its creation (Harrison 2022). The United Nations also displayed their recognition of the State of Israel by admitting it as a member state in May 1949 (United Nations General Assembly 1949). Despite the international support that it received, Israel's independence was seen as an imposition by the Arab population in Palestine and thus resulted in violent tensions between Israeli forces and a coalition of Arab states. The Nakba resulted in the displacement of more than 700,000 Palestinians – approximately half the Arab population of Palestine (Mattar 2004, 1767). This mass-exodus, called in Arabic *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe), culminated into a massive refugee crisis, with most of the population migrating to refugee camps in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip,

Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt (Mattar 2013). In the midst of this refugee crisis, the United Nations established their Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in 1949 to provide aid and relief to Palestinian refugees.¹ At the time of its inception, it offered assistance to 750,000 refugees (Fischbach 2017).

As the United Nations was established around the same time as the State of Israel, it demonstrated concerns for Israel's statehood from its own beginnings. Such concerns were made manifest in several resolutions that involved the state of Israel and its Occupation of Palestine. One prominent event to which the United Nations responded definitively was a major conflict in 1967. In the wake of regional tensions in the Middle East, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War was fought between Israeli forces against a coalition of Arab states including Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Following the end of the war and Israel's victory, Israel seized several territories throughout the Middle East and Palestine: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights (Kumaraswamy 2015, 266). Their success was due in part to the support received by their American allies, as the United States was the primary arms supplier to Israel during this war (Hastedt 2016). Israel's victory thus resulted in another wave of Palestinian refugees. In an Israeli-conducted census from the same year, about 1,000,000 Palestinians were there at the time of Israel's land seizure, with most of them being in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (B'Tselem and Forensic Architecture 2018). Israel also annexed about 7,000 hectares of land in the West Bank to the boundaries of Jerusalem, which was designed to establish a predominantly Jewish population in Jerusalem – and was also a breach of international law (B'Tselem and Forensic Architecture 2018).

The Role of the United Nations

In order to understand the influence of the United Nations on Israel, it is necessary to review the structural organization of the institution. In 1945, the United Nations was founded by 51 member states and today contains 193 member states. The organization's main bodies include the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, the Secretariat, and the Security Council (United Nations 2022a). Out of these institutional bodies, the Security Council is the only one with unique enforcement

¹ UNRWA remains in function today, serving more than five million refugees of Palestinian and Arab descent (Fischbach 2017).

abilities such as imposing sanctions on nations or authorizing the use of force in order to satisfy its primary objective: to maintain international peace and security (United Nations 2022c). Hence, it has the power to impose sanctions on nations who breach international law. The Council is made up of fifteen members, which includes five permanent member states and ten non-permanent members who are elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly, which is composed of all 193 members (United Nations 2022b). The five permanent members of the Security Council – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – always remain on the Council and possess the exclusive power to veto any resolution put forth by the Council. Although the United Nations itself cannot force any individual nation into action, its Security Council is the closest that it comes to influencing or encouraging worldwide diplomatic action in order to sustain international peace.

The United Nations responded to Israel’s vast acquisition of territories following the 1967 war. On November 22, 1967, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 242 condemning Israel’s use of force and calling for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories (United Nations Security Council 1967). During the drafting process, the Security Council debated including the word “the” before “occupied territories.” The original draft read,

“withdrawal of Israel armed forces from *the* territories occupied in the recent conflict.”
After debate, that was edited to:

“withdrawal of Israel armed forces from *territories* occupied in the recent conflict”
(United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 2017).

Omitting the definite article in this claim, opened up interpretations of whether it required Israel to withdraw from *all* or merely *some* territories.

Even with this diluted version of the resolution, Israel ignored the United Nations’ request for withdrawal. Later in 1975, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 3414, which repeated its condemnation of Israel’s occupation and reaffirmed that its acquisition of territory is “inadmissible” and must be reversed (“UN General Assembly Resolution 3414 [December 1975]” 1975). This resolution was adopted by a vote of 84 in favor to 17 against, with 27 abstentions. The United States voted *no* on Resolution 3414 (United Nations General 1976). Around this time – just a decade after its 1967 occupation – Israel, after annexing land

through war, had established nearly thirty settlements in the West Bank (B'Tselem and Forensic Architecture 2018).²

The United Nations' Responses to Israel's Occupation

In addition to Resolutions 242 and 3414, the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly have passed many resolutions with regard to Israel, Palestine and the ongoing occupation. Firstly, while the institution recognized Israel as a member state in 1949, it acknowledged Palestinian's international presence in only 2012 by admitting it not as a member, like Israel, but as a *non-member observer state* (Garten 2012). An additional example is Resolution 3379, which was passed by the General Assembly in 1975 and included a principle that determined Zionism to be "a form of racism and racial discrimination" (United Nations General Assembly 1975). This resolution was rejected in the vote by the United States, and received critical backlash from Zionists within the UN.

The trajectory of Resolution 3379 was heavily influenced by the United States, whose government received immense domestic pressure to respond to the UN's critique of Zionism. After Resolution 3379 was passed, pro-Israel lobby groups, which were led by the Christian-Right, put pressure on Washington officials to ask Congress for support in repealing the resolution (Haija 2006, 79). This phenomenon will be elaborated on below, as it remains a prevalent occurrence in American politics today. The aggressive campaign championed by the American Christian Zionists brought about successful results: on January 23 2990, a group of Congressional representatives proposed their own resolution that called on the UN to repeal Resolution 3379. Upon receiving these criticisms, the United Nations nullified Resolution 3379 in 1991 with Resolution 4686, which revoked the official position on Zionism being a form of racism (United Nations General Assembly 1991). This outcome thus reflects the US' disproportionate influence on UN decisions regarding Israel's Occupation.

Another attempt at applying international law to Israel involved the Fourth Geneva Convention. This came in the form of the Security Council Resolution 2334. This 2016 resolution reaffirmed that Israel's occupied territories from 1967 have no legal validity and

² Since 1967, Israel has appropriated more than 100,000 hectares of land from Palestinians, has demolished more than 50,000 homes and structures in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and has allowed for the migration of over 600,000 Jewish Israeli settlers on occupied Palestinian land (Shehadeh, 2022).

constitute a violation of international law (United Nations 2016). The resolution specifically references the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which was ratified by the UN to establish principles regarding the protection of civilians in time of war. Article 4 of the Convention affirms its protection of persons who find themselves “in the hands of a Party to the conflict or Occupying Power of which they are not nationals” (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949). The Council therefore noted in Resolution 2334 Israel’s failure to address their obligations as the occupying power, and thus acted in breach of the Convention. Geneva IV also prohibits the transferring of civilian populations into occupied territories, which represents another violation on the part of Israel. Nonetheless, Israel denies the applicability of the Geneva Conventions and contends that it possesses historic claim to the occupied territories (Mikaberidze 2013, 321).

The United States refrained from positioning themselves on the issue of Israel’s illegal settlement expansion when it voted *no* on Resolution 2334, which will be discussed later in this study. The resolution was nonetheless passed despite the United States’ abstention, as it received a vote of fourteen. Despite the Council calling for the cessation of Israel’s settlement activity, Israel defied the resolution on several occasions since the decision. The Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner noted that in each of the 20 reports delivered to the Security Council since the adoption of Resolution 2334, it was found that Israel had not complied with any demands of the Council (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2021). Hence, even when the UN attempts to apply international law to Israel’s ongoing Occupation, Israel—enabled by US support—is able to defy certain decisions and evade punitive measures.

United States Foreign Policy Toward Israel

Since Israel declared independence in 1948, the United States has almost always offered it diplomatic, political, military and financial support. It appears paradoxical that the US would seek to orient its foreign policy toward a small nation like Israel, being that the US is a leading global power with one of the strongest militaries and economies in the world. It has been contended that the US possesses the “luxury” of conducting its foreign policy from a “position of strength and with a wide degree of independence” (Bose 2017). So why does the US have such a strong bond with Israel? It is evident that the US has displayed its loyalty to Israel across several

decades—especially through its outstanding aid budget and its continuous shielding of Israel at the UN. The explanations for why the US favors Israel are complex and contentious.

One factor that may influence US foreign policy to Israel derives from Israel's strategic importance as an ally in an often unstable region as the Middle East. Some American interests served by the close alliance with Israel are to secure oil access in the Middle East, maintain US military bases there, defend "friendly" regimes and resist extremist movements and terrorist threats (Al Sarhan 2017, 469). In the earlier era after Israel's independence, the US was primarily concerned with access to oil in the Middle East. Although America's dependence on Middle Eastern petroleum dwindled over the decades, the US still seeks to protect a vital energy flow in the region from competitors like Iran and Iraq, thus making it necessary to keep Israel as a close ally (Mueller et al. 2017). Despite the US-Israel relationship not being airtight in the 1950s and early 1960s, American cooperation with Israel became increasingly pronounced as the Soviet Union grew more committed to other Arab States in the region (Hastedt 2016). The US' long-time conflict with the Soviet Union during the Cold War made it vital for the US to gather allies that shared common enemies and interests. This phenomenon has grown, especially since Iran can now stand on its own without Soviet/Russian support. Today, the US and Israel are both threatened by the increased dominance of Iran over the Middle Eastern region, its looming nuclear program and its support of Islamist militants (Robinson 2022b).

Furthermore, the US views Israel as a strategic ally in the Middle East due to its intelligence, technological and military capabilities. The US has often benefited from Israel's cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts, tactical intelligence and expertise in urban warfare and cyber defense (Blackwell, Robert and Slocombe, Walter 2012). Both the US and Israel share a common interest in defeating regional terrorist groups, such as Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and al-Qaeda affiliates, thus making it vital for the US to share in Israel's efforts. Israel's extensive military and surveillance technology industry provides significant benefit to the US not just in terms of its counter-terrorism capabilities, but also in its basic function of intelligence collection. Thus, from these various explanations of the US' support for Israel, it can be deduced that part of the US' political tilt is rooted in its interest to remain powerful in the Middle East, as well as to have a dominant hand against threatening actors in the region.

Another explanation for the US' favored relationship with Israel has to do with the influence of the powerful Zionist lobby in the United States, which is described as the "coalition

of individuals and organizations who influence US foreign policy to be pro-Israel” (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006, 5). The Zionist lobbying groups play a vital role in American fundraising, political elections and overall decision making in public affairs (Sarsar 2004, 461). According to proponents of this view, Zionist influences have allowed the US to become the “de facto enabler of Israeli expansion in the Occupied Territories” (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006, 20). One notable Zionist lobbying group is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which is considered to be one of the most influential in tilting US foreign policy as pro-Israel. According to critics of AIPAC, common strategies of the Zionist lobby to prevent the spread of criticism against Israel include wielding influence in Washington to pressure both Congress and the executive branch, and ensuring that American public discourse always portrays Israel in a positive light (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006, 6).

The Zionist lobbying groups of America are not at all limited to Jews; Rather, they involve an overwhelmingly large constituency made up of Christian Evangelicals, or the Christian Right. This group of Christian Zionists make up the largest voting bloc in the Republican party, as well as the largest social movement in the US (Haija 2006, 77). In fact, a University of Maryland poll revealed that evangelical sentiments regarding Israel account for the vast majority of the Republican party’s support for Israel (Telhami 2021). Their support for Israel and Zionism derives from dispensationalist theology, which contends that we are living in the last dispensation of the Book of Revelation, or in the “end-times” (Haija 2006, 80). This theological movement asserts that the return of the Messiah is contingent upon particular events, including the existence of the Jewish State of Israel. Thus, the Christian Right is driven by this theology in their pursuit of Zionism and protection of Israeli interests. Some contemporary scholars argue that the Christian Right have produced counterproductive effects for Israel, as their aggressive Zionist policies exacerbate the violence and tensions in the Occupied Territories rather than encourage peace for Israelis and Palestinians alike (Haija 2006, 93). The evidence pointing to the immense power of the Christian Right thus debunks the myth of US evenhandedness in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and explains why the US has not considered it politically beneficial to exert any real pressure on Israel.

Due to both the strategic interests involved in America’s alliance with Israel and the immense political influence of American Zionist groups, the United States has often shaped its foreign policy to cater to pro-Israel influences. One way that the US displays its foreign policy

agenda is through its acts of diplomacy within the international arena, and specifically the way it shapes its discourse in speeches at the UN.

US Administrations' Positions on Israel: Obama and Trump Eras

As consecutive Presidents, Obama and Trump's policies differed drastically on many levels, so how did their foreign policy toward Israel compare? On the one hand, the Obama administration faced an internal contradiction between its commitment to upholding the US-Israel allyship and its simultaneous pursuit of the democratic ideals of peace, human rights, and justice. While the Obama administration had to present to the world a semblance of concern for human rights, the Trump administration did not demonstrate human rights as a priority. Instead, the Trump administration publicly disregarded several long-running traditions of diplomacy and executed a staunchly pro-Israel foreign policy.

President Obama: 2009-2016

When President Barack Obama was in office from 2008 to 2015, he maintained the U.S. alliance with Israel that reflected that of his predecessors from both parties. Upon campaigning for the presidency, Obama as a Democratic candidate sought out to win over pro-Israeli voters in America. For example, in 2008 on the day after he secured the seat of Democratic nominee, Obama delivered a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) where he expressed his commitment to Israel's security and casted off any doubts that some Jewish voters expressed about his candidacy: "Those who threaten Israel threaten us... And I will bring to the White House an unshakeable commitment to Israel's security" (Obama 2008). Although AIPAC represents just one source of pressure from the Zionist movement, it nevertheless echoes the large constituency that perceives pro-Israeli policies to be of immense strategic interest to the US. Also during his 2008 campaign, Obama embarked on a two-day visit to Israel in an attempt to further display his allegiance to Israel (Gold 2013). These diplomatic gestures made during his first campaign highlight President Obama's efforts to not only secure the support of America's pro-Israel lobby but to also publicize his intent to remain in line with the policies of past administrations ahead of the 2008 election.

After his election, President Obama continued his pro-Zionist tone throughout his two-term presidency, and was careful not to lean too far into any rhetoric or policy that was deemed anti-Israeli. For instance, during his 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 State of the Union addresses to Congress, he reminds the American government and public of his commitment to the security of Israel. In the 2012 address, for example, President Obama asserts the United States' "ironclad commitment" to Israel's security (Obama 2012). In 2014, the President gave a speech regarding the Gaza War of that same year - also known as "Operation Protective Edge" - which was a military operation launched by Israel into the Gaza Strip and resulted in the death of hundreds of Palestinians (American Friends Service Committee, n.d.).³ During this 2014 speech at the White House, President Obama further expressed his fealty to Israel when he supported "Israel's right to defend itself" (Administration of Barack Obama 2014).

The President's concern for Israel and its security appears to be at odds with other commitments of his democratic party, such as the maintenance of human rights and international law, as discussed below. This contradiction presented a challenge for the Obama administration, which refrained from outrightly criticizing Israel for their violations of international law and crimes committed against the Palestinians despite its supposed intent to address human rights violations and promote democracy worldwide. This intent was clearly outlined in Obama's first Presidential address to the United Nations General Assembly in 2009, where he declared that "the United States stands ready to begin a new chapter of international cooperation – one that recognizes the rights and responsibilities of all nations" (Obama 2009b). Despite this inspiring promise, the Obama administration failed in its responsibility to recognizing the rights of Palestinians. Rather, it often ignored Israel's offenses committed against Palestinians. In fact, the Obama administration did not even associate Israel with its illegal practices. For instance, in a 2011 speech given by Maria Otero, the Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs, Otero commended the UN Human Rights Council for its efficacy at advancing universal human rights, despite the Council having an "unfair and imbalanced bias against Israel" (Otero

³ Following a kidnapping of three Israeli youth by Palestinians, the Israeli government began a campaign of "collective punishment" against the Palestinians in the West Bank. In the summer of 2014, Israel launched a series of raids in Palestinian cities and villages, destroyed Palestinian homes, detained hundreds of Palestinians without charge and carried out bombing attacks against Gaza. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 2,000 Palestinians—a majority being civilians—were killed by Israel during the Operation (American Friends Service Committee, n.d.).

2011). This comment by Otero highlights the administration's dual task of projecting a pro-human rights image to the world while simultaneously defending Israel despite its violations.

In other instances, the administration does not even mention Israel in its discourse about human rights. For example, in 2013 Ambassador Susan E. Rice delivered a speech outlining the Obama Administration's position on human rights. In her address, Rice proudly discussed the administration's support and membership in the UN Human Rights Council. Regardless of her praises sung about the organization and its efforts to combat injustice, Rice refrained from commenting on the Council's 2012-2013 investigation and subsequent report outlying Israel's human rights abuses in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Office of the Press Secretary 2013). Moreover, Rice mentions the administration's participation in investigating human rights violations in Syria, North Korea, and Libya, yet does not reference any violations committed by Israel (Office of the Press Secretary 2013). These silences observed in the rhetoric of the Obama administration demonstrate how its diplomacy is manifested in a careful manner in order to ensure both a positive public image and a good-natured relationship with Israel. The topic of silences will be elaborated on and discussed later.

Although the Obama administration clearly demonstrated pro-Israeli behaviors during its two terms, the President sometimes challenged Israel because of the need to display commitments to human rights. However, such challenges were often made to no avail. For example, in 2009 he proposed a settlement freeze against Israel, saying in a speech in Cairo that "the United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements" and that "this construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace," finally saying that that "it is time for these settlements to stop" (Obama 2009a). Despite this effort, his demand was sidelined as the White House received numerous calls and messages, particularly from leaders of American Jewish organizations and members of Zionist lobbying groups, urging him against this act (Beinart 2020). The proposed settlement freeze was refused by then-chairman of Israel's Likud Party, Benjamin Netanyahu, asserting that he would not evacuate settlements as such concerns are "invalid and unimportant" (United Press International 2009). Thus, regardless of his early diplomatic efforts, President Obama's actions were not enough to prevent Israel's illegal practices, and so their settlement expansion persisted. Although it came as no surprise that there would be no tangible effect, the Obama administration still had to gesture

towards human rights to appease its Democratic constituents alongside its pro-Israel commitments.

Despite the apparent continuation of previous administrations' positions on Israel, the Obama administration still had to juggle its desire to project a democratic and pro-human rights image to the rest of the world. Consequently, President Obama's diplomatic policies did not always satisfy the Israeli government, especially its then Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. For example, in 2015 the United States joined the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was an agreement signed with Iran, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom that pledged billions of dollars' worth of sanctions relief in exchange for Iran to dismantle its expanding nuclear program (Robinson 2022a). Although this establishment of the JCPOA was aimed at mitigating turmoil in the Middle East, it elicited criticism from Prime Minister Netanyahu, who told the US Congress in 2015 that this was a "bad deal" and said that if they think "this deal kicks the can down the road, think again" (Netanyahu 2015). Since Israel and its government perceive Iran to be one of its most threatening enemies in the Middle East, Netanyahu was quick to denounce American diplomatic engagement with Iran. Thus, this serves as one instance in which the Obama administration did not prioritize Israeli interests in its own foreign policy.

In 2016, the Obama administration made a passive gesture toward recognizing Palestinian rights when the United States abstained from the UN Security Council Resolution 2334. The resolution outlined Israel's continued settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories and condemned Israeli settlement expansion as a violation of international law. This condemnation was more symbolic than effective, since it was understood that this action – or nonaction – would not have any actual bearing on Israel's practices. By abstaining from the vote and not positioning itself on either side of the debate, the United States effectively chose to maintain its balancing act between upholding its loyalty to Israel and its dedication to international law and justice. Nonetheless, Prime Minister Netanyahu condemned the US for abstaining from the vote and allowing the resolution to pass, calling it an "anti-Israel" resolution and accusing Obama of "colluding" against Israel (Ravid 2016). Even the *Wall Street Journal* criticized the President for "stabbing Israel in the front," calling it another "disastrous policy" on Israel and a "major challenge for American interests" (Bolton 2016). Thus, significant backlash

emerged – from home and from abroad – in response to the US’ abstention, and it was in this diplomatic tension that Obama completed his Presidency.

On several occasions, the two-term Obama administration had to finesse their foreign policy in light of Israel’s egregious refusal to abide by international law. The struggle to display commitments to contradictory demands between human rights and Israel’s Zionist pursuit made it difficult for the democrats of Obama’s administration to appease both sides. His administration had to grapple with how their gestures and messages would be perceived by its pro-Israel constituents, as well as by the rest of the world. Although the United States under the Obama administration was careful not to aggravate either side of the debate, its succeeding administration made more apparent its allegiance and dedication to Israel and the Zionist movement.

President Trump: 2017-2020

From the onset of his political career, Donald Trump was not subtle about his unwavering support of Israel and its government in their Zionist pursuit. His bold pro-Israeli sentiment was evident even during his campaign for Presidency. For instance, during his campaign trail he delivered a speech to AIPAC, making clear his commitment to actively support and defend Israel. In his speech, he focused primarily on the perceived threat of the Iran New Deal (JCPOA) and promised his audience that, if elected, he would “stand up to Iran’s aggressive push to destabilize and dominate the region” – followed by a round of applause thereafter (Begley 2016). Upon assuming the Presidency, Trump fulfilled his campaign promises to actively and outwardly support Israel and its policies. Unlike the Obama administration, which oftentimes had to counter-balance its display of fealty to Israel, the Trump administration often demonstrated un-nuanced and unreserved loyalty to Israel. For instance, in each of his State of the Union addresses (2017-2020), he mentions the steps he has taken to reaffirm America’s “unbreakable alliance” with Israel, like imposing sanctions on those who support Iran’s ballistic missile program, or establishing a new embassy in the Holy City of Jerusalem (Trump 2017). In his 2018 and 2019 State of the Union addresses, the President declared his acknowledgement of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. This profound diplomatic gesture was perhaps the most prominent act of Trump that displayed both his dedication to Israel and his disregard for the maintenance of international norms.

In 2018, President Trump made the controversial decision to move the United States embassy to Jerusalem, effectively signifying his recognition of the Holy City as the capital of Israel and becoming the first US President to follow through on his campaign promise to do so (Trump White House Archives 2018). Unlike past American presidents who also pledged to relocate the embassy to Jerusalem, Trump “went beyond rhetoric” and acted on his promises (Moten 2018, 20). This announcement was controversial due to the religious history associated with Jerusalem: The ancient city is considered sacred by Islam, Judaism, and Christianity alike, and remains an important religious site for members of all three religious groups. Furthermore, Trump’s embassy move complicated the former division of Jerusalem that was established by the United Nations in 1948, which resulted in a split between Arab-controlled East Jerusalem and Israeli-controlled West Jerusalem (“Jerusalem” 2004). Following the 1967 war, Israel seized East Jerusalem, but few countries recognized Israel’s right to the entire city and the Palestinian population still regards East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state (“Jerusalem” 2004). The United Nations Security Council even considered Israel’s occupation of East Jerusalem to be invalid and illegal, and urged Israel to cease settlement activity there, as expressed in SCR 2334 (Moten 2018, 6). Despite these criticisms, the President boasted about his decision, saying during a declaration at the White House that it was “long overdue” and that it was a “recognition of reality” (Trump 2020).

Other public gestures of the Trump administration further demonstrated its fidelity to Israel, rather than trying to present a semblance of even-handedness, as the Obama administration often did. For instance, in 2020, President Trump unveiled his “Peace to Prosperity” plan in an attempt to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This initiative was presented by the President’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who spoke of the administrations’ plans to enhance infrastructure in Gaza and the West bank (Morris 2019). Although other Presidents certainly displayed nepotism in their own administrations – notably Kennedy and Clinton – their relatives were still qualified in politics and other related fields. On the other hand, Kushner’s appointment drew criticism as he possessed neither the qualifications nor professional expertise to comment on the situation – let alone to be the one to deliver the Peace Plan to the Israeli government. Thus, this obvious sign of unjustified nepotism furthers the contention that the Trump administration was not concerned with maintaining the image of professional diplomacy, but rather with fulfilling its own political desires through non-conventional means. As the

initiative did not involve any new ideas for alleviating the pressures on Occupied Palestine, the Peace Plan was criticized by the Palestinian leadership for being too biased in favor of Israel, and has been characterized as being too lenient on Israel's violations of international law (Sawafta and al-Mughrabi 2020).

Although the Obama and Trump administrations positioned themselves at different ranges on the spectrum in terms of their outright support of Israel, undeniably the US-Israel alliance remained strong throughout both. This fact is made especially clear when considering US military and security funding to Israel. For example, during both Obama administrations, the United States provided Israel with over \$23.5 billion in military funding and over \$3 billion in missile defense funding (Office of the Press Secretary 2016). These numbers were even higher under President Trump's administration, which requested \$3.3 billion in military funding and \$500 million in missile defense aid to Israel (Sharp 2022). This massive budget allotted to Israel falls in line with the practices of former US Presidents, who have supported Israel in a similar fashion, making it the largest recipient of US foreign assistance since World War II (Sharp 2022). As a result of this trend, Israel remains the highest recipient of United States funding in the world.

Rhetorical Strategies Used by the US in the Discussion of Jewish Settlement Expansion

The eight selected Security Council meeting records from 2012 to 2019 corroborated the respective policies that each administration expressed in other forums, as discussed in the next section. In each meeting, the meeting President begins with an overview of the meeting agenda and proceeds by allowing each ambassador to take turns speaking on the presented issues. The respective ambassador speeches are prepared and delivered in one sitting, rather than it being a dialogue amongst the members. The following findings derive from a rhetorical analysis of the American ambassador speeches during these meetings.

In Defense of Israel

It is a consistent trend in the Security Council meetings regarding the "Palestinian question" that the respective United States ambassador offers a remark aiming to highlight Israel's own victimhood. Rather than urging for relief for Palestinians struggling under the

Occupation, the US representative often expressed their concern for Israeli security and protection exclusively – irregardless of Israel’s illegal conduct committed against Palestinians. For instance, while the American Friends Service Committee were calling for an end to the five-year long blockade in 2012, the US envoy to the Security Council of that same year concentrated instead on the ways in which *Israel* is threatened (American Friends Service Committee 2020). On July 25, 2012 Ambassador DeLaurentis concluded his speech by condemning rocket fire attacks on Israel from Gaza: “We remind members of the paralyzing effects that such attacks have on the lives of innocent Israelis and the threat that they pose to the peace process and to the region generally” (United Nations Security Council 2012). Not only does this concluding line attempt to emphasize the innocence of Israelis, but it also serves to categorize the attacks on Israelis as the most paramount factor degrading peace and stability in the region. This tactic serves as one way in which the US uses their diplomatic leverage at the UN to “shield Israel from criticisms,” as argued by Milton-Edwards.

However foregrounded, the supposed victimhood of Israel was a less common tactic during the Obama administration than during that of Trump (see Table 1). The example from 2012 is the only observed instance in which a delegate of the Obama administration outrightly commented on the challenges posed against Israel. An explanation for this discrepancy may lie in the fact that this administration had to be more careful in displaying any inflammatory rhetoric contrary to Israeli political interests. The Obama-era Security Council meetings examined in this study do not have many strong remarks to defend Israel or emphasize its victimhood. Rather, this trend can be most prominently observed during the period of 2016-2019 – marking both the commencement of the Trump administration as well as the passing of Security Council Resolution 2334, which affirmed Israel’s settlement activity to be a violation of international law.

Another tactic observed in the meetings during the Trump administration is US ambassadors defending Israel’s breach of law by delineating settlement expansion as a threat to *Israeli* security rather than Palestinian security. 2016 marked the start of a new rhetorical trend in which the different US ambassadors made specific references to Israeli security – a trend which occurred 10 times between the selected 2016 and 2018 meeting records. Also in 2016, the Security Council passed Resolution 2334, which therefore explains part of the need to shift the discussion to the victimhood of Israel. It is not surprising that this display of concern for Israel’s security is more evident in the Trump era – especially since the President’s top advisor publicly

declared that the President did not view settlements as “an obstacle to peace,” and that Israel’s settlement activities should not be condemned (Eg lash 2016). This tactic observed during the meetings from Trump’s administration further emphasizes the ways in which his bold pro-Israel foreign policy was made more transparent than that of Obama.

Criticizing the UN

Another tactic used by the US ambassadors to deflect from Israel’s breach of international law is to criticize the United Nations as biased against Israel. This particular tactic was evident only in the US ambassador speeches from the Trump administration (2017-2019), which further highlight the dichotomy observed between the foreign policies of the two administrations. On about a dozen occasions, rather than acknowledging the issue at hand (illegal land settlement expansion by Israel), the United States speaker sharply chastises the UN and its members for treating Israel differently than other member states. For example, on February 20, 2018 Ambassador Haley explains that her and other US envoys have attempted to shift the discussion away from Israel due to the “well-founded belief that the United Nations spends an altogether disproportionate amount of time on Israeli-Palestinian issues” (United Nations Security Council 2018). Despite this particular meeting being labeled “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine question,” as well as the fact that every other delegate in the meeting commented on Israel’s ongoing occupation, Haley still defended her position, later claiming the United Nations to be “grossly biased” against Israel.

Essentially, through this strategy of condemning the institution of the UN, Ambassador Haley implicitly reveals the Trump administration’s contention that Israel is not deserving of any criticism nor punishment for their actions as an occupying power and for blatantly ignoring international law. This tactic echoes a pillar of Trump’s foreign policy, which often antagonized the United Nations and other international institutions. For instance, during a campaign speech delivered to AIPAC, Trump discussed what he called the “utter weakness and incompetence of the United Nations,” and the fact that the United Nations is “not a friend of democracy,” nor to the United States, nor to Israel (Begley 2016). By including this message in his campaign speech, Trump foreshadowed the image of his administration’s foreign policy: one that is not concerned with upholding diplomatic traditions.

Table 1. Instances of US Ambassadors Defending Israel

Meeting Record	Number of Instances the US Ambassador Defends Israel, Including UN Criticism
7/25/2012	1
1/23/2013	1
10/29/2014	n/a
7/23/2015	n/a
12/23/2016	8
12/18/2017	5
2/20/2018	3
11/20/2019	3

Blaming the Palestinians

Another tactic used by the United States ambassador in order to detract attention from Israel's illegal settlement expansion is to cast blame on the Palestinians. One way this method is manifested is by targeting the Palestinian authority and leadership. For instance, on December 18, 2017 Ambassador Haley condemned Palestinian leaders "who for many years rejected one peace proposal after another," insinuating that the failure to achieve peace rested in their hands and not in those of the occupying power. Not only is this tactic used to criticize the Palestinian leadership but also the terrorist or militant organizations associated with the Palestinian effort. On November 20, 2019, for example, instead of addressing the agenda topic of settlements, Norman-Chalet reported on what Israel is "expected to endure," mentioning rocket fire attacks into Israel by the Islamic Jihad, noting that these attacks "threaten the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike" (United Nations Security Council 2019). Further, in the meeting record taken on February 20, 2018, the US ambassador performs concern for the Palestinians in Gaza, but does not attribute their suffering to Israel. Rather, Ambassador Haley contends that the Palestinians in Gaza are threatened by the Hamas organization, essentially insinuating that the real threat comes from their own side, rather than from Israel: "The people of Gaza live in truly

awful conditions, while their Hamas rulers put their resources into building terror tunnels and rockets” (United Nations Security Council 2018). While a range of voices have criticized the implications of Hamas policies in Gaza, the point here is that Haley avoided the topic of settlements under discussion and instead directed her criticism *only* at Hamas as being a source of oppression in Gaza.

Overall, there are 14 instances throughout the selected meeting records in which the respective speaker reminds the audience of what the Palestinians are doing to ignite tensions and how they are at fault (see Table 2). In the instance from 2012, Ambassador DeLaurentis concludes his speech by reflecting on how the rocket fire from Gaza into Israel negatively impacts the peace process, and how “the international community must stand united in opposition to such threats” (United Nations Security Council 2012). This comment was made irrespective of Israel’s constricting blockade over Gaza, which at that point had reached its five-year anniversary (American Friends Service Committee 2020). Ambassador DeLaurentis leaves his audience with this culminating thought at the conclusion of his speech, displaying to both the international community and America’s pro-Israel constituents what remains at the forefront of America’s concern: the plight of the Israelis. Interestingly enough, this trend of highlighting Palestinian culpability does not pick up again until 2016, which again reflects both a changing administration as well as the passing of the landmark SCR 2334 of that same year. Thirteen out of the fourteen examples of this trend come from the period of 2016-2019, thus showing a correlation with the surrounding events at the UN and changing politics of the United States (see Table 2).

Also involved in the tactic of highlighting Palestinian culpability is to argue how Palestinians are damaging peace efforts by refusing to cooperate. In one example from the February 2018 record, Ambassador Haley pointedly asserts that the United States has been open to working towards a solution, and that it is the Palestinians and President Abbas who have declined to cooperate. Nearing the end of this speech, Haley gives both the Palestinians and the Security Council an ultimatum, saying that they can either accept the US position or continue with the status quo:

“You can choose to denounce the United States, reject the United States’ role in peace talks and pursue punitive measures against Israel in international forums such as the United Nations. I assure you that path will get the Palestinian people exactly nowhere

towards the achievement of their aspirations. Or you can choose to put aside your anger about the location of our embassy and move forward with us towards a negotiated compromise that holds great potential for improving the lives of the Palestinian people.” (United Nations Security Council 2018)

By posing this discussion as a *choice* that must be made by the Palestinians, Ambassador Haley portrays the ongoing suffering and violence to be a result of Palestinian unproductivity and defiance. Further, this tactic performs a semblance of commitment to Palestinian interests despite the surrounding policies and actions taken by the United States to undermine such interests.

Table 2. Instances of US Ambassadors Referring to Palestinian Culpability

Meeting Record	Number of Instances the US Ambassador Refers to Palestinian Culpability
7/25/2012	1
1/23/2013	n/a
10/29/2014	n/a
7/23/2015	n/a
12/23/2016	6
12/18/2017	1
2/20/2018	3
11/20/2019	3

Both Parties at Fault

Another way that the United States in the Security Council attempts to deflect from the severity of Jewish settlement expansion is by casting the occupation as a conflict balanced equally on both sides. The following list presents just four instances in which the United States ambassador refers to “both sides.”

*“We believe that unilateral actions harm the peace process and only entrench **both sides.**”*

(US Ambassador DeLaurentis, July 25, 2012)

*“We will continue to urge leaders on **both sides** to avoid unilateral steps and provocations that make peace negotiations harder to resume.”*

(US Ambassador Rice, January 23 2013)

*“This is a time that calls for responsible decisions by leaders and people of **both sides**... to advance the goals of security and peace.”*

(US Ambassador Pressman, October 29, 2014)

*“We continue to believe that the parties concerned can still pursue that path if **both sides** are honest about the choices and have the courage to take steps that will be politically difficult.”*

(US Ambassador Power, December 23, 2016)

This “both sides” trend also shows some differences between the two administrations. During Obama’s administration, there are 4 times as many instances of this trend than during that of Trump (see Table 3). The bulk of these remarks were made in the meeting on October 29, 2014 by Ambassador Pressman. In this particular meeting, Pressman makes four references to Israel’s settlement expansion, attesting to its illegitimacy, yet he counter-balances this with five comments that place both sides on equal footing: “The current situation is only made more difficult by actions that pollute the atmosphere for peace and further undermine trust on both sides” (United Nations Security Council 2014). In using the term “illegitimate” rather than “illegal,” the ambassador displays to the international forum a subtle acknowledgement of the injustice of settlement activity without actually admitting its criminality. In this manner, Ambassador Pressman does not defend Israel outright, yet still reminds his audience that Israel should not receive total blame for the situation at hand. At this time in 2014, the surrounding context involved the Gaza War launched by Israel, also known as Operation Protective Edge (American Friends Service Committee n.d.). With this context, it is made more clear the motives behind Pressman’s rhetoric and use of a balancing act between displaying empathy for the plight of the Palestinians while not fully placing blame on Israel. This dichotomy is of course also reflected in the foreign policy of the Obama administration, which also had more pressure to perform an “even hand” when publicly discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Comments referring to the actions of “both parties” are commonly seen in the years of 2012-2015, effectively coinciding with the era of Obama’s administration. This phenomenon is reflected in the scholarship of Imseis (2020), who addressed the paradox in the UN between its commitment to international law and its actions towards Israel’s overall presence in the Occupied Territories. Such remarks about the responsibility of “both parties” fade near the end of the Obama presidency, with the exception of two references made in the 2016 meeting by Ms. Power:

“Even if every single settlement were to be dismantled tomorrow, peace still would not be attainable without **both sides** acknowledging uncomfortable truths and making difficult choices.... We continue to believe that the parties concerned can still pursue [peace] if both sides are honest about the choices and have the courage to take steps that will be politically difficult.” (United Nations Security Council 2016).

This strategic rhetoric regarding Jewish settlement expansion reiterates the view that Israel should not be villainized in this event, and that the Israelis should not be the sole bearer of culpability. This tactic serves to obscure the imbalance of power between Israelis and Palestinians, and the harm that Palestinian civilians have had to endure in the process of settlement expansion. The “both sides” argument is ironic considering the imbalance between the occupied country and its occupying force; that is, the American delegates are equating Israel – a UN member state with an extensive military and defense force – and Palestine – a non-member observer state without an established military funded by one of the biggest Western powers. After 2016, however, this trend falters and instead the US ambassador emphasizes the Palestinian deficiencies in the peace process rather than those of the Israelis. From this point on, there is no longer the urge to portray the conflict as balanced on both sides but rather as the sole responsibility of the Palestinians.

Table 3. Instances of US Ambassadors Referencing “Both Sides”

Meeting Record	Number of References Made to “Both Sides” by the US Ambassador
7/25/2012	1
1/23/2013	2

10/29/2014	5
7/23/2015	n/a
12/23/2016	1
12/18/2017	n/a
2/20/2018	n/a
11/20/2019	n/a

Referencing Humanitarian Efforts

To deflect from the United States’ policies championing Israel, its overlooking of legal breaches, and its unprecedented amount of foreign aid offered to Israel, the US delegates try to project an image of balance and recognition of Palestinian suffering. The strategic practice of focusing on US humanitarian support for Palestinians serves to both deflect from Israeli abuses and to emphasize the United States’ own goodwill. This tactic can be seen in seven instances in the meeting records from 2012-2015 (see Table 4), where the respective US ambassadors allot a portion of their speech to recounting the amount of aid and support the US government gives Palestinian refugees through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). For instance, on July 23, 2015 Ambassador Power boasted that the US has given more aid to UNRWA “than any other bilateral donor,” noting that they had given 95% of their pledged \$400 million as well as more than \$398 million in 2014 (United Nations Security Council 2015). By weaving this information into her address, Ms. Rice effectively portrays the US as a generous humanitarian global leader rather than one that bolsters Israel’s illegal settlement activity. This tactic’s prominence in 2013 coincided with the release of an official report by the UN Human Rights Council which investigated Israel’s human rights abuses and eventually decided that the State has violated international law on several occasions (United Nations Human Rights Council 2013).

Table 4. Instances of US Ambassadors Referencing Humanitarian Aid

Meeting Record	Number of References Made to US Humanitarian Aid
7/25/2012	1
1/23/2013	3
10/29/2014	n/a
7/23/2015	3
12/23/2016	n/a
12/18/2017	n/a
2/20/2018	n/a
11/20/2019	n/a

Deflection to Other Regional Issues

Another strategy employed by the various US ambassadors in the Security Council meetings regarding the Palestinian question is to deflect from the situation in order to distract from its severity and instead point to problems in other Arab or Muslim-majority countries. Despite each of the chosen meetings in this project's corpus having the issue of settlement expansion as one of the main meeting topics, it is often the case that the US speaker chooses to ignore the topic of settlements and instead focus on unrelated subject matter elsewhere in the Middle East/ North Africa – a pattern that is noticed around ten times over the course of the selected documents (see Table 5). Both in 2012 and 2013 as the Syrian civil war ensued, the majority of the US discussion in these meeting records was dedicated to this crisis and criticizing Syria's own oppressive regime, rather than the topic of Palestine – which defined the reason for the meeting.

This trend continued in 2015, but with additional topics of deflection. For instance, in addition to deferring to discussion on Syria, American Ambassador Power talked about extremist groups such as ISIL, as well as Iran and the JCPOA, which was established in the same year. During this meeting – where almost every other national ambassador comments on the issue of

land settlements – there are in fact zero references made to Israel’s settlement activity by the United States delegate. Later in 2018, under the Trump administration, Ambassador Haley made five references to other crises unfolding in the Middle East/ North Africa, including that of Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt. This tactic observed throughout these meeting records points to the United States’ attempt to highlight other urgent matters in the Middle East in order to detract from the importance of the Palestine question and the issue of illegal settlement expansion. These references to surrounding events in the Middle East (where Muslims are the antagonists) serve to imply that such events are perhaps more egregious and appalling than Israel’s continual seizure of land. In this sense, it is assumed by the US speaker that by reminding the audience and the members of the UN of these other issues, their concerns will be directed away from the issues regarding Israel and Palestine and consequently Israel’s violations of international law.

Table 5. Instances of US Ambassadors Deflecting from Topic

Meeting Record	Number of Instances of Deflection by the US Ambassador
7/25/2012	Majority of speech dedicated to Syrian crisis.
1/23/2013	Majority of speech dedicated to Syrian crisis.
10/29/2014	3
7/23/2015	n/a
12/23/2016	n/a
12/18/2017	n/a
2/20/2018	5
11/20/2019	1

Silences

Perhaps the most prominent trend observed in US ambassador rhetoric is in fact what they *do not* say. Among the chosen Security Council meeting records—with the exception of that of 2019—the respective US ambassadors omit any reference to international law in its relation to Israeli illegal land settlement expansion. Although the United Nations’ official position finds Israel’s ongoing settlement expansion to be a flagrant violation of international law, the United States never aligns themselves with this position. Similar to their “silences” displayed in their abstention from SCR 2334, the United States delegates fail to demarcate an official position on the legality of Israel’s conduct. The various ambassadors have instead consistently avoided making any suggestion that Israel’s actions are illegal in any way. While these ambassadors do not completely refrain from commenting on the issue of settlement activity, they do so in a strategic and cautious manner so as to not undermine their defense of Israel. For example, in each year between 2012 and 2014, the different US ambassadors under President Obama do admit that the Jewish settlements are damaging to the peace process, and describe them as “illegitimate” and “deeply concerning.” During these years, the United States position on settlement expansion can be recognized as one of reserved disapproval – yet this position does not manifest itself beyond these remarks (see Table 6). This tactic is reflected in previous scholarship, notably from Scherzinger’s textual analysis that found that in addition to strategic word choice, a *lack* of rhetoric can also be influential in diplomacy. Similar to how this tactic functions in this study, Scherzinger’s analysis proved that it can be vital to analyze both what is said and what is left unsaid in a text or speech.

The way the US discusses settlement activity shifts around 2016, again, coinciding with other rhetorical shifts observed during this era. In 2016, when the US abstained from voting on SCR 2334, the conversation about land settlements shifts from how they erode the peace process to how they damage the interests of Israel *only*: “We believe, however, that continued settlement building seriously undermines Israel’s security” (United Nations Security Council 2016). Later, with the Trump administration in place and after the passing of Resolution 2334, the discussion of settlement activity became more defensive. In 2017, every reference made to the settlements condemns Resolution 2334 and its contents. During this meeting on December 18 2017, Ambassador Haley confidently professed that given the chance to vote again on Resolution 2334, “the United States would vote ‘no’” (United Nations Security Council 2017). This claim reflects

the US' historical "liberal use" of their Security Council veto to support Israel, which was not taken advantage of in 2016 by the Obama administration (Sarsar 2004, 457). Later, Ambassador Haley criticizes the Council for "misplacing blame for the failure of peace efforts squarely on the Israeli settlements," therefore implying that Israel should not be blamed for their wrongdoings (United Nations Security Council 2017). The meeting record taken on February 20th, 2018 shares the same sentiments about the resolution, saying that it was "wrong on so many levels" and that the US made a "serious error" in allowing it to pass (United Nations Security Council 2018).

In this project's entire corpus, there was only one instance from November 20, 2019 in which a United States ambassador makes any reference to international law (see Table 7). Despite this reference to international law finally being used in the rhetoric of an American ambassador, it is in fact used to further *defend* Israel's violations: "It is the position of the United States that the establishment of Israel civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law" (United Nations Security Council 2019). As this final meeting record shows, no matter how "concerning" or "illegitimate" settlement expansion might be – or no matter if it is recognized as a violation of international law – the United States will never falter in their defense of Israel and will not accuse them of illegal conduct.

Table 6. Words and Phrases Used to Describe Settlement Activity by US Ambassadors

Meeting Record	Words and Phrases Used to Describe Settlement Activity by US Ambassador
7/25/2012	"Does not accept legitimacy"
1/23/2013	"Does not accept legitimacy" "Long-standing opposition" "Damaging to efforts for a two-state solution" "Run counter to the cause of peace" "[We] oppose efforts to legalize outposts"
10/29/2014	"[We] urge [Israel] to refrain" "Deeply concerning" "[Will] further escalate tensions"

	“Illegitimate”
7/23/2015	n/a
12/23/2016	<p>“Undermines Israel’s security”</p> <p>“Harms the viability of a two-state outcome”</p> <p>“Erodes prospects for peace and stability”</p> <p>“No legal validity”</p> <p>“Settlements must stop”</p> <p>“The settlement problem has gotten worse”</p> <p>“Putting at risk the viability of the two-state solution”</p> <p>“Settlements are not the only factor harming the prospects of a two-state solution”</p> <p>“[Continued settlement expansion] would threaten Israel’s stated objective to remain both a Jewish State and a democracy”</p> <p>“[SCR 2334] is too narrowly focused on settlements”</p> <p>“Even if every single settlement were to be dismantled tomorrow, peace still would not be attainable”</p>
12/18/2017	<p>“Given the chance to vote again on Resolution 2334... the US would vote ‘no’”</p> <p>“Resolution 2334 itself was an impediment to peace”</p> <p>“Misplacing the blame for the failure of peace efforts squarely on the Israeli settlements”</p>
2/20/2018	<p>“The United States made a serious error in allowing that resolution to be adopted. Resolution 2334 (2016) was wrong on many levels.”</p>
11/20/2019	<p>“It is the position of the United States that the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law.”</p> <p>“The United States Government is expressing no view on the particular legal status of any individual settlement, nor are we addressing or prejudging the ultimate status of the West Bank.”</p>

Table 7. Instances of US Ambassadors Referencing International Law

Meeting Record	Number of References Made to International Law by the US Ambassador
7/25/2012	n/a
1/23/2013	n/a
10/29/2014	n/a
7/23/2015	n/a
12/23/2016	n/a
12/18/2017	n/a
2/20/2018	n/a
11/20/2019	1

Comparison with US Ally Rhetoric

In stark comparison, several United States allies who are also allied with Israel, including the UK and France, do not project the same fealty to Israel. This position is demonstrated by the fact that these national ambassadors explicitly say on multiple occasions that Israel is violating international law. In almost every meeting record, not only does at least one US ally address the issue of land settlements, but they outwardly assert that they are illegal under international law and must be stopped. The following list presents comments from six meetings where both English and French Ambassadors explicitly condemn Israel for its continued settlement activity.

*“And yet, every day Israel’s pursuit of its settlement policy undermines the possibility of peace and **violates international law** and the resolutions of the Security Council.”* (France Ambassador Araud, July 25, 2012)

*“For the Government of Israel, that means being prepared to enter serious negotiations and ceasing settlement activity, which is **illegal under international law.**”* (UK Ambassador Sir Mark Lyall Grant, January 23, 2013)

*“Our long-standing national position on Israeli settlements is clear. They are **illegal under international law**, present an obstacle to peace and take us further away from a two-State solution.”* (UK Ambassador Sir Mark Lyall Grant, October 29, 2014)

“Israel’s recent plans to construct more than 900 new settlement housing units in the West Bank are clearly contrary to the goal of peace, and so are the plans to evict Palestinians from the village of Susiya.” (UK Ambassador Rycroft, July 23, 2015)

*“Settlement-building, which is **illegal under international law**, is part of a deliberate policy aimed at presenting the population, including the international community, with a *fait accompli* in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.”* (France Ambassador Delattre, December 23, 2016)

“We call on Israel to immediately reverse its policies of settlement expansion and demolitions.” (UK Ambassador Allen, February 20, 2018)

*“Israel’s settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territories is **illegal under international law**, particularly international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and contravenes Security Council Resolutions.”*
(France Ambassador De Riviere, November 20, 2019)

On several occasions, representatives from the United States’ allies like the United Kingdom and France express their disapproval with Israel’s illegal behaviors, and they explicitly mention “international law,” rather than simply alluding to their illegitimacy as the US ambassadors do. They also highlight that such violations on the part of Israel are to blame for the lack of progress towards a two-state solution. In contrast, amongst the selected meeting records from 2012 to 2019, the only time the United States references international law concerning land settlements comes from November 20, 2019. In this document, the US representative, Ms. Norman-Chalet, does not reflect the UN position on the issue but rather states that it is simply not “per se inconsistent” with the law. This tactic illustrates Moten’s claim that the US consistently prevents the Security Council from condemning Israeli settlement expansion (2018). Thus, even when

international law is presented as a concern for the United States, it is directed to further defend Israel for its illegal conduct rather than to call for an end to such injustice.

As the textual analysis shows, there are notable differences between the two administrations in terms of their positions on Israel. President Trump did not follow in his predecessor's footsteps by admitting that Israel's settlement activity violates diplomacy in any way. Such differences can be better understood when considering the underlying concern for public image. President Obama, unlike President Trump, was concerned with displaying to the world his dedication to human rights, even if his actions were sometimes contradictory. In front of the rest of the world, Obama could not manifest his foreign policy as unapologetically pro-Israel as that of his successor. President Trump, on the other hand, prioritized his allegiance to Israel over presenting to the public an image of respect for diplomacy. Another difference observed in the conduct of the two administrations is the fact that President Trump engaged in concrete efforts - such as the 2018 embassy move - in order to defend Israel's illegal practices, whereas Obama's political efforts were more symbolic at times. These findings thus highlight how rhetoric is shaped and influenced for particular audiences and to serve a particular political agenda.

Conclusion

This examination of Security Council meeting records in this project advances the notion that diplomatic rhetoric does not merely entail empty words, but rather is orchestrated to further a particular political agenda and to reach several audiences. With the Obama administration's audience being split between its democratic constituents and the pro-Israel groups of America, it had to remain mindful of its contradictory commitments to international justice and its loyalty to Israel. On the other hand, the Trump administration did not have to appease a staunchly pro-human rights audience, and was thus able to be more hardlined in its treatment and response to Israel's occupation. For example, the research findings showed that the tactic of assigning culpability to "both sides" was more prominent during the Obama era while the tactic of referring uniquely to Palestinian culpability was increased during that of Trump. Furthermore, there were more instances in which the US ambassador attempted to defend Israel from criticism during the records from the Trump administration than that of Obama.

In addition to these apparent contrasts, there was an observed consistency regarding the US' overall shielding of Israel from condemnation regarding its violations of international law. This was especially prevalent in the observation that the US ambassadors never outrightly stated that Israel's settlement expansion is illegal under international law, despite this fact being acknowledged by American allies and the UN institution itself. This project's findings thus reflect not only the US' overall objective to protect and defend Israel from criticism, but also the differences between the Obama and Trump administrations and the overarching political contexts under which they served. From this study, we are able to understand the implications of diplomatic rhetoric as well as the factors that shape it.

Although diplomatic rhetoric represents a more symbolic form of foreign policy, it is nevertheless worthwhile to identify its function through the method of rhetorical analysis. This study is positioned at the intersection of the fields of international relations and rhetorical studies. It falls in line with preceding scholarship that has examined the relationship between rhetoric and diplomatic action, and thus reaffirms the conviction that diplomatic rhetoric is able to both encourage and prevent certain diplomatic decisions. Admittedly, this project faced some limitations in terms of both its narrow time frame and scope of the corpus. With that being said, it could be insightful for further research to undertake a similar method with a more extensive scope. A larger research project could perhaps cover more years, more American administrations or could even attempt a comparative analysis between American diplomatic rhetoric and that of other UN member states. Such potential research could illuminate how US rhetoric within the UN is related to other aspects of foreign policy.

The findings presented in this study builds on past research that has looked at the US' relationship with Israel, and reveals another channel through which this relationship is displayed and solidified. By considering how policy is manifested in crafted diplomatic rhetoric, this thesis complements other studies of why US policy often favors Israel. From this study, we are able to gain a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which foreign policy is expressed and exhibited, and can use this understanding to become more critical in our perceptions of international diplomacy.

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Appendix. Full Database

Date	Number of Instances the US Ambassador Defends Israel, Including UN Criticism	Number of Instances the US Ambassador Refers to Palestinian Culpability	Number of References Made to “Both Sides” by the US Ambassador	Number of References Made to US Humanitarian Aid	Number of Instances of Deflection by the US Ambassador	Number of References made to International Law by the US Ambassador	Number of References to Settlement Activity by the US Ambassador
July 25, 2012	1	1	1	1	Majority of speech dedicated to Syrian Crisis.	n/a	1
January 23, 2013	1	n/a	2	3	Majority of speech dedicated to Syrian Crisis.	n/a	4
October 29, 2014	n/a	n/a	5	n/a	3	n/a	4
July 23, 2015	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	n/a	n/a	0
December 23, 2016	8	6	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	10+
December 18, 2017	5	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3
February 20, 2018	3	3	n/a	n/a	5	n/a	1 (<i>indirect</i>)
November 20, 2019	3	3	n/a	n/a	1	1	2