BEYOND TALK:

FIVE WAYS THE AMERICAN JEWISH ESTABLISHMENT SUPPORTS THE OCCUPATION

A REPORT BY IFNOTNOW
Executive Summary

For the past 51 years, the organized American Jewish community has played a key role in supporting, both directly and indirectly, the Israeli government’s Occupation of Palestinian territories. In the era of President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu’s unholy alliance, the role of our communal leaders in upholding the Occupation has become even clearer, proving how out of touch they are with the average American Jew. This report examines five concrete ways the American Jewish establishment actively supports the Occupation.

IfNotNow defines the Occupation as the military rule over Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. We also know that the discrimination and displacement inside Israel’s 1948 borders are connected to its rule in those Occupied Territories. This system of violence deprives all Palestinians of civil, political, and economic rights.

The American Jewish establishment, as we use the term, is made up of well-resourced Jewish communal organizations that claim to serve and represent American Jewry. These groups perpetuate the Occupation when they: fund organizations and institutions that entrench the Occupation, lobby American politicians to unequivocally support the Israeli government, honor leaders that work to expand the Occupation, promote a political culture that denies Palestinian rights, and marginalize those who critique the Israeli government.

Ali Hassan/Anadolu/Getty Images
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Key Findings

The American Jewish community actively supports the Occupation when our institutions:

1. **Directly fund organizations that uphold Israel’s military, economic, and political control over Palestinians’ daily lives.**
   - Between 2009 and 2013, 50 American 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations gave over $220 million in tax-deductible donations to settlements and other extreme right-wing organizations, according to an investigation of American and American Jewish organizations’ IRS tax forms by the Israeli daily Haaretz.¹
   - Jewish Federations in cities around the country allow donors to funnel money through donor-advised funds to pro-Occupation organizations that fund extreme right-wing settlers.²³ At the same time, they prevent donors from using these funds to support groups that have expressed support for Palestinian rights, such as the National Lawyers Guild, Jewish Voice for Peace, and IfNotNow.⁴

2. **Lobby American politicians to put unconditional support for the Israeli government and its policies above Palestinian human rights.**
   - The educational arm of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and organizations such as local Jewish Community Relation Councils send regular delegations of politicians to Israel to boost unequivocal support for the Jewish state while hiding the reality of the Occupation.⁵⁶⁷ The limited engagement with Palestinian perspectives on such trips was described by one participant, former U.S. Rep. Brian Baird, as “a sort of token process.”⁸
   - In addition to lobbying for Israel, the majority of Jewish institutions lobby against any and all criticism of Israel’s Occupation. Of all American Jewish organizations with large national memberships, only Americans for Peace Now,⁹ Jewish Voice for Peace,¹⁰ J Street,¹¹ and the New Israel Fund¹² supported the U.S. administration’s abstention in the December 2016 United Nations Security Council Resolution recognizing Israel’s settlements as illegal under international law. The mixture of condemnation and silence from every other national American Jewish organization demonstrates an investment in a status quo that benefits settlement expansion over Palestinian rights.
3 Amplify prominent individuals and organizations responsible for deepening the Occupation.

- Hillel International has a financial and programmatic partnership with Naftali Bennett, Israel’s Education and Diaspora Affairs Minister. He leads Israel’s far-right Jewish Home Party and promotes annexation of Palestinian territories. The $66 million “Mosaic United” initiative aims to quell growing criticism of the Occupation on college campuses.\(^{13}\)

- Mainstream and progressive leaders have celebrated and normalized Israel’s envoy in New York, Dani Dayan, a prominent settler leader.\(^{14}\)

- Sheldon Adelson, the Republican mega-donor and supporter of Israel’s right-wing government, is a major donor to Birthright Israel and was recently honored at its gala.\(^{15}\)

4 Promote a culture within the Jewish community that omits and denies the legitimacy of Palestinian narratives and rights.

- Many Jewish youth groups promote the state of Israel while barely acknowledging the existence of the Occupation. For example, many camps and Hebrew schools use maps of Israel without the Green Line in their educational materials.\(^{16}\)

- Hillel International, which oversees the largest network of centers for Jewish life on college campuses, maintains “standards of partnership” guidelines that prohibit Hillel-affiliated organizations and student groups from hosting or partnering with organizations or individuals that “support boycott of, divestment from, or sanctions against the State of Israel,”\(^{17}\) effectively barring engagement with Palestinians opposed to the Occupation.

5 Silence and intimidate those who oppose the policies of the Israeli government, shutting dissent out of the mainstream Jewish community.

- In 2014, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which was founded in the 1950s to represent all major streams of American Jewry in national affairs, voted against J Street’s membership; vocal opponents said that it was not sufficiently pro-Israel because it opposed the Occupation.\(^{18}\)

- Mainstream Jewish organizations have refused to speak out against and even funded watchlists, like Canary Mission, that vilify individuals and organizations that speak out for Palestinian rights. Canary Mission is a database that catalogues the photos and names of Palestinian rights activists, encourages employers to blacklist them, and has been used as the basis to deny entry to Israel.\(^{19}\)
Introduction

Since 2014, thousands of young Jews from across the country have come together under the banner of IfNotNow to demand the end of American Jewish support for the Israeli Occupation. While many Jews and Jewish organizations claim to support a two-state solution, and some recognize the denial of Palestinian rights as a core obstacle to peace, there is little to no public conversation about the extent to which the American Jewish establishment actively perpetuates the Occupation. The American Jewish establishment, as we use the term, is made up of well-resourced Jewish communal organizations that claim to serve and represent American Jewry. These organizations take actions that further entrench the Occupation, making any solution in which Palestinians and Israelis live with freedom and dignity impossible. This report identifies and frames the key ways the American Jewish establishment upholds the Occupation by analyzing specific examples from the last 10 years. This document is intended to be a resource, and while it is comprehensive, it is by no means exhaustive.

This report uses the term Occupation to refer to the military rule over Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. We also recognize and discuss the ways that the discrimination and displacement inside Israel’s 1948 borders are connected to its rule in those Occupied Territories. The Occupation is a system of violence and separation that deprives Palestinians of civil, political, and economic rights. It is a central project of the Israeli government. Beyond daily military violence, the Israeli government disenfranchises Palestinians in social, political, and economic
life. The government enables and subsidizes Jewish settlements while obstructing Palestinian housing development; permits Jewish travel throughout the West Bank while restricting Palestinian movement; and provides Jews with economic opportunities while blockading vital resources from entering Gaza, which the UN anticipates will become unlivable by 2020. While Jews benefit in a narrow sense from these structural privileges, the Occupation presents a moral and political crisis for the Jewish community that cannot be ignored.

This crisis comes into sharper view given the fact that the Israeli government appears prepared to continue the status quo of military rule and disenfranchisement indefinitely, as indicated by the recent passage of the nation-state law. With the Trump administration’s recent decision to move the embassy to Jerusalem, they signaled support for this strand of Israeli politics and symbolically sealed indefinite Occupation. The direct and indirect support of the American Jewish establishment is by no means the only factor in sustaining this undemocratic status quo. Still, political, cultural, and financial support for the Israeli government’s policies from mainstream Jewish institutions plays an important role. Organizations such as the Jewish Federations of North America, and the Jewish Council on Public Affairs, and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee pressure politicians to allocate greater military support for Israel while opposing efforts to censure illegal settlement construction. They silence and intimidate voices that expose the injustices of the Occupation. Jewish institutions have created a culture in which unquestioning support for Israel is actively encouraged while the critical conversations needed to initiate the dismantling of the Occupation are not tolerated.

In short, Jewish organizations support the Occupation when they:

1. Directly fund institutions that uphold Israel’s military, economic, and political control over Palestinians’ daily lives.

2. Lobby American politicians to put unconditional support for the Israeli government and its policies above Palestinian human rights.

3. Amplify prominent individuals and organizations responsible for deepening the Occupation.

4. Promote a culture within the Jewish community that omits and denies the legitimacy of Palestinian narratives and rights.

5. Silence and intimidate those who oppose the policies of the Israeli government, shutting dissent out of the mainstream Jewish community.

Sadly, the most significant way that most American Jewish institutions support the Occupation is by failing to actively oppose it. Our institutions profess to support peace, but the majority of our communal energy and resources go towards defending Israel from criticism rather than working to end the Occupation.

However, especially in the past few years, it becomes clear that if the Jewish establishment wants to criticize unjust Israeli policies, it can and will. They have spoken out forcefully around the nation-state law, Israel’s plan to deport tens of thousands of African Refugees, and the egalitarian prayer space at the Western wall. The leaders of our community know that the core of our Judaism is a commitment to justice, tradition, and resilience. Now, our community must stop supporting the Occupation, and instead stand on the side of freedom and dignity for all Israelis and Palestinians.

* The nation-state law declares “Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people” in semi-constitutional Basic Law. It does not mention “democracy” or “equality.” See https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-israel-s-contentious-nation-state-law-everything-you-need-to-know-1.6292733
The American Jewish establishment directly funds institutions that uphold Israel’s military, economic, and political control over Palestinians’ daily lives.
Every year, American Jews bring in billions of dollars for Israel’s economy and institutions. Business investments and consumer spending in Israel by American Jews generate $14 billion, 6.4% of the country’s GDP.21 A Brandeis University study estimated in 2007 that American Jewish organizations raised $2.1 billion for Israeli organizations that year.22 While the majority of this money goes to social welfare and religious education, a significant portion goes to fund groups that explicitly entrench and expand the Occupation.23

Between 2009 and 2013, 50 American organizations channeled over $220 million dollars into the Occupied Territories, according to a Haaretz investigation of IRS forms.24 The Central Fund of Israel moved around $23 million from the United States to Israel in 2013,25 and The New York Times explains that “dozens of West Bank [settler] groups seem to view the fund as little more than a vehicle for channeling [tax-deductible] donations back to themselves.”26 Another American group, the Friends of Ir David, sent $31 million between 2006–2013 to promote settlement and tourism in the East Jerusalem Silwan neighborhood, intentionally displacing Palestinian families from their homes in the process.27,28

The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) represents 148 Federations and 300 “Network Communities,” serving as a fundraising hub to support Jews in need and distributing about $2 billion annually to communities locally and internationally.29 In addition to grants, local Federations maintain donor-advised funds, which allow donors to give large tax-deductible donations to their Federation and disperse that sum over time to organizations approved by the Federation.30 While Federations readily send donors’ money to pro-Occupation organizations, they do not always allow donors to direct their funds to organizations that have expressed concern for Palestinian rights. The Federation in San Francisco, for example, barred progressive organizations such as the American Friends Service Committee, the National Lawyers Guild, and Jewish Voice for Peace from its approved list.31 Similarly, a fund connected to the

* The authors chose 2007 due to the impact of of the great recession, and they suggest that the true total is far more, citing methodological limitations.
Los Angeles Federation recently barred a donor from disbursing funds to IfNotNow. Despite the guise of being “apolitical,” these restrictions give a free pass to individuals supporting the Occupation while censoring those who seek to fund groups speaking out against it.

One of the most successful and well-known American Jewish fundraising efforts for Israel is on behalf of the Jewish National Fund (JNF). In 2014, the JNF’s American branch reported raising $205.9 million in revenue and sending $27.2 million of that to Israel. That money often goes into occupied territory over the Green Line, the 1949 armistice line that was supposed to demarcate Israel’s border. For example, the JNF recently gave $530,000 to support a visitors center in Kfar Etzion, a settlement in the West Bank. A 2012 investigation by Israeli journalist Raviv Drucker revealed a long list of JNF-funded projects over the Green Line, including millions of dollars for infrastructure items like parks and cultural spaces inside settlements. When pressed on its connections to settlements by the American Jewish rabbinical organization T’ruah, the JNF argued—contrary to international law—that the settlements it funds are within “consensus areas of Israel.”

International law is clear that all of the settlements built on territory gained through war are illegal, regardless of which areas Israel assumes it will be able to keep through some hypothetical future peace agreement.

This erasure of Palestinian claims to the land seized by Israel in 1967 is not an isolated example. Historically, the JNF has obscured Palestinian history by building forests where the Israeli armed forces demolished Palestinian villages in 1948. The JNF has also been involved in the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem: In 2011 it was reported that 12 members of a Palestinian family, the Sumarins, were given two weeks notice to vacate their home in Silwan. The group behind the eviction was a subsidiary of the JNF, which had been trying to evict the family since 1991. Seth Morrison, a JNF board member at the time, resigned over this incident, reporting that this was not an isolated case and that the “JNF has gained ownership of other Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and transferred the properties to a settler organization, Elad, whose purpose is to ‘Judaize’ East Jerusalem.” Since Israel took control of East Jerusalem in 1967 until 2015, more than 14,000 Palestinian residents of the city had their residency revoked. As of 2017, 140,000 others have been cut off from access to municipal services by Israel’s wall.
The American Jewish establishment lobbies American politicians to put unconditional support for the Israeli government and its policies above Palestinian human rights.
American Jewish institutions prioritize unconditional support for Israel as a core element of their political lobbying efforts, often equating support for Israel with support for the Jewish community overall.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) funnels millions of dollars into campaigns that “strengthen, protect and promote the U.S.-Israel relationship in ways that enhance the security of the United States and Israel.” In 2015, pro-Israel lobbying totaled $4.2 million, with AIPAC spending more than three-quarters of that sum. While AIPAC does not directly contribute to political campaigns, it directs donors towards candidates whose views on Israel align with their positions. Additionally, AIPAC’s educational arm, the American Israel Education Foundation, sends a large congressional delegation to Israel every two years. One congressman described these trips as “virtually obligatory,” and The New Yorker described them as “lavish” and designed to win elected officials over to Israel’s perspective on regional issues. Local Jewish Community Relations Councils (JCRC) also regularly send politicians on trips to Israel in order to bolster support of their pro-Israel-at-any-cost agenda.

This agenda to increase American political and economic support includes massive amounts of military aid. Under the Obama administration, which many Jewish institutions often criticized for being insufficiently supportive of Israel, the U.S. committed an unprecedented $38 billion in military aid to Israel over 10 years. American Jewish support is by no means the only reason for this aid; significant lobbying also comes from Christian evangelical groups. U.S. military contractors are major beneficiaries as well since the majority of the aid must be spent on U.S. corporations, which develop the arms and technology Israel employs. While Israel has legitimate security concerns and needs, this U.S. aid both directly supports military rule over Palestinians as well as provides Israel economic ability to compensate for the high cost of maintaining the Occupation.

In addition to direct lobbying for Israel, Jewish organizations also frequently condemn any criticism of Israel’s Occupation, or any perceived failure to defend Israel from criticism. When President Obama decided not to veto the December 2016 United Nations Security Council Resolution which reaffirmed that Israel’s settlements are illegal under international law, the condemnation and silence from every other national American Jewish organization demonstrates an investment in a status quo that benefits settlement expansion over Palestinian rights.

Unfortunately, too few American Jewish organizations condemn the Occupation and settlement expansion. In this case, only Americans for Peace Now, Jewish Voice for Peace, J Street, and the New Israel Fund supported the U.S. administration’s abstention in the resolution vote. The condemnation and silence from the mainstream Jewish establishment when he relocated the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. This decision symbolically ended the role of the

* AIPAC is supported by numerous American Jewish institutions but is not technically a Jewish organization.
U.S. as a neutral party in the peace process while normalizing the violence and inequality that exists in Jerusalem between Jews and Palestinians. By moving the embassy to Jerusalem and recognizing it as Israel’s capital, Trump gave a green light to continued annexation of East Jerusalem and beyond. Rick Jacobs, the President of the Union for Reform Judaism, said, “President Trump has affirmed an age-old dream of the Jewish People,” and the Anti-Defamation League “celebrated the historic milestone.” New York Senator Chuck Schumer, the highest ranking Jewish Democrat in Washington, D.C., applauded the decision and called it “long overdue.”

In addition to lobbying for Israel, many local Jewish institutions lobby for bills condemning criticism of Israel, primarily through supporting both federal and state legislative efforts to counter the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) of Israel.* Many variations of this legislation implicitly erase the distinction between Israel and the Occupied Territories or explicitly protect the Occupation by penalizing the boycott of settlements, a significant shift of U.S. policy which has always been critical of settlements at least in name. The legislation is opposed by human rights and civil liberties groups as an infringement on First Amendment protected speech. While IfNotNow does not take a unified position on the BDS movement, it opposes attempts to silence this form of nonviolent political protest.

Local Jewish institutions have played significant roles in encouraging the passage of such legislation. For example, the Indianapolis JCRC strongly backed HB 1378, which required that the state’s pension fund divest from businesses that “boycott, divest from, or sanction” not only Israel inside the Green Line but also “businesses that are based in...territories controlled by the Jewish state of Israel.” The Indianapolis JCRC bills itself as a “statewide leader in combating the delegitimization of Israel proliferated by the BDS movement.”

Continuing this trend, in June of 2016, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order barring state agencies from contracting with businesses or organizations that support BDS after intense lobbying by the New York JCRC, the Israel Action Network (an initiative of the JFNA and Jewish Council for Public Affairs), and others. Dov Hikind, a Jewish State Assembly member who supported the executive order,

* The Palestinian call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions started in 2005 and demands an end to the Occupation, equality for Palestinians living in Israel, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees.
said it was intended to scare groups and individuals into remaining silent about their support for BDS. “By doing this, in a sense, anyone who wants to participate in a BDS thing will think ten times,” Hikind told Politico.

At the political level, support for candidates from Jewish institutions, donors, and fellow elected officials is often tied to their record on Israel. This has created a disturbing dynamic in which support for the Jewish community has come to mean support for the Israeli government, erasing other priorities and concerns for Jewish communities.

The prioritization of Israel has also led to the toleration and sometimes, direct embrace, of political figures regardless of their connections to anti-Semitic groups. After the Forward reported that Sebastian Gorka, a former national security deputy assistant to President Trump, has ties stretching back decades to an anti-Semitic group in Hungary, The Jerusalem Post invited him to defend himself at their annual conference in New York, where he spoke to many of the leaders of American Jewish institutions. Similarly, when Trump tapped Stephen Bannon, who helped build Breitbart News into the face of the anti-Semitic alt-right, to be Chief Strategist, AIPAC, JCPA, and others refused to publicly comment and failed to offer a unified condemnation of his appointment from Jewish leaders. Bannon’s Jewish defenders include Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, who wrote in Breitbart, “How can a man who publicly fights BDS, stands as a foremost opponent of the Jew-hating genocidal regime in Iran, and opens a Breitbart bureau in Jerusalem so that Israel’s voice can be heard be labeled an antisemite?”

The alliance between segments of the alt-right and pro-Occupation groups is rooted in an incredibly narrow conception of Israeli and Jewish self-interest and a shared disregard for Palestinian lives.
The American Jewish establishment amplifies prominent individuals and organizations responsible for deepening the Occupation.
Prominent mainstream Jewish institutions play host to and even partner with some of the most right-wing, pro-Occupation voices in Israeli politics, including individuals who advocate for the Israeli government’s perpetual military and political control over Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The following are profiles of just three individuals embraced by mainstream Jewish institutions despite their support for the Occupation.

Naftali Bennett

In 2016, Hillel International joined Israeli Minister of Diaspora Affairs Naftali Bennett’s $66 million “Mosaic United” public-private partnership. The initiative aims to stop criticism of Israel on college campuses and curb assimilation among American Jews, goals which aligned Hillel with the Jewish nationalist agenda of Bennett’s pro-settlement, religiously conservative Jewish Home party. The program’s goal of stifling dissent on Israel, combined with its regressive focus on Orthodox conceptions of “the Jewish family unit,” have led critics to call it “a program based on a war against assimilation and critical discourse” and an attempt to turn “the complex ties with the Diaspora into a political fiefdom” of the religious settler movement.

As a leading partner in Israel’s governing coalition since 2013, Bennett and his party have served as a firewall against policies that could harm or deter the settlement project. Bennett’s frequent denials of Palestinian rights even extends to refuting the fact that Palestinians have a unique national identity. In a 2014 BBC interview, he said, “We only have one homeland, the Arabs have twenty-two.” After Donald Trump was elected president, Bennett called on Israel to seize the opportunity and begin to annex the parts of the West Bank still under full Israeli control.

Bennett’s support for annexation of the Occupied Territories put him at odds with the majority of American Jews, but he has nevertheless been a frequent guest of mainstream Jewish institutions. In 2013, he spoke at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan alongside Dan Senor, the Republican foreign policy adviser and author of Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel’s Economic Miracle. On one of American Jewry’s most prominent stages, Senor and Bennett painted an entirely one-sided, pro-military, and anti-Arab vision of Israel. While giving lip service to coexistence and a limited form of Palestinian self-governance, Bennett reiterated his unequivocal opposition to the two-state solution. At one point, Bennett held up an ancient Judean coin. “This coin... was found outside the Green Line [in] what’s called the ‘Occupied Territories,’ where two Jews were probably doing business,” he said. “And they were speaking the same Hebrew I speak today, living at the very same place that I live, that I work today, and it’s my direct ancestors. Now you tell me—can I occupy my own home?” The line, a glib dismissal of the Palestinians’ historic claim to the land and current experience of Israeli military control, got a round of applause from the audience.

The Solomon Schechter School of Manhattan hosted Bennett in 2015, giving him a platform in a mainstream Jewish educational institution. Bennett was criticized for speaking at the Conservative movement-affiliated school by the ultra-Orthodox Chief Rabbi in Israel, who was angry that Bennett would choose to establish ties with a non-Orthodox movement that “distances Jews from the path of the Jewish people.” By coming off as the “good guy” in comparison to the ultra-Orthodox rabbinate, Bennett was able to portray himself not only as a moderate, but as a defender of Judaism and Jewish values writ large. The stunt earned him praise from the Solomon Schechter of Manhattan’s head of school, who wrote a glowing review of his visit in the liberal Forward.

Naftali Bennett speaking at a conference. Miriam Alster/Flash90
Dani Dayan

As Israel’s Consul General in New York, Dani Dayan has earned mainstream recognition despite his longstanding ties to the settler movement. Dayan is the former chairman of the Yesha Council, the political arm of the settler movement. He is an opponent of an independent Palestinian state and called “Israel’s moral claim” to the West Bank “unassailable.” As a representative of the State of Israel, Dayan represents the growing part of the Israeli government which does not even nominally support the two-state solution while advancing Occupation through settlement construction.

Initially, Dayan was appointed to serve as Israel’s ambassador to Brazil. Met with opposition in both Israel and Brazil, Dayan’s name was eventually withdrawn. While his New York appointment also sparked some controversy, American Jewish leaders, including some notable liberals, have warmed to Dayan. Despite his combative opinion articles and social media posts, he has expressed concern about the treatment of non-Orthodox Jews in Israel, which has endeared him to some mainstream figures in the American Jewish community, particularly the Reform and Conservative movements as they struggle to open the space for non-Orthodox Judaism in Israel.

The New York Times glowingly described him as “articulate and charming, a lively and provocative conversationalist,” and he has been a frequent guest at Jewish functions around the Greater New York City area and in other parts of the country. The UJA-Federation of New York hosted a welcome reception for him after his appointment. He has also spoken to Jewish students on college campuses, including at least one appearance sponsored by Hillel. He has also addressed Jewish Federations in New Jersey, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and the Lehigh Valley. The Cincinnati event was co-sponsored by the local Jewish Community Relations Council.
Sheldon Adelson

One of the most recognizable donors to Donald Trump, other prominent Republicans, and Israeli far-right elements, casino magnate Sheldon Adelson has long defended the settlements and opposed the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Adelson’s position on a Palestinian state puts him far outside of the consensus of the American Jewish mainstream. Adelson considers the idea of a two-state solution suicidal for Israel, and believes that “the purpose of the existence of the Palestinians is to destroy Israel.” Still, Adelson’s money is welcomed by mainstream Jewish organizations, whether it’s Gateways, a Massachusetts-based organization that provides special education services in Jewish schools, or Taglit-Birthright Israel. Over the years, Adelson has invested his money in various pro-Occupation political projects: founding a pro-Netanyahu free daily newspaper in Israel, establishing himself as a “mega-donor” for American Republican political candidates who mirror his views on Israel, and giving lavish amounts of money to various American Jewish and pro-Israel organizations, notably the Maccabee Task Force and the Zionist Organization of America. A former donor to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Adelson eventually shifted his money to the Israeli-American Council in order to create a “harder-line alternative to AIPAC.”

Due to strict financial contribution laws in Israel, Adelson was somewhat hindered in his ability to financially support Netanyahu. Rather than simply donate money, Adelson helped found the Israeli tabloid Israel Hayom in 2007, subsidizing its losses with $200 million and turning it into the most widely distributed newspaper in Israel. The free newspaper supports the political agenda of the Netanyahu government.

The American Jewish Establishment readily accepts his money and praises him on some of the community’s biggest stages. For example, the Birthright Israel Foundation gave Miriam and Sheldon Adelson the Guardians of the Jewish Future award in April 2018 after rescheduling the gala which was due to be protested, supposedly to ensure that Adelson could receive the award in person.

Adelson is looking for opportunities to influence popular opinion on Israel and zeroing in on young American Jews. Hillel in particular has let its agenda be shaped by Adelson through his financial support for the Campus Fellows program. In 2011, the Adelsons donated $1 million to the Jewish Agency to fund the program, which places young Israelis on college campuses to recruit students for Birthright trips and other pro-Israel activities. As recently as 2015, the Adelsons continued to donate $3 million annually to the program, which has more than 75 fellows running programs on over 120 campuses. As the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement began to grow at universities, Adelson created the Maccabee Task Force, an organization with annual campus budgets in the “low six figures” at over 40 schools that helps students create programs related to Israel. Despite an effort to rebrand the program as more open and progressive, the agenda remains the same: to build a firewall against criticism of Israeli government policies.
The American Jewish establishment promotes a culture within the Jewish community that omits and denies the legitimacy of Palestinian narratives and rights.
Many American Jewish institutions disregard or blatantly deny the experiences of Palestinians living under Israeli military control. American Jewish institutions create educational materials and organize trips that encourage a love for Israeli culture while concealing the reality of the Occupation. This creates a social and political climate in which support for Israel is encouraged while the Occupation is ignored, unquestioned, or fiercely defended.

Many Jewish youth groups and summer camps teach young Jews about Israel without including any Palestinian perspectives. For example, NFTY, the youth group of the Reform movement, provides extensive resources for Israel advocacy, travel options, and youth group programming, but little-to-nothing about the occupation. Former participants in Jewish youth programs have shared their experience of receiving a censored and one-sided education about Israel. A Camp Ramah staff member during the 2014 Gaza War stated that, “Despite the thousands of Palestinian casualties in addition to the few dozen Israeli deaths, we were not allowed to discuss the issue with our campers, for fear our politics ‘would ruin’ their summer. Additionally, the word Occupation was never mentioned, and only Israeli deaths were remembered.”

These stories are just a few examples of how American Jewish youth organizations often present history and politics that erase the realities of Occupation for Palestinians.

Another way American Jewish organizations perpetuate the Occupation is by propagating educational materials such as maps of Israel without the Green Line. For example, summer camps affiliated with Bnei Akiva, a Modern Orthodox youth movement, use maps which blatantly deny the distinction between the state of Israel and territory under Israeli military control, minimizing the importance of the Palestinians who live there. When asked about the use of these maps, Arye Sokol of Camp Moshava in Pennsylvania responded, “Generally, Bnei Akivah tries to stay away from politics as much as we can...we do believe ideally that Israel would be all ours. So making a map that suddenly explains the Green Line, it’s a deeper discussion, but for the most part we ignore it because we’re not trying to get into this deeper controversy.” Bnei Akiva’s operations director, Bini Dachs, put it more bluntly: “We use the map of Israel.” The issue of synagogues and Hebrew schools using maps without the Green Line is so pervasive that the J Street Education Fund launched an entire campaign about putting the Green Line back on the map. While some organizations like the Union for Reform Judaism are working to incorporate the Green Line in their maps, the pluralistic Camp Interlaken stood by their commitment to exclude it.

American Jewish organizations further entrench the Occupation when they keep young people ignorant of its existence by only using one-sided education materials such as those provided by StandWithUs, the right-wing pro-Israel advocacy organization. StandWithUs’ reach is broad; they partner with over 750 organizations from around the world including

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* For more stories of American Jewish youth organizations presenting a one-sided narrative on the history and politics of Israel/Palestine, please visit https://younevertoldme.org/. This INN project includes stories from URJ, USY, Solomon Schechter, Ramah, BBYO, and NFTY.
mainstream organizations like Hillel and Jewish federations as well as synagogues, high-schools, and colleges. They provide fact sheets, lesson plans, and brochures, all of which omit Palestinian narratives and deny the harsh reality of living under Israeli military control. In one “fact sheet,” the organization downplays Israel’s control over Palestinian lives as mere “security policies,” and denies the Palestinian identity of 20% of Israel’s citizens, while ignoring Israel’s anti-democratic military Occupation:

[Israel] is a multicultural liberal democracy whose legal system upholds equal rights, liberties, and protections for all of its citizens... The Palestinians are not citizens or residents of Israel and do not wish to be. They are a separate national movement with their own governments. Israel implemented security policies only to separate Palestinian terrorists from their intended victims, Israeli Jews.

In reality, the Israeli government controls the lives of millions of Palestinians, on both sides of the Green Line, including their access to resources and basic civil rights. Human Rights Watch reported that Israel has “prevented Palestinian villages from upgrading or building homes, schools, health clinics, wells, and water cisterns, blocked Palestinians from accessing roads and agricultural lands, failed to provide electricity, sewage, water, and other utilities to Palestinian communities, and rejected their applications for such services.”

Similarly, while StandWithUs argues that the border wall is necessary for Israeli security, this flies in the face of analysis from the Shin Bet, an Israeli intelligence agency, which finds that the border wall is ineffective. According to the Human Rights Watch report, these tactics of Occupation make Palestinians’ lives exceedingly difficult on a day-to-day basis but “often have no conceivable security justification.”

StandWithUs’ educational materials ignore the Israeli government’s role in denying Palestinians rights and even goes as far as to shift the blame onto Palestinians themselves.
American Jewish Institutions further deny the legitimacy of Palestinian narratives by refusing to host or recognize events led by Palestinian activists, events that criticize Israeli policies, or events that educate the public about the reality of the Occupation. On college campuses, Hillel International’s “standards of partnership” prohibit partnering with, housing, or hosting “organizations, groups, or speakers that as a matter of policy or practice ... support boycott of, divestment from, or sanctions against the State of Israel.” Given that the call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) has been broadly adopted by much of Palestinian civil society as a nonviolent means of advocating for the rights of Palestinians—who live under Occupation in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, face discrimination inside 1948 Israel, and are refugees in the diaspora—by default this policy casts many Palestinian activists and their arguments as outside the bounds of acceptable political discourse.

Applied broadly, Hillel’s “standards of partnership” mean that not only are Palestinians excluded, Jewish students are also denied the opportunity to critically engage with Israel’s history. In May of 2016, Brown University Hillel tried to cancel an event called “Jews Facing the Nakba.” The event was slated to be on Yom Ha’atzmaut, Israel’s day of Independence, and to feature three films by Zochrot, a group that aims in part to educate people about the Palestinian experience of that day and of continued Palestinian displacement. Students met for this event despite the official cancellation.

Similarly, in 2012, Binghamton University student Ben Sheridan arranged a showing of “5 Broken Cameras,” a 2011 film documenting Palestinian protests in the West Bank village of Bil’in, and a talk with Iyad Burnat, a Palestinian activist who leads weekly nonviolent demonstrations against the Occupation and the wall encroaching on his village of Bil’in. Sheridan subsequently was compelled to resign from his position on the board of Hillel-affiliated Bearcats for Israel and from his paid internship with Masa Israel, at the request of campus Hillel leadership. Hillel’s policies silence the conversations around Israel/Palestine, denying Palestinians a platform to speak and Jewish students an opportunity to engage with their stories.

In terms of scope, arguably the most significant program that teaches young Jews to support Israel is Birthright, which has sent over 600,000 people to Israel for free since 1999. At $3,000 per participant, Birthright (funded in part by the Israeli government, local Jewish Federations, the Jewish Federations of North America, and individuals like billionaire Sheldon Adelson) spent $84.4 million in 2015 alone to send young Jews to Israel—without informing them of the reality of the Occupation. Participants on Birthright trips travel across the country, getting an “immersive experience” of Israel, yet they never encounter the systemic oppression that is enacted on approximately 4.9 million Palestinians living in the militarily Occupied Territories. In the summer of 2018, participants on Birthright trips have taken to social media to speak out about the lack of Palestinian narratives on Birthright trips—for example, the maps that all participants receive, which do not have the Green Line and thus erases the Occupation of millions of Palestinians.
In Tours that Bind, Shaul Kelner, professor of Sociology and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University, contrasts the way Palestinian and Jewish narratives are told on Birthright trips. He explains that Palestinians’ perspectives are conveyed so that “Arab nationalist narratives command little if any emotional weight on the tours.” In contrast, Kelner describes how participants learn about Israel’s culture and history through dramatic storytelling as well as physical excursions. This inequality is compounded as participants are “guided through processes of self-exploration that will enable them to link their personal stories to collective Jewish narratives, which they can thereby embrace as their own.” Kelner argues that this asymmetry in how tour guides treat the narratives impacts how participants relate to the region. As a result, the thousands of American Jews who attend these trips each year gain an appreciation for and an attachment to Israel while leaving the Occupation largely unchallenged.

In all of these ways and more, mainstream Jewish organizations have perpetuated a culture that devalues Palestinian lives and blames them for their own deaths in order to deflect any criticism of the Israeli state’s behavior. A recent example of this was the statement by the ADL the day after at least 60 non-violent Palestinian protesters had been murdered saying: “All parties should explore all possible approaches to resolve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza quickly and peacefully in a manner that directly provides for the needs of civilians who are the ultimate victims of Hamas’ policies and the ensuing conflict.” At every turn, mainstream Jewish organizations’ efforts to respond to the killings of protestors dismissed the reasons for the protest, erased the role of grassroots activists, and overstated the role of Hamas in order to absolve Israel from legitimate critiques of its human rights record.
The American Jewish establishment silences and intimidates those who oppose the policies of the Israeli government, shutting dissent out of the mainstream Jewish community.
The practices that attempt to marginalize critics of the Occupation are numerous and widespread. This section focuses on how the Jewish establishment excludes organizations, holds budgets hostage, refuses honest interfaith relationships, and attacks individuals—all in order to maintain the pro-Occupation status quo.

**Excluding Organizations from Umbrella Institutions**

Jewish communal spaces often vilify and shut out organizations that challenge the Jewish establishment’s line on Israel/Palestine.

J Street, the self-described “pro-Israel, pro-peace” lobby, has been publicly attacked by the Jewish establishment over and over again since its founding in 2007. In 2008, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, then president of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), described statements from J Street as “morally deficient, profoundly out of touch with Jewish sentiment and also appallingly naïve.” Under Yoffie and his successor Rick Jacobs, the URJ eventually warmed to J Street, but liberals and conservatives continue to react harshly to J Street’s agenda. In 2014, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which was founded to represent all major streams of American Jewry, voted against allowing J Street to join. Four years later, J Street is still not a member of the Conference of Presidents.

Jewish Voice for Peace and its members have been demonized and excluded from the mainstream Jewish community to an even greater extent. For its support of the nonviolent movement to boycott, divest, and sanction (BDS) Israel until Palestinians have equal rights, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) is both frequently called antisemitic and accused of legitimizing terrorist violence. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has named JVP as one of the top 10 “anti-Israel groups,” and maintains a profile on the organization. JVP has been explicitly excluded from most mainstream Jewish organizations and members sometimes fear that their professional lives and social ties could be threatened by the hostility towards the organization. JVP is seen as so toxic by the American Jewish establishment that even partnering with them for an event unrelated to Israel can result in a loss of support for Jewish groups. In March 2017, the Hillel at Ohio State University expelled Jewish LGBTQ group B’nai Keshet. B’nai Keshet—the only group of its kind at OSU—had partnering with JVP and others to raise money for housing and other basic needs for LGBTQ refugees. As a result, Hillel withdrew funding and staff support for the group, explicitly choosing a hardline on Israel over support for queer Jewish students.

On college campuses, mainstream Jewish groups have explicitly excluded both J Street and JVP for criticizing Israeli policy. At UCLA, for example, the JVP chapter met many times with the leading Hillel rabbi and filled out an extensive questionnaire about their political views but their application for membership was ultimately rejected based on their position on the call for BDS. On the UC Berkeley campus, the Jewish Student Union voted to reject J Street U’s request for membership in 2011. While J Street U remains affiliated with Berkeley Hillel, J Street U was again rejected from the Jewish Student Union in 2013, this time because it hosted anti-Occupation veterans from the Israeli Defence Forces through the organization Breaking the Silence.

The exclusion of anti-Occupation Jewish groups from campus Jewish organizations affiliated with Hillel, generally based on the organizations restrictive “standards of partnership” discussed previously, spurred the founding of the Open Hillel campaign,
When Muslim organizations that support Palestinian rights stand by those convictions publicly, they find interfaith collaboration with mainstream Jewish organizations difficult if not impossible.

which seeks to challenge political redlines. In 2013, Swarthmore Hillel announced it would no longer follow Hillel’s restrictive guidelines, followed quickly by the Hillel-affiliated Vassar Jewish Union. The students, organizations and the colleges themselves were blasted by Jewish institutional leaders and donors after calling for a more open conversation about Israel/Palestine.

Holding Budgets Hostage

Mainstream Jewish nonprofits and donors fund organizations that support or remain silent about the Occupation while ostracizing organizations that speak out for Palestinian freedom and dignity. In 2010, the Jewish Community Federation (JCF) in San Francisco announced strict funding guidelines that prohibited JCF funds from being allocated to organizations that advocate or endorse the BDS movement “in whole or in part.” Organizations know that their budgets are on the line if they criticize Israel or partner with groups or individuals that support BDS. This stops them not only from taking a stance on BDS but also from speaking out against the Occupation at all, out of fear of losing funding. Indeed, IfNotNow itself was targeted in such a way, when a $5,000 grant from a donor-advised fund was blocked by the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles.

Picking and Choosing Interfaith Partnerships

The strict rules that govern how Jewish organizations can discuss Israel/Palestine also makes interfaith engagement between Jews and Muslims more difficult. Taher Herzallah and Ben Lorber, two Palestinian solidarity organizers working on campuses explain, “In too many interfaith partnerships, Muslims are required to put ‘relationships before politics’ and the ‘local over international’, effectively stifling their political agency.” The Israel guidelines enforced by Jewish groups require many Muslim organizations to keep conversations about Israel/Palestine off the table in Jewish/Muslim relationships. When Muslim organizations that support Palestinian rights stand by those convictions publicly, they find interfaith collaboration with mainstream Jewish organizations difficult if not impossible. For example, many Jewish organizations refuse to partner with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the preeminent American-Muslim civil rights organization, because of its support for Palestinian rights. Instead of
breaking this precedent and partnering with a fellow civil rights organization on domestic issues, the ADL published a report in 2015 arguing that CAIR’s support for Palestinian rights undermines its broader civil rights work.\textsuperscript{157} This type of litmus test drives a wedge between Jewish and Muslim communities in the U.S., and spreads the mistaken notion that our communities cannot work together.

Redlines like these also impact interfaith partnerships between Jewish and Christian communities as well. Major U.S. churches including the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ have voted to divest their pension funds from companies profiting off of Israeli Occupation. In a letter to the Presbyterian delegates, the president of the URJ called their decision to divest from the Occupation a “vicious attack on Judaism,” saying, “[w]e want to partner with you, but your support for BDS will make this much harder.”\textsuperscript{158} These accusatory reactions, which equate Judaism with the Israeli government’s policy of endless Occupation, undermine the possibility for healthy interfaith relationships between mainstream Jewish organizations and churches that support Palestinian rights. The effect is to shut our community off from important partnerships.

**Attacking Activists, Journalists, and Professors**

Mainstream Jewish institutions also target individuals for speaking out against the Occupation. When Simone Zimmerman was named the Jewish outreach coordinator for Bernie Sanders’ 2016 presidential campaign, right-wing activists released screenshots of a personal Facebook post from March 2015 in which she criticized Prime Minister Netanyahu for coming, against the will of the Obama administration, to speak to Congress in opposition to the Iran Deal and criticized the most recent war in Gaza. While she had since edited the post and apologized for the profanity in its text, many prominent Jewish individuals called for her dismissal.\textsuperscript{159} Zionist Organization of America president Morton Klein called Zimmerman an anti-Israel “extremist” who believes that “Jews should simply die.”\textsuperscript{160} Zimmerman was quickly suspended from her work on the campaign. The establishment, determined to prevent an anti-Occupation Jew from representing the community on the national stage, succeeding in pressuring the campaign to fire her.

Pro-Occupation groups also use “watch lists” to vilify individuals and organizations. Canary Mission is a database that documents Palestinian rights activists, claiming to “expose those who promote lies and attacks on Israel and the Jewish people.”\textsuperscript{161} The site lists photos and names of Palestinian, Jewish, and other activists, encouraging employers to blacklist them. Border control officers at the Israeli border have even used Canary Mission dossiers to deny people entry into Israel or Israeli-controlled territories.\textsuperscript{162} Despite its high profile and toxic tactics, mainstream Jewish organizations have generally refused to speak out against Canary Mission. After years of speculation, an October 2018 exposé in Haaretz found that a foundation controlled by the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco funded Canary Mission’s to the tune of at least $100,000.* As BDS activists have found success on campus, the Israel on Campus Coalition has escalated their tactics and went so far as to hire a political consultant to launch a sophisticated campaign against a student-led BDS resolution at Ohio State University.\textsuperscript{163} At George Washington University, two men dressed head to toe as canaries came to intimidate student senators before a vote on a divestment resolution.\textsuperscript{164}

Similarly, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) claims it provides “accurate and balanced coverage of Israel and the Middle East.”\textsuperscript{165} Contradicting their stated goals, CAMERA systematically tried to skew Wikipedia entries about Israel/Palestine.\textsuperscript{166} This matches their reputation as a “rightist attack group”\textsuperscript{167} that writes articles to intimidate journalists from outlets like The New York Times\textsuperscript{168} and Teen Vogue.\textsuperscript{169} They describe J Street as anti-Israel and generally characterize any support for Palestinians as both anti-Israel and anti-Semitic.\textsuperscript{170, 171} In the academic sphere, the AMCHA Initiative, an organization that claims to protect Jewish students, published a list of professors who have ever called for an academic boycott of Israel.\textsuperscript{172} Make no mistake: this is a blacklist, much like the anti-communist blacklists that put Jews and others out of work a half-century ago.

The constant monitoring of activists, professors, and journalists for anything that could be perceived as “anti-Israel” intimidates those who wish to speak out against the Occupation and contributes to the maintenance of the pro-Occupation status quo. 🕳️

Conclusion

The American Jewish establishment’s commitment to support Israel’s Occupation is out of touch with a growing generation of young Jews and others that demand an end to the status quo. During the 2014 war on Gaza, a Pew poll found that more young Americans blamed Israel more than Hamas (29 percent to 21 percent), and a Gallup poll discovered that this generation deemed Israel’s actions unjustifiable at a two-to-one rate. Similarly, J Street polled Jews in 2016 and reported that 78 percent of American Jews reject expansionist settlement policy. As more American Jews speak out against the system that deprives Palestinians of civil, political, and economic rights, the legitimacy of the Jewish establishment and its leadership will continue to erode until they too speak out. The American Jewish establishment has shown time and time again in recent memory that they can and will speak out against unjust Israeli policies—from the passage of the nation-state law, to the plan to deport tens of thousands of African Refugees, to the egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall.

The American Jewish community must stand on the side of freedom and dignity for all Israelis and Palestinians. Until that moment, none of us can remain silent. For those who have felt that taking a stand is too complicated, who fear retaliation from their community, or who haven’t felt the urgency to act: **Now is the time.**
### Abbreviations

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADL</td>
<td>Anti-Defamation League</td>
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<td>AIPAC</td>
<td>American Israel Public Affairs Committee</td>
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<td>BDS</td>
<td>Boycott, divestment, and sanctions</td>
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<td>CAIR</td>
<td>Council on American-Islamic Relations</td>
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<td>CAMERA</td>
<td>Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America</td>
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<td>JCF</td>
<td>Jewish Community Federation</td>
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<td>JCRC</td>
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<td>JFNA</td>
<td>Jewish Federations of North America</td>
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<td>JNF</td>
<td>Jewish National Fund</td>
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<td>JVP</td>
<td>Jewish Voice for Peace</td>
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<td>URJ</td>
<td>Union for Reform Judaism</td>
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References


[4] Ibid.


[19] Ibid.


