Israel and Apartheid in International Discourse

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While Israel's leadership takes pride in the state's liberal policies, particularly in comparison to those of its non-democratic neighbors, international discourse appears to debate, if not question, Israel's democratic character. In particular, it appears that Israel is increasingly compared to South Africa's former apartheid regime,[1] a system of institutionalized racial segregation in which a white minority harshly oppressed a large black majority. While the adoption of the loaded term "apartheid" is not uncommon in criticism relating to perceived institutionalized racism in additional liberal and democratic regimes,[2] it is generally internally focused. In other words, it is unusual for states to accuse other states of practicing apartheid-like measures, all the more so when such accusations are systemized and ongoing.

The threat of Israel's isolation in the international arena has penetrated the Israeli public debate and is well known. However, there are insufficient concrete findings and data regarding when and how Israel's image as a non-democratic apartheid state became rooted in international discourse; the extent to which it is overtly apparent; and its fluctuations over the years. The absence of such data enables decision makers, who are weary of allocating scarce resources to amorphous threats, to argue that channeling funds to deal with Israel's international standing is less urgent than the need to address tangible and imminent threats. To this end, the current article strives to document the existence of international questioning regarding Israel's democratic character and explore the perils that this trend encompasses by providing qualitative and quantitative findings relating to the apartheid analogy.

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The article begins by explaining the concept of apartheid and providing background to the international struggle against the South African apartheid with which Israel appears to be equated, as well as to the anti-Israel campaign. Following this is a section that verifies the existence of the Israel-apartheid analogy through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of international English media items. This is followed by a section on the surfacing of the Israel-apartheid analogy in the UN. The article concludes with policy recommendations in light of the central findings presented.

The International Struggle against South African Apartheid and the Global Anti-Israel Campaign: Milestones and Methods

The South African Case

South Africa's international prestige began to erode in 1946 when its racial policies were debated in the first session of the United Nations. In 1948, the South African National Party won the general elections, and the elected Prime Minister, D. F. Malan, embarked on official efforts to separate South Africa's small white minority from its large non-white majority. Laws enforcing apartheid such as the Group Areas Act,[3] the Lands Act,[4] and the Population Registration Act[5] are clear examples of the institutionalization of the racial segregation upon which the South African apartheid regime was based. Unlike other states that may have blatantly defied international norms in the same period, South Africa's international standing suffered a severe blow because its racial repression appeared more extraordinary than other governments' similar militarization, bureaucratic control, and use of torture.[6]

In the mid-1980s, alongside the transnational anti-apartheid movement's (AAM) efforts to equate support for South Africa as support for racism, the divide grew between Congress and the Reagan administration, which pursued the policy of "constructive engagement."[7] Anti-apartheid activists began staging protests at the South African embassy in Washington, and thereafter at South African consulates elsewhere in the US. The visibility of such acts increased as demonstrations began to include prominent personalities and members of Congress.[8] In 1985, bipartisan concessions on partial sanctions were reached in open opposition to the administration's policy of constructive engagement. In 1986 international criticism of South Africa grew, and bipartisan efforts succeeded in overriding President

Raegan's veto of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (CAAA), marking a dramatic shift in US policy.

As such, and against President Reagan's initial will, the United States began imposing restrictions on new investment in South Africa, including stronger restrictions on governmental loans, imports, trade assistance, and tourism promotion, and fewer preferred tax agreements with South Africa.[9] These steps significantly boosted the global momentum for sanctions, with Britain accepting multilateral demands to sanction South Africa because of the social costs of appearing to tolerate racism. This was also the case with the Commonwealth and Europe, which following the US lead, imposed economic sanctions on South Africa, and Japan, which adopted bilateral restrictions.[10]

The UN played an important role in monitoring these sanctions and the international community's overall relations with South Africa. This was done through the establishment of an organizational platform for this purpose that included the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, composed of 19 states, and the Center against Apartheid – a UN office in the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs.[11] The UN compiled an annual list of institutions giving indirect support to the South African apartheid regime, based on the rationale that sensitizing the international community would pressure the South African government to amend its racist policies.[12] Eight years later, in 1994, South Africa held its first democratic multi-racial elections, and the state's apartheid era came to an official end.

Contrary to the South African case, the analogy to apartheid in Israel hinges on opinion rather than fact. Moreover, the idea of separation between Israelis and Palestinians in the stretch of land between Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea is linked to security issues and was officially backed by the UN.

The Israeli Case
Israel defines itself as a Jewish democratic state. While the exact meaning of such a formula is widely disputed, Israel's Jewishness is firmly recognized by many of the same scholars who hold diverging view on its democratic performance.[13] Since 1947 the international community has envisaged partition, rather than a single state, as the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 181, supported by a two thirds majority on November 29, 1947, clearly stipulates the creation of an Arab state and a Jewish state in Palestine as the means

to resolve competing national claims over the land by the Zionist and Palestinian national movements.[14] This partition, which enabled the creation of a Jewish state in what was Mandatory Palestine, was not accepted by the Arab inhabitants of Palestine or the surrounding countries, and the two sides have been immersed in conflict ever since.

In June 1967 Israel gained control over the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Israel's claims to these territories, along with the question of Palestinians living in the latter three areas, continue to pose a long term challenge to Israel's diplomacy, notwithstanding many rounds of negotiations over the years in an attempt to reach a peaceful solution. In 1979 Israel signed a peace agreement with Egypt, and a peace agreement with Jordan was signed in 1994. In June 2002, in a wave of ongoing terror attacks, the Israeli cabinet decided to erect a physical barrier separating Israel from most of the West Bank with the declared objective of regulating the entry of Palestinians from the West Bank into Israel; this separation barrier was soon dubbed by critics as the "apartheid wall." In 2005 Israel withdrew unilaterally from the Gaza Strip, a move that included the dismantling of Israeli settlements. To this day Israel's borders (in the East and West) are not internationally recognized.

Although popular sentiment may attribute the international questioning of Israel's democracy to recent years, the genesis of the idea that the very establishment of Israel is based on racism dates back to the 1975 UN resolution defining Zionism as a form of racism.[15] Despite the fact that the resolution was later rescinded,[16] this very debate created a dent in Israel's international image.

The September 2001 UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance[17] was the next significant milestone in cultivating the idea that Israel is a racist, apartheid state. This conference culminated with an anti-Israel declaration,[18] endorsed by hundreds of civil society organizations in attendance, calling on the international community to isolate Israel "as an apartheid state, as in the case of South Africa."[19]

July 2005 can be noted as the following milestone, with the issuing of the Palestinian Civil Society Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel,[20] endorsed by over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations, forming the BDS movement (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions). BDS advocates a full-fledged boycott of Israel until three stated goals are achieved: (a) end of the occupation of all Arab lands and dismantlement of the "Wall"; (b)

recognition of the rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and (c) respect for the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.[21] The first goal referring to Israel's occupation of Arab lands remains ambiguous, with BDS leaders stating their vision regarding a single Palestinian state, or in other words, the end of the Jewish state.[22]

Similar to AAM, BDS systematically works bottom-up to influence global public opinion against Israel, through vocal protests and lobbying of decision makers. Through activities reminiscent of anti-apartheid activist protests, Israel is systematically equated with racism and apartheid.

Nonetheless, the First World democratic establishment thus far appears to remain supportive of maintaining trade, diplomatic ties, and other cooperation with Israel.[23] Israel's thriving relations with the Western world are often cited by policy shapers as proof that anti-Israel activists have limited, if any, success; that anti-Israel sentiment is in fact a new form of old anti-Semitism that Jews will always face regardless of their state's conduct; that Israel's place in the international community of nations is secure; and that Israel's apartheid analogy is employed exclusively by radicals who are nothing more than a nuisance.

In order to counter this argument and delineate the extent to which Israel's democracy is sincerely questioned in the mainstream international arena – a trend that poses a dangerous threat to Israel's security – the following sections illustrate the use of the Israel-apartheid analogy in two central realms: the international press and the United Nations.

The Perception of Israel as an Apartheid State in the International Press

A search of the international media in English[24] coupling the words "Israel" with "apartheid state" yields 54 articles published between 1967 and 2000 (a period of 33 years). Between 2001 and 2015 (a period of 14 years), the search showed 1,741 articles referencing these terms. The turn of the century can clearly be pinpointed as a watershed for intensive international deliberation regarding the authenticity of Israel's democracy.

The mere abundance of articles, however, while pointing to inflated international interest in the linkage between Israel and apartheid, does not indicate the manner in which the international media portrays Israel with respect to the analogy. In other words, the quantitative findings themselves

are insufficient to determine if Israel is accused of being an apartheid state or is defended against such a perception.

In extracting English European[25] (n=86)[26] and American (n=51)[27] articles from the large database of articles containing the terms "Israel" and "apartheid state," an analysis of 137 press items published over the course of fifteen years (2000-2014) was performed.[28] Each item was assessed with respect to the context in which the analogy appears,[29] i.e., positive: articles defending Israel against apartheid accusations; negative: articles claiming that Israel is an apartheid state; or neutral: items that report about protests against Israel as an apartheid state, items that bring multiple perspectives, or items that warn that Israel could become an apartheid state in the future.[30]
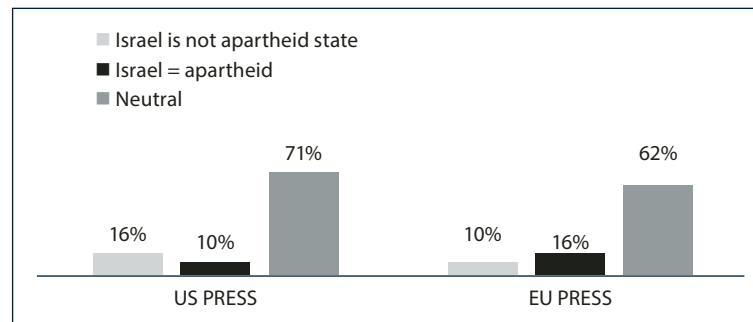

Figure 1. Classification of international press articles relating to Israel and apartheid (2000-2014)

As illustrated in figure 1, 16 percent of American articles and 10 percent of European articles defend Israel's democratic character by arguing against its equation with apartheid, while the vast majority of press items, 62 and 71 percent in Europe and America, respectively, do not take a stand on this comparison, noting its existence in public discourse or warning of the possibility that this situation will emerge in the absence of substantial policy change.

Division of the data into two time periods, the previous decade (2000-2009) and the last five years (2010-2014), indicates that there was a significant increase in coverage relating to the analogy over the past five years. More specifically, from 2000 to 2009 the number of press items in American publications referring to Israel and apartheid was 27, whereas from 2010-2014, 24 articles dealt with this analogy. In Europe, the previous decade saw the publication of 37 press items that related to the Israel-apartheid

analogy, whereas the number of articles relating to this analogy over the past five years alone rose to 49 press items.

These findings lead to two central conclusions: (a) only a minority of articles (10-16 percent in European and American newspapers, respectively) voice claims wholeheartedly defending Israel against its equation with apartheid; and (b) in recent years the question of Israel's democracy is drawing increasing international attention.

The Perception of Israel as an Apartheid State in the UN

In analyzing the analogy in the United Nations, a search for documents including the terms "Israel" and "apartheid" between January 2000 and December 2014 yielded 158 documents.[31] Of these, only seven items make the case for Israel and argue in defense of the state's policies (i.e., 4 percent of documents).[32]

Of the UN documents mentioning the words "Israel" and "apartheid" and not drafted by the State of Israel or by pro-Israeli NGOs (n=151), 56 percent (n=84 documents) refer to Israel as an apartheid state (i.e., to Israel's "apartheid regime" or various "apartheid" practices), and 32 percent of documents (n=48 documents) relate the word apartheid to the separation barrier between Israel and the Palestinian territories ("the apartheid wall").[33]

The coining of the term "apartheid wall," clearly referencing the black South African struggle for self-determination, is a brilliant success of pro-Palestinian forces, particularly owing to the fact that no such barrier between whites and blacks ever existed under South African apartheid. The Israeli security barrier was thus "recruited" by activists to sustain additional arguments that Israel is an apartheid state, for example by basing a comparison to the "pass" system, a trademark of apartheid South Africa (e.g., "Checkpoints serve to humiliate Palestinians …in this respect they resemble the 'pass laws' of apartheid South Africa, which required black South Africans to demonstrate permission to travel or reside anywhere in South Africa"[34]).

Another Israeli policy that significantly boosted criticism of Israel as an apartheid state in the UN arena is the ongoing expansion of settlements and the construction of roads connecting settlements to each other and to Israel. These roads "were reserved for exclusive use by settlers, relegating Palestinians to second-class roads obstructed by checkpoints and roadblocks,"[35] thus facilitating the creation of a new term in UN discussions and reports: "road apartheid." The expansion of settlements has also

led to criticism of Israel regarding disproportionate allocation of natural resources between Palestinian and Jewish residents (settlers) in adjacent areas, coining additional new terms such as "water apartheid."[36]

In looking at bottom-up anti-Israel civil society efforts in the UN arena, 21 percent of documents relating to Israel and apartheid were submitted to UN forums by pro-Palestinian NGOs (n=31 documents), as opposed to 1 percent of documents (n=2 documents, over the course of 15 years!) submitted by pro-Israeli NGOs. This finding clearly illustrates the centrality that NGOs and civil society activists play in nurturing the negative attention directed at Israel and fueling continued interest in its conduct vis-à-vis the Palestinians.

In breaking the analysis into two time periods (i.e., 2000-2009, and 2010-2014) two trends emerge (table 1): (a) an increase (from 52 percent of all items in the first period to 62 percent of all items in the second period) of documents relating to Israel as an apartheid state; and (b) an increase (18 percent of all items in the first period to 26 percent of all items in the second period) in the proportion of documents relating to "Israel" and "apartheid" submitted to the UN on behalf of Palestinian civil society organizations.

Table 1. UN documents relating to the terms "Israel" and "apartheid" (2000-2014)

	2000-2009	2010-2014	Total
Number of documents referring to Israel as an apartheid state	53 (52%)	31 (62%)	84 (56%)
Number of documents submitted to the UN on behalf of Palestinian civil society organizations	18 (18%)	13 (26%)	31 (21%)
Total	101	50	151

Findings of documents relating to Israel and apartheid in the UN arena thus reinforce the central trend apparent in the international media of an intensifying debate regarding Israel's non-democratic character in recent years, and of little, almost nonexistent, pro-Israel efforts both on the part of Israel and other nations, in defense of accusations relating to Israel's democratic regime. UN documents further point to Israel's settlement policy as a central factor in nurturing the anti-Israel sentiment in the UN

and to the significant, and growing, role that pro-Palestinian civil society efforts play in cultivating the Israel-apartheid analogy in UN discourse.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The collective findings presented in this article assert that the Israel-apartheid analogy is increasingly employed in the international press as well as in UN discussions, statements, and reports in order to puncture Israel's democratic image in the international arena. The intensification of the debate regarding Israel's apartheid-like features can be dated to the beginning of the century and has increased in scope over the last five years; with only 10 and 16 percent of articles in the European and American press, respectively, defending Israel from apartheid accusations. Findings also indicate that the UN arena is neglected by Israel, which at the best of times puts up a poor fight to counter apartheid accusations, and that pro-Palestinian civil society organizations are increasingly involved in inserting the Israel-apartheid analogy into the UN public sphere. Furthermore, it appears that Israel's policies vis-à-vis building and expanding settlements, and the ongoing occupation of the West Bank in general, are central catalysts in the perception of Israel as an apartheid state. Both these policies cultivate the employment of extreme, charged terms such as "the apartheid wall," "water apartheid," and "road apartheid."

While Israel's positive relations with the official governments of Western democratic states are often cited as proof that anti-Israel activity has limited, if any, success, the quantitative and qualitative findings in this article place a large question mark on the indefinite period that the modern world's official leadership can remain immune to much harsher anti-Israel public sentiment that the growing use of the apartheid analogy may well produce. As illustrated in the South African case study, intensive and mechanized bottom-up civil society efforts played a crucial role in changing the attitudes of the superpowers toward South Africa and initiating sanctions against its apartheid regime.

Alongside much-needed, and much-absent, proactive pro-Israel efforts to counter the Israel-apartheid analogy,[37] a more effective and long-lasting antidote to factors that nurture international anti-Israel sentiment is Israel's professed and active commitment to the two-state solution. The credibility of the claim that the State of Israel is liberal, democratic, and committed to the globally endorsed two-state solution requires Israel to follow up on such declarations with concrete actions. This will not only serve to significantly

improve Israel's deteriorating international standing – contributing to its legitimacy and securing its future as a Jewish state – but will also enable Israel to buy leverage and political space to attack apartheid-related international perceptions.

Israel would do well to chart trends in the international arena regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the perception of Israel's contribution to the deadlock; monitor indicators hinting at its deteriorating international position; and take significant, proactive strategic steps to rectify the situation. More significant than contributing to the dissolution of the Israel-apartheid analogy in the international arena, such an approach will contribute to Israel's national and international security.

Notes

1   Robbie Sabel, "The Campaign to Delegitimize Israel with the False Charge of Apartheid," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2009, http://jcpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/apartheid.pdf.
2   Examples include India ("Housing Apartheid Practices in Delhi against Muslims," *The Hindu Online*, July 8, 2012); Canada ("An Unofficial Apartheid of Cultures and Identity" with respect to French and English-speaking groups, *Books in Canada*, Vol. 28, May 1999, pp 29-30); and even America (where US celebrated author Alice Walker asserts that she grew up under "American apartheid," *The Independent*, June 20, 2012).
3   The Group Areas Act assigned racial groups to different residential and business sections in urban areas.
4   The Lands Act aimed to regulate the acquisition of land by South African blacks.
5   The Population Registration Act required that all inhabitants of South Africa be classified and registered in accordance with their racial characteristics, i.e., white, black, or colored.
6   Audrie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle against Apartheid* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995); Audrie Klotz, "Transforming a Pariah State: International Dimensions of the South African Transition," *Africa Today* 42, no. 1/2 (1995).
7   This included pursuing quiet diplomacy, rejecting sanctions, and valuing stability vis-à-vis relations with South Africa at the price of tolerating white minority rule.
8   Organized anti-apartheid activists cooperated with the Congressional Black Caucus.
9   Arnold Millard, "Engaging South Africa after Apartheid," *Foreign Policy* 87 (1992): 139; Klotz, *Norms in International Relations*.
10 Klotz, *Norms in International Relations*.

11 "Report of the Secretary General on Policies of Apartheid of the Government of South Africa: Measures to Monitor Sanctions against South Africa," undertaken by the United Nations System, Governments and Non-Governmental Entities, March 1990.

12 Preliminary report on monitoring the transition to democracy in South Africa submitted by the Special Rapporteur, July 1993.

13 Marco Allegra and Paolo Napolitano, "Leadership and Peace Making in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict," *Mediterranean Politics* 16, no. 2 (2011): 261-78.

14 Leila Farsakh, "The One State Solution and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Palestinian Challenges and Prospects," *Middle East Journal* 65, no. 1 (2011): 55-71.

15 UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 (1975).

16 The resolution was rescinded by the General Assembly in 1991, marking the first time that the UN General Assembly took such a step. See Sabel, "The Campaign to Delegitimize Israel with the False Charge of Apartheid."

17 Colloquially known as the "Durban Conference."

18 Hanafi Sari, "A Moral Victory in Durban," *Israel Resource Review: Behind the News in Israel*, September 17, 2001, http://israelbehindthenews.com/a-moral-victory-in-durban/3528/.

19 The declaration named Israel a "racist, Apartheid state in which Israel's brand of apartheid as a crime against humanity has been characterized by separation and segregation, dispossession, restricted land access, denationalization, 'bantustanization' and inhumane acts." Excerpts from the NGO Document are accessible on the Anti-Defamation League website, http://www.adl.org/durban/durban_ngo.asp.

20 BDS, "Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS," July 9, 2005, BDS Movement, http://www.bdsmovement.net/call.

21 Ibid.

22 Ehud Rosen, "What is the Real BDS Endgame? The Elimination of Israel," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, February 12, 2014, http://jcpa.org/article/what-is-the-real-bds-endgame/.

23 This, as opposed to municipal councils which have voted in support of boycotting Israel, e.g., the Clackmannanshire County Council in Scotland, March 14, 2013, http://www.clacksweb.org.uk/document/meeting/1/465/3999.pdf.

24 The search was carried out using the Lexis Nexis search engine.

25 Pursuant to the limitation of analyzing English press items, European-based articles include publications in the UK and Northern Ireland and Ireland only.

26 Articles included in the analysis are from the following European-based media outlets: *BBC Monitoring*; *Birmingham Evening Mail*; *Daily Mail* (London); *Belfast Telegraph*; *Daily Telegraph* (London); *The Express*; *The Guardian* (London);*The Independent* (London); *Irish Times*; *The Mirror*; *The Observer*;

The Scotsman; *Sunday Herald*; *Sunday Times* (London); *The Times* (London); *Western Mail*.

27   Articles included in the analysis are from the following US-based media outlets: *Christian Science Monitor*; *Daily News* (New York); *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida); *The Advertiser*; *International Herald Tribune*; *New York Times*; *Philadelphia Inquirer*; *Washington Post*.

28   The search was conducted on press items published between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2014. Letters to the Editor and book reviews were excluded from the analysis; the number of items stated (n) reflects the final number of items analyzed.

29   If there is more than one opinion reflected in the article dealing with the complexity of the situation and illustrating voices pro and against Israel, the article was tagged as objective.

30   In addition to these three categories there were a number of articles that coupled "Israel" and "apartheid" out of context so that the appearance of the word apartheid was unrelated to Israel, or the central issue covered did not relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or to Israel's stranding in the international arena. In the European press 12 percent (n=10) of the items analyzed and in the American press 4 percent (n=2) of the items analyzed fell into this category.

31   The search was conducted using the UN's official Document System (ODS) search engine as well as a more updated UN search engine recently installed on the UN website.

32   Five documents were submitted to the UN by the official Israeli delegation to the UN/Israel's Foreign Ministry, and two documents were statements submitted to the UN by pro-Israeli NGOs.

33   Few documents refer to apartheid in both contexts (i.e., referencing Israel as an "apartheid regime" and referring to the "apartheid wall"); other documents relate the word apartheid to other states and events, quote apartheid-related literature or reference similarities to the South African anti-apartheid struggle, thus not making the direct claim that Israel's practices are akin to apartheid.

34   Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation, 2008.

35   Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, Sixty-first session, Summary record of the 17th meeting, April 7, 2005.

36   General Assembly, Sixty-eighth session, Agenda item 52, Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, October 9, 2013.

37   For operative ways to counter the global anti-Israel campaign see INSS report: "Insights on BDS further to INSS-BICOM Workshop" conducted on June 11, 2015, http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4480&eventid=10112.