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## Israeli Treatment of Palestinians Remains Unchanged Over 75 Years



Netzah Yehuda training exercise. Photograph Source: יעסיעם – [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

The Biden administration's decision to continue funding the notorious Netzah Yehuda battalion, an ultra-Orthodox unit that operates on the West Bank, is the latest indication that the United States is unwilling to take any steps to counter Israel's genocidal campaign against the Palestinians. The funding of the battalion marks a major defeat for the human rights experts in the Departments of State and Defense, who argued that Netzah Yehuda should be barred from receiving U.S. support. This marks one more decision by Secretary of State Antony Blinken that ignores the need for accountability with regard to the barbarous actions of the Israeli Defense Forces.

The Netzah Yehuda battalion is particularly violent in dealing with the Palestinian community. The battallion has killed unarmed civilians and suspects in custody as well as committed sexual assault and torture. it has attracted many members of an extreme religious-nationalist settler group infamous for establishing illegal outposts on Palestinian land that have no legal basis in Israeli law. In recent years, the Netzah Yehuda battalion has been involved in at least a half-dozen controversial cases involving its soldiers, resulting in jail time, discharge, or harsh criticism for assaulting or killing innocent Palestinians.

U.S. funding of the battalion is a violation of the Leahy Law, passed in 1997, that prohibits the Departments of State and Defense from providing military assistance to foreign security force units that violate human rights. U.S. embassies and the appropriate regional bureaus of the Department of State vet potential recipients of security assistance. If a unit is found to have been credibly implicated in a serious abuse of human rights, assistance is denied until the host nation government takes effective steps to bring the responsible persons within the unit to justice. As a result, security forces and national defense units in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Columbia, Guatemala, and Mexico have been denied assistance in the past. The United States, of course, plays by different rules when it comes to military support for Israel.

Even before Blinken made his unfortunate decision regarding the battalion, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu obnoxiously proclaimed that “if anyone thinks they can impose sanctions on a unit of the IDF—I will fight it with all my strength.” U.S. presidents have been unwilling to stand up to Netanyahu who has led six of the eleven different Israeli governments over the past 28 years. This funding decision is particularly reprehensible because the battalion was responsible for the death of a 78-year-old American citizen whose stress-induced heart attack was brought on by being bound, gagged, and left on the ground by Israeli forces. Netanyahu’s government prosecuted no one in this case.

One of the more feckless U.S. moves regarding the war in Gaza was President Biden’s decision to deliver humanitarian aid to the Palestinians via a floating military pier. U.S. officials in the Departments of State and Defense argued that the weather conditions in the Mediterranean would compromise any effort to make the pier workable. The critics were right. They wanted the Biden administration to put pressure on Israel to open land crossings for aid, but Biden refused to do so. As a result, the pier was attached to Gaza’s coast line in May and abandoned in July.

Israeli officials maintain that they are allowing aid into Gaza, but the aid is going in slowly and humanitarian convoys are still being attacked. A UN vehicle, clearly marked, was attacked several days ago and Palestinian aid workers were killed. Meanwhile, more than 560 schools in Gaza have been hit or destroyed, and numerous shelters have been attacked. This points to the moral squalor of Israeli public declarations that deny the targeting of humanitarian missions.

In order to understand the Arab-Israeli conflict (and perhaps appreciate U.S. complicity), it helps to remember the first Israeli edicts against its Palestinian population more than 75 years ago. With the creation of the state of Israel, the Knesset adopted the British Defense Regulations that enabled Israeli military authorities to close off the Arab areas and restrict entry and exit only to those with permits. Every Arab inhabitant had to apply to the military government office or to the police in his/her district to obtain a permit to leave his/her village for whatever reason.

The Knesset added its own restrictions to the British regulations. These enabled the Israelis to deport people from their towns or villages and to summon any person to present himself at a police station or to remain confined to his/her house. Any Arab could be placed under administrative arrest for an unlimited time, without explanation and without trial. Violators were tried by military courts and not civilian ones; this is still true today on the West Bank. Tom Segev, one of Israel's most distinguished historians, noted in his important book, "1949: The First Israelis," that "among the soldiers and officers sent to rule over the Arabs were ones who had been found unfit for active service." They were vengeful, which is true today on the West Bank. Segev is associated with Israel's New Historians, a group challenging many of the country's traditional narratives.

Another distinguished Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé, recorded in his book, "Ten Myths About Israel," that the discussion of the forced transfer of the Arab population in Palestine began even before Israel received its independence in 1948. The discussions evolved into a master plan for the massive expulsion of Palestinians, which was known as Plan Delat. Pappé notes that the Israeli Foreign Ministry created the myth that the Palestinians became refugees because their leaders told them to leave Palestine before the "Arab armies invaded and kicked out the Jews."

The continued violence in Gaza and the renewed violence on the West Bank points to a dark future for the Middle East, particularly for Israel, Lebanon, and the Palestinian community. Israel has become increasingly isolated in the international community, and the ultra nationalism of the right wing is increasingly dominating Israeli politics. For the

past thirty years, the Israelis have hidden behind false gestures of support for a two-state solution and now the possibility of a cease fire in Gaza in order to maintain military and economic support from the United States. Sadly, it is working, and Israel shows no interest in pursuing any alternative to an endless war.

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