

## [Six EU double standards on Israel](#)

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Over the last few months, the Israeli government has stepped up its accusations that the EU employs a “double standard” in relation to Israel. According to Prime Minister Netanyahu, “there’s a natural tendency in the EU establishment to single out Israel and treat it in ways that other countries are not being dealt with.” This double-standards allegation has become the key Israeli talking point with regards to Europe, repeated at every opportunity.

So let us check the facts. Are the Israeli claims true? Does Europe really hold Israel to a different standard than other countries?

Yes, it turns out: Netanyahu is absolutely right. Europe does indeed apply double standards towards Israel—except that all of them happen to be to Israel's *advantage* rather than the other way around. Here are six examples:

### **1. Human rights**

The EU has no Subcommittee for Human Rights with Israel, although such bodies have been a standard component of the EU's relations with Mediterranean partner countries, from Morocco to Lebanon. Years ago, the EU yielded to Israel's refusal and agreed instead to a mere informal working group on human rights.

Similarly, the EU-Israel Action Plan that has been in place for the last ten years has the weakest human rights commitments of all EU action plans with neighbouring countries. Although the EU has deeper relations with Israel than with any other country in the region, Israel's human-rights issues have been given the lowest priority.

### **2. International Criminal Court**

The EU strongly supports the ICC. It uses trade and development agreements with many countries to encourage them to join the Hague Court, and has withheld assistance from Sudan and South Sudan which have refused to join. But in the case of Palestine, foremost EU states including the UK and France pressured President Abbas not to seek membership, which could lead to prosecution of both Israelis and Palestinians for war crimes. At the time, they claimed that ICC involvement could undermine the (defunct) Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Yet the same governments have led efforts to bring other countries embroiled in conflict—Sudan, Libya and Syria—to the Court through the United Nations Security Council, and condemned Russia and China for blocking the referral in the Syrian case. When Palestine eventually joined the ICC in April 2015, it was the first time that the EU did not issue a welcoming statement.

### **3. Sanctions**

The EU applies sanctions to [more than 30 countries](#) around the world. Sanctions seem to have become the EU's [default response](#) to international challenges, with their use [massively increasing](#) in recent years. But Israel is not on the list. This is despite its well-known, large-scale violations of international law and human rights in the occupied territories, which are, moreover, making a peaceful two-state solution to the conflict practically impossible; expansion of settlements in the West Bank is just one example. Yet the EU does not apply even the mildest sanctions against those pushing for settlement expansion, or against extremist settlers who violently attack Palestinians and destroy their property.

The few measures that the EU has taken so far—such as differentiated labelling of settlement products—are not sanctions, as the Israeli press likes to describe them. They merely ensure correct application of existing EU law based on its non-recognition of Israeli sovereignty in the occupied Palestinian territory. In contrast, to underscore its non-recognition of Russian sovereignty over Crimea, the EU has imposed real, sweeping sanctions, including a ban on all trade with and investment in the peninsula.

#### **4. Security**

The EU often emphasises its commitment to Israel's security, but rarely mentions the security of the Palestinians. This is despite the fact that the latter have been suffering far greater levels of insecurity and much higher casualties during decades of conflict. The EU affirms Israel's right to defend itself against Palestinian attacks but never says whether the Palestinians have a right to defend themselves against Israeli attacks, within the bounds of international law.

The EU also regularly calls on Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip to stop firing rockets and mortars on Israel, but not on Israel to curb its almost daily attacks, which also have been shown to [violate](#) international law. In 2015, there were [35 attacks](#) from Gaza that caused no Israeli injuries or damage. In the same year, Israeli forces conducted [56 raids](#) into Gaza and opened fire on Gazans in over 600 cases, [killing 25 people and injuring over 1,300](#). These incidents often target civilians who pose [no threat](#). Yet the latest EU Council [conclusions](#) on the conflict once again only addressed rocket fire by Palestinian militants.

#### **5. Quartet principles**

As part of the Middle East Quartet, the EU demands that any Palestinian government recognise Israel, accept previous agreements and renounce violence. In 2006 and 2007, the EU financially boycotted Palestinian governments that included Hamas as they did not commit to these three principles. The EU's stance contributed to the disastrous political split between Gaza and the West Bank that lasts to today.

Yet neither the Quartet nor the EU have demanded that the Israeli government adhere to the same principles. In fact, Israel would hardly pass the test: it has not recognised Palestine, does not abide by key elements of past agreements including the Oslo Accords or the Roadmap, and frequently resorts to violence to sustain the occupation. But rather than holding Palestinian and Israeli governments to the same principles, the Quartet has employed them as one-sided demands.

#### **6. Nuclear weapons**

Europe tolerates Israel's undeclared nuclear weapons arsenal and its evasion of international inspections. In fact, it was [France](#) and [Britain](#) that secretly helped Israel to get the 'bomb' in the 1950s and 60s. Germany still provides Israel with government-subsidised submarines, while [reportedly](#) knowing that Israel arms them with nuclear missiles. Europeans often [vote against](#) international resolutions calling on Israel to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which would open its nuclear facilities to inspections.

This stands in stark contrast to the immense pressure the EU put on Iran to curb its nuclear programme, notwithstanding the differences between the two cases. Undeniably, Europeans—and Germans in particular—have a vast historical debt to the Jewish people, which factors into their stance on Israel's nuclear weapons. But it remains that there is a double standard in Israel's favour.

#### **Redressing the imbalance**

Some inconsistencies in foreign policy are inevitable—Israel is not the only area in which the EU is guilty of double standards. The reasons for Europe's privileged treatment of Israel are multiple, and many of them are easy to understand: cultural affinity, historical guilt, sympathy for democracies, and admiration for cultural and scientific achievements (as well as organised pro-Israel lobbies).

Yet Europe has every reason to redress its imbalanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and be more even-handed. After all, as the Israeli government rightly says, the double standard “prevents the EU from being an honest broker in the conflict.”

And while there is no effective broker willing to hold both sides to the same standard, the very possibility of a peaceful solution is rapidly disappearing, promising more violence and instability on Europe’s doorstep and more fuel for global extremism in the decades to come.