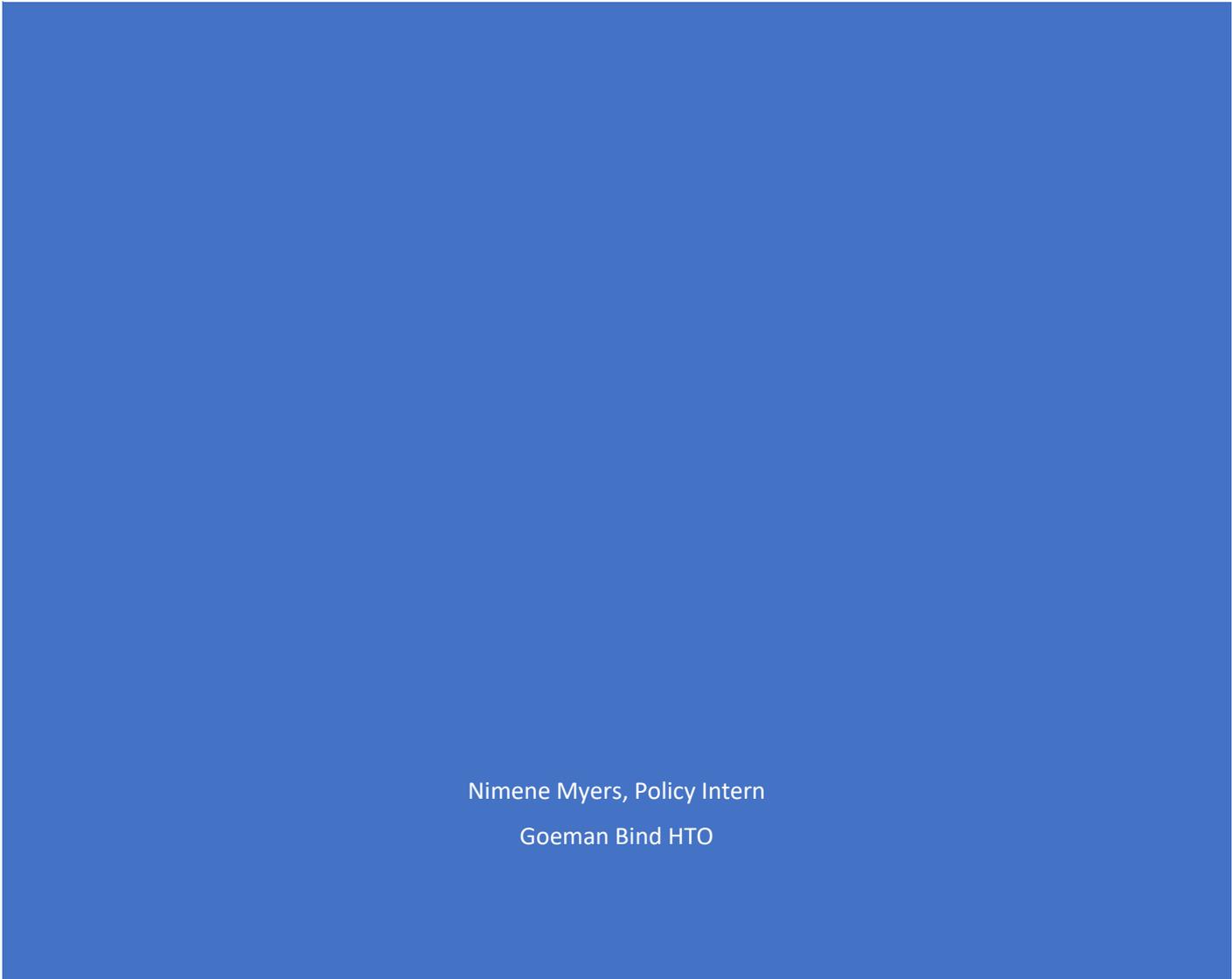




A DESK RESEARCH PAPER ON US WITHDRAWAL FROM UNESCO



Nimene Myers, Policy Intern
Goeman Bind HTO

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I. PREFACE

On October 12, 2017, the United States and its ally Israel announce their withdrawal from the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO).¹ For the US, the withdrawal comes in the wake of two major reasons: Long-standing issues she has had with UNESCO's refusal to acknowledge and work towards the need to restructure the organization; and what she refers to as continuing anti-Israel bias by UNESCO. This could be seen in the wake of UNESCO, in October 2011, admitting the Palestinian Territories to the organization as independent member-state called Palestine which triggered a US law which cuts off American funding for any organization that recognizes an independent Palestine.²

We cannot ignore the coincidence of this decision coming at a time when UNESCO was voting to choose a new director and the politics of lobbying were being interplayed.

This is not the first time that the US has walked out of UNESCO. The first time was in December of 1983. She pulled out on grounds that "Unesco had extraneously politicized virtually every subject it deals with, has exhibited hostility toward the basic institutions of a free society, especially a free market and a free press, and has demonstrated unrestrained budgetary expansion."³ But the then - US Secretary of State, George Shultz said that Washington would continue "to further the international cooperation in education, science, culture and communication that UNESCO was originally established to promote. He continued that this year will give UNESCO a potential opportunity to respond to the serious concerns that have caused their withdrawal and that they remain open to indications of significant improvement."⁴ However, President George W Bush made the US join back in 2002, but relations curdled over in 2011 when President Barack Obama stopped the funding to the body after its members voted to admit Palestine as a full member.

The outgoing Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova branded the US withdrawal as deeply regrettable and a loss to multilateralism.⁵ Israel also announced her withdrawal following the US. Why? This paper takes a look at a background overview of all parties involved. It examines the circumstances surrounding the withdrawal of the US from UNESCO followed by the announcement by Israel of its withdrawal as well. The paper further considers how these decisions are perceived from various angles and the possible impacts of them.

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/12/30/world/us-is-quitting-unesco-affirms-backing-for-un.html>

² <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/10/12/16464778/unesco-us-withdrawal-trump>

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/12/30/world/us-is-quitting-unesco-affirms-backing-for-un.html>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

II. MILIEU

A. UNESCO

The United Nations Educational Cultural Scientific Organization (UNESCO) with headquarters in Paris has its founding and mandate dated back to a League of Nations resolution on September 21, 1921, to elect a Commission to study feasibility. Later, during World War II, the governments of the European countries, which were confronting Nazi Germany and its allies, met in the United Kingdom for the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME) to discuss ways and means to reconstruct their systems of education once peace was restored. Its momentum gained universal attention and new governments, including that of the United States, decided to join in.⁶ Upon the proposal of CAME, a United Nations Conference for the establishment of an educational and cultural organization (ECO/CONF) was convened in London from 1 to 16 November 1945. Representatives of forty-four countries decided to create an organization that would embody a genuine culture of peace. In their eyes, the new organization must establish the “intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind” and, in so doing, prevent the outbreak of another world war. At the end of the conference, thirty-seven countries founded the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The Constitution of UNESCO, signed on 16 November 1945, came into force on 4 November 1946 after ratification by twenty countries including The United States of America.⁷ Israel joined Sept. 16, 1949, and Palestine joined Nov. 23, 2011.

Projects sponsored by UNESCO include: literacy, technical, and teacher-training programs, international science programs, the promotion of independent media and freedom of the press, regional and cultural history projects, the promotion of cultural diversity, translations of world literature, international cooperation agreements to secure the world's cultural and natural heritage (World Heritage Sites) and to preserve human rights, and attempts to bridge the worldwide digital divide.⁸ According to the United Nations Charter, its purpose is also to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through educational, scientific, and cultural reforms in order to increase universal respect for justice, the Rule of Law, and human rights along with fundamental freedom.⁹

B. Israel and Palestine

Conflict and enmity between Israel and Palestine is of global concern. Both have claims and counter-claims to Jerusalem as their capital with Gaza, West Bank, and East Jerusalem being major areas of contestation. Leaders on both sides are more concerned with radicalizing their constituencies than peaceful negotiations.

Besides religious justification of the land been given to them by their ancestors over 3000 years ago, Israel claims are on archaeological and historical grounds: That findings deep in the earth suggest that they lived there over 3000 years ago, and that Israel existed during the Roman

⁶<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/history/>

⁷ <http://www.unescocenterforpeace.org/about-us/faq/>

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO>

⁹Ibid.

Empire before their land was taken and they were sent into exile in 70AD¹⁰. The Turks took over 700 years ago and were later removed by the British. Palestine claims, though they occupied the land prior to 1941, are in connection to the 1941 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181, where the world recognized the two-state solution and called for the emergence of “independent Arab and Jewish States”.¹¹ On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was born. Almost seven decades later, the world still awaits the birth of the Palestinian State.¹²

In 1917 the British issued the Balfour declaration, in which they supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.¹³ The League of Nations confirmed a British Mandate on Palestine, after World War I, based on the British pledge to establish a Jewish homeland. In 1920 the first riots took place in Palestine in Jaffa against Jewish immigration. With the rise in power of the Nazis in Germany, Jewish immigration to Palestine increased.¹⁴ In 1947 in the aftermath of the holocaust in which 6,000,000 Jews were killed by the Nazis, and continued fighting in Palestine, the United Nations approved a plan for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state.¹⁵ Jerusalem was to be internationalized. The Jews accepted the plan, but the Arabs did not. A war then ensued, the first part taking place between the Jews and Arabs of Palestine. During that period the Jews gained control over most of the areas given to them by the United Nations. It was during this period that the first Palestinian Refugees were created.¹⁶ Many left of their own volition, or from a fear of what the Israelis might do to them, some were no doubt encouraged to leave by the Israelis, and others expelled.¹⁷ From this point onwards Israel began to have dominion over the land.

C. Israel and The United States Relations

Seeing the US and Israel closeness today, one might think it has always been that way. It is important to note that the United States and Israel did not always have a tight friendship.

When Israel along with Britain and France, invaded Egypt in 1956, the United States demanded Israel's withdrawal from Sinai and Gaza and the Israelis complied.¹⁸ The United States provided no aid for Israel except for food aid given through a U.N. program that served many nations. The United States was not hostile to Israel, nor did it regard its relationship as crucial until after the Six-Day War in 1967. After the conflict, the French, wanting to improve relations with the Arabs, cut off weapons sales to Israel. The United States saw Egypt become a Soviet naval and air base, along with Syria. This threatened the U.S. Sixth Fleet and other interests in the eastern Mediterranean.¹⁹ Once the French pulled out of their relationship with Israel and the Soviets consolidated their positions in Egypt and Syria in the wake of the Six-Day War, the United States was forced into a different relationship with Israel and became its primary source of military assistance. This support surged during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, with U.S. assistance

¹⁰<http://www.aish.com/h/iid/48891682.html>

¹¹<https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sgsm18372.doc.htm>

¹² <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2016-12-16/secretary-generals-briefing-security-council-situation-middle-east>

¹³<http://www.historycentral.com/historynews.html>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2015/03/04/the_complex_history_of_the_us-israel_relationship_111012.html

¹⁹ Ibid.

rising from roughly 5 percent of Israeli gross domestic product to more than 20 percent a year later.²⁰

Even in her favoritism for Israel, the United States has on some occasions taken side against Israel: For example, as part of encouraging a strategic reversal into the U.S. camp after the 1973 war, the United States negotiated an Israeli withdrawal from Sinai that the Israelis were extremely reluctant to do but could not avoid under U.S. pressure. Similarly, U.S. President Ronald Reagan opposed an Israeli invasion of Lebanon that reached Beirut, and the initial U.S. intervention in Lebanon was not against Arab elements but intended to block Israel.²¹

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

III. ANALYSIS FROM VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES

Many were surprised by the decision of the Trump administration to withdraw the United States' membership from UNESCO in Oct. 2017, given that, UNESCO seems like an innocuous organization: it embodies a culture of peace. Prominent amongst its operations is the contribution to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through educational, scientific, and cultural reforms in order to increase universal respect for justice, the Rule of Law, and human rights along with fundamental freedom i.e. designating and protecting official international landmarks, called World Heritage Sites.

A. What Prompted the U S Decision?

First, it is worth noting that this is not the first time the US is withdrawing its membership from UNESCO. The first time was under former President Ronald Reagan in 1984. The Reagan administration left in protest, claiming, UNESCO had spendthrift habits and pro-Soviet leanings. The agency was financially irresponsible and had been politicized leftward.²² According to Alan D. Romberg, a State Department spokesman, the decision was made because UNESCO had extraneously politicized virtually every subject it deals with, has exhibited hostility toward the basic institutions of a free society, especially a free market and a free press, and has demonstrated unrestrained budgetary expansion." But he said that Washington would continue "to further the international cooperation in education, science and culture and communication that UNESC was originally created to promote."²³ "This year will give Unesco a potential opportunity to respond to the serious concerns that have caused our withdrawal," Mr. Shultz said. "We remain open to indications of significant improvement."²⁴ An observer panel was set up at the State Department to monitor UNESCO'S performance, and the United States assumed the formal status as an observer at UNESCO headquarters in Paris with the hope that with improvement in UNESCO's performance the US will return.

After 18 years of absence, during George W. Bush administration, the United States rejoined in 2002 as part of her efforts to broaden her international cooperation. Whether significant improvements were seen or not seen in UNESCO to encourage or discourage their return was not clear. But later, in 2011, the Obama administration withdrew its funding from UNESCO, though the US maintained its membership status. The decision to withdraw its funding gravely affected UNESCO as it created a financial crisis for the organization given the US share of contribution. The US had earlier pay for 22 % (\$ 80 million) of UNESCO's annual budget.²⁵ This withdrawal was prompted in accordance with a 1990 U.S. law to discourage the United Nations from recognizing the Palestinian state. The prohibition on U.S. funding of U.N. agencies that recognize a Palestinian state was included in two pieces of legislation Public Law 103-236, that were signed into law by President George H.W. Bush in 1990 and President Bill Clinton in 1994.

¹⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1984/12/20/unesco-withdrawal-announced/b9c6dc92-a31f-443a-977b-f3468faf44fe/?utm_term=.f1225668efce

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁵ <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/10/12/16464778/unesco-us-withdrawal-trump>

The **1990 law** prohibits the appropriation of funds “for the United Nations or any specialized agency thereof which accords the Palestine Liberation Organization the same standing as a member state.”

In **1994**, Congress barred funding “any affiliated organization of the United Nations which grants full membership as a state to any organization or group that does not have the internationally recognized attributes of statehood.”²⁶

So, when UNESCO granted the Palestinian Authority full membership; admitting the Palestinian territories to the organization as an independent member-state called Palestine, the US withdrew its funding but maintained its membership. Maintaining its membership implied that the US still had interests in the organization and a good possibility of reconsideration.

But by 2013, the US, having made good her promise of not funding UNESCO; she missed several rounds of payment to UNESCO, the organization suspended US voting rights in its core decision-making bodies.²⁷ Technically, by this action, the US was unofficially not a real member. The Trump administration officially withdrew on the following grounds according to State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert²⁸

- Continuing anti-Israel bias that comes in the wake of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the subsequent admission of Palestinian Territories to UNESCO as an independent member-state called Palestine.
- US concerns with mounting arrears at UNESCO (by the end of 2017, the unpaid US bill will amount to \$ 550 million)
- The need for fundamental reforms at the organization.

Though not stated by the US, it is important to mention that it is not just a coincidence that this withdrawal comes at a time when UNESCO members are voting on a replacement for Bokova (the outgoing Director-General of UNESCO). Qatar’s Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kawari led France’s Audrey Azoulay and Egyptian hopeful Moushira Khattab in the first voting rounds. Israeli officials and American Jewish groups have expressed concerns about Kawari for what they have said is a record of fostering anti-Semitism. Given that, if he becomes the next Director-General for UNESCO, matters could go worse for Israel and get better for Palestine as far as UNESCO activities are concerned.

Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., said the last straw was when UNESCO this summer designated the old city of Hebron in the West Bank, with its Tomb of the Patriarchs, a Palestinian World Heritage site. Calling UNESCO’s politicization, a “chronic embarrassment,” Haley added, “Just as we said in 1984 when President Reagan withdrew from UNESCO, U.S. taxpayers should no longer be on the hook to pay for policies that are hostile to our values and

²⁶https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/unesco-votes-to-admit-palestine-over-us-objections/2011/10/31/gIQAMleYZM_story.html?utm_term=.a28fd330549

²⁷ <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/10/12/16464778/unesco-us-withdrawal-trump>

²⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/10/12/u-s-withdraws-from-unesco-the-u-n-s-cultural-organization-citing-anti-israel-bias/?utm_term=.3b629364cfb3

make a mockery of justice and common sense.”²⁹ Haley further said the United States will evaluate all U.N. agencies “through the same lens.”³⁰

According to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson,³¹ “the withdrawal follows long-standing issues the U.S. has had with UNESCO and does not necessarily foreshadow a further retrenchment of U.S. engagement with the United Nations, where the Trump administration has been pushing to bring about structural and financial reforms. The most immediate impact is that the U.S. will halt the arrears it has run up since it stopped funding the organization in 2011 to protest UNESCO’s admission of Palestine as a full member. With no sign that U.S. concerns would be addressed, the US decided to pull out after Dec. 31, 2018, when the unpaid balance will top \$600 million.” Mr. Trump has criticized what he sees as a disproportionate contribution by the US to UN institution. The US funds 22% of the UN's regular budget and 28% of UN peacekeeping.³² At a special meeting on UN reform on Monday, he encouraged member states to take a "bold stand" to change the UN's "business-as-usual" approach rather than "be beholden to ways of the past which are not working".

"I am confident that if we work together and champion truly bold reforms the United Nations will emerge as a stronger, more effective, more just and greater force for peace and harmony in the world."³³

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict has been central to US-UN disputes i.e. decision by the UN not to expel Syria from its human rights committee after the civil war in that country began, and repeated resolutions that refer to Israel as an occupying power. However, the US has expressed through its State Department that it would like to remain involved as a nonmember observer state in UNESCO.³⁴ That will allow the United States to engage in debates and activities, send representatives to UNESCO meetings, though it will lose its right to vote on issues. This seems to be what the US has been since 2011. For the US, her withdrawal which takes effect Dec. 2018, should send an acute message that there is a need to see fundamental reform in the organization, and it raises everyone’s awareness about continued anti-Israel bias. They hope that the withdrawal will help push UNESCO to make changes that would satisfy Washington, so the U.S. can resume full membership.

B. UNESCO

While it is true that UNESCO is perhaps best known for its World Heritage Program which helps preserve major designated cultural sites around the world, it is also involved with other international programs i.e. promoting issues such as women’s equality and human rights, carrying out literacy programs (training) for Afghan police officers, and teaching the history of the Holocaust, etc.

²⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/10/12/u-s-withdraws-from-unesco-the-u-n-s-cultural-organization-citing-anti-israel-bias/?utm_term=.3b629364cfb3

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41598991>

³³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41310204>

³⁴ Ibid.

The US, a major world superpower, and one of the founding members, withdrawal from UNESCO is a blow to the organization. The consequences of the subsequent aid cutoff for UNESCO have been severe. Klaus Hüfner, an expert on UNESCO at the Global Policy Forum, termed it a “financial crisis.”³⁵s severity has compelled UNESCO to cut back spending on some of it’s important environmental and educational activities. According to the outgoing Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, “At the time when conflicts continue to tear apart societies across the world, it is deeply regrettable for the United States to withdraw from the United Nations agency promoting education for peace and protecting culture under attack,” “This is why I regret the withdrawal of the United States.”³⁶ She called the US withdrawal a "loss to multilateralism", saying she is convinced that "UNESCO has never been so important for the US, or the US for UNESCO".³⁷

Bokova said the partnership between the United States and UNESCO “has never been so meaningful,” despite the withholding of U.S. funding. “Together, we have worked to protect humanity’s shared cultural heritage in the face of terrorist attacks and to prevent violent extremism through education and media literacy,” she said. She added: “The American poet, diplomat, and Librarian of Congress, Archibald MacLeish, penned the lines that open UNESCO’s 1945 Constitution: ‘Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.’ This vision has never been more relevant.”³⁸

But she admitted that "politicisation" had "taken its toll" on the organization in recent years.³⁹ Ms. Bokova told the New York Times that she had informed members of Congress repeatedly that immediate payment of US arrears to UNESCO was not an issue, and that American re-engagement in the organization was the priority. But she questioned the timing of the announcement, coming as UNESCO chooses a new leader. “One concern for the organization might be whether the US move prompts a few others to leave or to be slow on their payments,” Bosco worries. “Organizations like UNESCO are always struggling to get members to pay their dues on time in any case.”⁴⁰

According to UNESCO Media Chief, George Papagiannis, The US's decision will not affect existing UNESCO world heritage sites in the country or prevent it from submitting sites for consideration in the future, but he added that the US was losing a "world security partner" in UNESCO. "We're trying to make a difference in this world by fighting violent extremists; making sure girls are getting access to schools; that teachers are getting the proper training they need," he told *The Independent*. "...It's very disappointing to see the United States withdraw."⁴¹

UNESCO considers right, its decision to grant admission to Palestinian territories as independent member-states called Palestine. She views her actions in the wake of promoting the 1941 UN Resolution 181 that called for a two-state solution, something Israel and the United

³⁵ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/withdraws-unesco-171012133838151.html>

³⁶ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-12/u-s-withdraws-from-unesco-saying-it-s-biased-against-israel>

³⁷ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/withdraws-unesco-171012133838151.html>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41598991>

⁴⁰ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sgsm18372.doc.htm>

⁴¹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/unesco-us-withdraw-israel-bias-trump-palestine-haram-al-sharif-temple-mount-latest-a7996791.html>

States have long opposed. According to the Security Council, Gaza, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has been under military occupation since 1967. These lands comprise the future Palestinian State, ultimately to be agreed by the parties through direct negotiations.⁴² Even though negotiations haven't been that fruitful, UNESCO still justifies its actions on grounds that Israel is refusing to live up to a previous agreement. A brief timeline of major related occurrences:

1974: Congress suspends US contribution after UNESCO criticizes Israel and recognizes the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) - but later rejoins.

1984: Under President Ronald Reagan, US withdraws from UNESCO, saying the agency is politically left-wing and financially irresponsible.

1985: The UK withdraws, rejoining under change of government in 1997.

2003: The US rejoins under George W Bush.

2011: The US withdraws funding in protest at Palestinian membership of UN; arrears begin to accumulate.

2017: The US announces it will withdraw entirely; Israel says it will follow suit.⁴³

C. Palestine's Perspective

Palestine became the 195th full member of UNESCO in 2011, as the United Nations organization defied a mandated cutoff of American funds under federal legislation from the 1990s. The Palestinians won their 2011 UNESCO membership by a thundering 107-14 margin (though 52 states abstained).⁴⁴ However, this has produced little in the way of progress on an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. The step will cost the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization one-quarter of its yearly budget — the 22 percent contributed by the United States (about \$80 million) plus another 3 percent contributed by Israel.⁴⁵ The Palestinian foreign minister, Riad al-Malki, praised the organization, saying that “this vote will help erase a tiny part of the injustice done to the Palestinian people” and that it would help protect world heritage sites in Israeli-occupied territory; in a long speech, Mr. Malki said that “this membership will be the best step toward peace and stability,” insisting that the Palestinian request for membership in UNESCO was “linked in no way to our request to join the United Nations.”⁴⁶ This comment comes in the wake of the perceived notion by The United States that this vote signals an intention of Palestine to seek memberships in UN organizations where the US doesn't have veto power. For the Palestinians, this is membership in UNESCO is long overdue:

⁴² <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sgsm18372.doc.htm>

⁴³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41598991>

⁴⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/01/world/middleeast/unesco-approves-full-membership-for-palestinians.html>

⁴⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/01/world/middleeast/unesco-approves-full-membership-for-palestinians.html>

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

1. In a letter dated 27 April 1989 addressed to the Director-General, Mr. Yasser Arafat applied for the admission of the 'State of Palestine as a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
2. In a letter dated 11 May 1989, the Director-General transmitted this application to the Chairman of the Executive Board so that he might submit it for consideration by the Executive Board in order that the latter might follow it up in the most appropriate manner.
3. The Director-General considers that the Executive Board, in examining this request, should take into consideration Article II, paragraph 2, of the Constitution, Articles 92 and 93 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference and resolution 43/177 adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 15 December 1988.⁴⁷

D. Israel's Perspective

In July 2011, UNESCO declared the ancient and hotly contested core of Hebron in the Israeli-occupied West Bank as a Palestinian World Heritage Site. Israel, from a historical and religious perspective dating back some 3000 years ago, sees the land as their heritage. And if UNESCO claims to exist to protect World Heritage Sites then their actions are not only contrary but also counter-productive. Its decision to designate Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs as a Palestinian heritage as well as resolutions that seemed to minimize Jewish ties to Jerusalem, prompted new accusations of anti-Israel bias, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, accusing the organization of promoting "fake history."⁴⁸ He accused UNESCO of ignoring Judaism's ancient connection to the city, which includes the crypt where its matriarchs and patriarchs are buried and condemned them for declaring the Old City of Hebron in the West Bank a Palestinian World Heritage site. Given this controversial resolution by UNESCO which made no reference to Jewish ties to a key holy site in Jerusalem and criticized Israel's activities at holy places in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, Israel, earlier suspended her co-operation with UNESCO before her final withdrawal.⁴⁹

The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, announced a \$1m cut in funding to the UN, saying the UNESCO vote ignored Jewish ties to the site. A UNESCO resolution on Jerusalem in May 2011 strongly criticised Israel's occupation of the eastern part of the city. After the vote, the Israeli Foreign Ministry issued a statement denouncing the membership bid as a "unilateral Palestinian move which will bring no change on the ground but further removes the possibility for a peace agreement."⁵⁰ Israel recalled its ambassador to the Paris-based organization in 2016

⁴⁷<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/28ead5e67368b9ea852579180070e4d6/a49be78bcaadcc71852579220070828f?OpenDocument>

⁴⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41598991>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

after some governments supported a resolution that denounced Israel's policies on religious sites in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

In May of 2017, Israel was infuriated by a resolution identifying Israel as "the occupying power" in the divided city of Jerusalem and calling on it to rescind any move changing the city's "character and status".⁵¹

With the US, in October 2017, announcing its decision to leave UNESCO for several reasons inclusive of anti-Israel bias, the Israelites also announced their withdrawal from UNESCO: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the decision to leave UNESCO "brave" and "moral."⁵² Other Israeli officials, from both left and right, also praised the decision. Netanyahu said he had instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to prepare for Israel's withdrawal as well. "UNESCO has become a theater of the absurd because, instead of preserving history, it distorts it," he said in a statement. After the vote, the Israeli Foreign Ministry issued a statement denouncing the membership bid as a "unilateral Palestinian move which will bring no change on the ground but further removes the possibility for a peace agreement." The Israeli ambassador Danny Danon said the US withdrawal was proof that the "absurd and shameful resolutions against Israel have consequences. Danon said: "Today is a new day at the UN where there is a price to pay for discrimination against Israel."

The Israeli ambassador, Nimrod Barkan, said that UNESCO had done "a great disservice" to international efforts to restart negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. "UNESCO deals in science, not in science fiction," he said, noting that a Palestinian state is not otherwise recognized by the international community. UNESCO, he said, had acted on a "political subject outside of its competence."⁵³ Yigal Palmor, the Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman, said the vote would not give the Palestinians "any advantage on the ground" and called the UNESC vote "a big diplomatic car crash."⁵⁴

E. Perspectives of Others

"UNESCO is about promoting our ideas and values through culture, education, and science," UNESCO's ideas are "part of America's DNA", Francois Delattre, France's UN ambassador, said in New York, and adding that "we need an America that stays committed to world affairs."⁵⁵

Russia's foreign ministry said the departure of "one of the countries that founded the UN system" is "a shock and a pity. It regrets the decision, adding that the move would disrupt a number of important projects planned by UNESCO."⁵⁶

⁴⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/01/world/middleeast/unesco-approves-full-membership-for-palestinians.html>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/01/world/middleeast/unesco-approves-full-membership-for-palestinians.html>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/withdraws-unesco-171012133838151.html>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he "deeply regretted" the US decision but that the UN would continue to "interact with the United States very productively on a range of issues through a range of organizations".⁵⁷

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) applauded, saying that for years, the agency had "betrayed its original laudatory mission... and chosen instead to unfairly target the Middle East's lone democracy, Israel".⁵⁸

"Now is not a time for democracies to abandon UNESCO," said Shimon Samuels, director for international relations at the Simon Wiesenthal Center. "Their departure will leave a vacuum rapidly filled by the enemies of freedom."⁵⁹

"There is nothing wrong with the organization. The problem is with the member states who submit specific texts and vote the way they do" said Yigal Palmor, a former spokesperson for Israel's Foreign Ministry.⁶⁰

In a statement denouncing Israel's withdrawal, Maria Zakharova, the spokesperson of Moscow's Foreign Ministry, pointed out that Israel's withdrawal "came at a time when a trend has emerged towards easing politicized tension during the discussion of 'Palestinian resolutions' concerning the preservation of Old Jerusalem and the restoration and development of the Gaza Strip as well as matters of culture, education, gender equality and youth work on the Palestinian territories."⁶¹

The European Union has failed to come to a common agreement on the issue. Some European countries voted in favor of Palestine (France, Belgium, Greece) while others voted against (Germany, Czech Republic, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Palau, Sweden) and even others abstained (Britain, Poland, Portugal, Italy, Denmark, Spain, Japan, Ukraine, and Switzerland, etc.)

⁵⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41598991>

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-planned-withdrawal-from-unesco-unlikely-to-improve-anything/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-planned-withdrawal-from-unesco-unlikely-to-improve-anything/>

⁶¹ Ibid.

IV. The US Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital

Barely two months after the US withdrawal from UNESCO, President Trump on Wednesday, Dec. 6th, 2017, formally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, reversing nearly seven decades of American foreign policy and setting in motion a plan to move the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to the fiercely contested Holy City. President Trump claims to be very committed to the peace deal between Israel and Palestine in the Middle East. "Today we finally acknowledge the obvious: that Jerusalem is Israel's capital, Mr. Trump said from the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House. This is nothing more or less than a recognition of reality. It is also the right thing to do. Recognizing Jerusalem, he added, was "a long overdue step to advance the peace process."⁶² The president cast his decision as a break with decades of failed policy on Jerusalem, which the United States, along with virtually every other nation in the world, has declined to recognize as the capital since Israel's founding in 1948.⁶³

Upon the announcement, the US stood isolated and incurred a swarm of criticisms from the UN and Arab and European leaders. It was met with anger and demonstrations by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As of December 25, 2017, Salafi groups have fired almost 30 rockets towards Israel from the Gaza Strip, with almost half landing inside Gaza. Two caused minor damage to property near Ashkelon and Sderot.⁶⁴ Turkey and Yemen co-sponsored the draft resolution which calls on all countries to refrain from establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem. In a non-binding resolution voted at the United Nations General Assembly on 21 December 2017, nine countries supported the US resolution to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, 128 disagreed, 35 abstained and 21 did not participate.⁶⁵ Federica Mogherini, the European Union's top diplomat, made clear that Europe saw the president's decision as a threat to peace in the Middle East. "We believe that any action that would undermine these efforts must absolutely be avoided, she said. A way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as a future capital of both states."⁶⁶ A motion condemning the move was proposed in the United Nations Security Council but was vetoed by the United States after a 14-1 vote. The United Nations General Assembly later passed a motion condemning Trump's announcement 128 to 9, with 35 abstentions.⁶⁷

A) What Does It Mean for the US to Recognize Jerusalem as Israel's Capital and Relocate Her Embassy There?

Policy concerns are that these actions would gravely hamstring the Israel-Palestinian peace deal amongst other outcomes. But, as a sovereign nation, is the US action really wrong or don't they have the prerogative to do so? Is there any legal sanctity in her recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and decision to move her embassy to Jerusalem? It is common knowledge in politics, diplomacy, and international law that locating a nation's embassy in a territory of

⁶² <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_recognition_of_Jerusalem_as_Israeli_capital

⁶⁵ <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/22/middleeast/jerusalem-vote-united-nations-list-intl/index.html>

⁶⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html>

⁶⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/20/us-take-names-united-nations-vote-to-reject-jerusalem-recognition>

another state communicates that the nation recognizes the sovereign control of that state over that particular territory. The US decision to keep her Embassy in Tel Aviv is also a refusal of her acknowledgment of her strategic ally, Israel's jurisdiction over Jerusalem. In this case, the US decision to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem recognizes Israel as having sovereignty over the highly contested Jerusalem. Under international law, this implicitly gives Israel some rights and obligations, she otherwise may not have had, in the exercising of control over the territory. Said action, at such a time when heated negotiations are still ongoing with a two-state solution in mind and given the facilitative role the US plays in the process, could be interpreted as counterproductive for many, while for Israel and the US, it is seen as something long overdue.

Previous presidents avoided said actions given a US policy which does not recognize Israel or any other state as having sovereignty over Jerusalem. In 1967, Israel established control over the entire city of Jerusalem. In subsequent United Nations proceedings, the United States stated that the "continuing policy of the United States Government" was that "the status of Jerusalem ... should be decided not unilaterally but in consultation with all concerned."⁶⁸ President Trump said that policy brought us "no closer to a lasting peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians." "It would be folly to assume that repeating the exact same formula would now produce a different or better result".⁶⁹

Is President Trump acting unanimously? No. Congress has repeatedly adopted bipartisan resolutions expressing its support for such a move, often with overwhelming support. At times, it has also enacted legislation requiring the executive branch to take steps that would recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 is the most forceful expression of Congress's desire that the U.S. Embassy be moved to Jerusalem. The act declares that "Jerusalem should be recognized as the capital of the State of Israel" and that "the United States Embassy in Israel should be established in Jerusalem no later than May 31, 1999." To ensure this happens, it imposes sanctions on the executive branch if it fails to take such steps along an enumerated timeline. Specifically, section 3(b) of the act states: Not more than 50 percent of the funds appropriated to the Department of State for fiscal year 1999 for "Acquisition and Maintenance of Buildings Abroad" may be obligated until the Secretary of State determines and reports to Congress that the United States Embassy in Jerusalem has officially opened.⁷⁰

Past presidential administrations (Clinton, Bush, and Obama) found a work around the Act through a waiver—section 7 (a, & b)—that allows the president to suspend the Act six months prior and renewed said suspension periodically through signing in order to prevent section 3(b) from being executed by the president. Said Previous presidents justified said waiver on grounds of national security or fear of the actions having dire consequences on the peace process. Up to this writing, President Trump has refused to renew such waiver, allowing it to expire invokes section 3(b) into effect.

⁶⁸ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/30/how-to-move-the-u-s-embassy-to-jerusalem/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html>

⁷⁰ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/30/how-to-move-the-u-s-embassy-to-jerusalem/>

Hence, as every country has the right to determine where to put her embassy, for the US, it is not just within her prerogative and legal sanctity, it is her sovereign right to both recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and relocate her embassy to Jerusalem. The US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley said: "At the UN we're always asked to do more and give more. So, when we make a decision, at the will of the American people, about where to locate 'OUR' embassy, we don't expect those we've helped to target us. She categorically asserted that the United States will not be told by any country where they can or should put their embassy. She said: that it is a scandalous charge to say that the US is setting back the prospects of peace in the Middle East. It is rather the UN doing more harm than good in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, she asserted."⁷¹

If the Palestinians get East Jerusalem as their capital, other nations will gladly have their embassies there. For many, including the UN, the Arab world, and specifically the Palestinians which see East Jerusalem as their future capital, the move might compel the Palestinians to seek dialogue with the US or lead them to a hiatus and more violence as it highly prejudices the status of Jerusalem in favor of Israel and discredits the US facilitative role in promoting a negotiated settlement. Of course, this move removes any ambivalence on the part of the US. It might also have other consequences including the possibility of weakening diplomatic relations between the US and other nations i.e. the newly close relationship between Saudi Arabia and the Trump administration.

For Israel, her 1980 Jerusalem Law already declared Jerusalem her united and eternal capital, exerting that her sovereignty extends throughout Jerusalem. But, it was never recognized by the UN, instead, a resolution was adopted against her (resolution # 478) and all foreign states were encouraged to remove their embassies from Jerusalem. Israel categorically rejected the resolution and its Foreign Ministry announced, "It will not undermine the status of Jerusalem as the capital of a sovereign Israel and as a united city which will never again be torn apart".⁷²

B) Brief Historical background of Jerusalem

Given the lengthy history of Jerusalem filled with a historical timeline of different events, I cannot cover everything here. However, a brief history of Jerusalem might shed some light.

Jerusalem (/dʒəˈruːsələm/: Hebrew יְרוּשָׁלַיִם *Yerushalayim* [jeruʃaˈlajim]; is a city in the Middle East, located on a plateau in the Judean Mountains between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea. The periods of Jewish sovereignty in the city's history are important to Israeli/Jewish nationalists (Zionists), who claim the right to the city based on Jewish descent from the Israelite Kingdom of Judah, of which Jerusalem was the capital some 3,000 years ago. In contrast, Palestinian nationalists claim the right to the city based on modern Palestinians' descent from many different peoples who have lived in the region over the centuries, rather than those from a particular period.⁷³

⁷¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/20/us-take-names-united-nations-vote-to-reject-jerusalem-recognition>

⁷² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_478

⁷³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem#cite_note-15

i. Ancient Past

Before Jerusalem came to be considered a holy city in the three major Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, according to the Bible, King David conquered the city from the Jebusites 3,000 years ago and established it as the capital of the United Kingdom of Israel, and his son, King Solomon, commissioned the building of the First Temple. These foundational events, straddling the dawn of the 1st millennium BCE, assumed central symbolic importance for the Jewish people. During the Israelite period, significant construction activity in Jerusalem began in the 9th century BCE (Iron Age II), and in the 8th century, the city developed into the religious and administrative center of the Kingdom of Judah. The holiness of Jerusalem in Christianity, conserved in the Septuagint which Christians adopted as their own authority, was reinforced by the New Testament account of Jesus's crucifixion there in 1ST Century Judea in 33 AD. This is attested to by other ancient sources and is established as a historical event confirmed by non-Christian sources.⁷⁴ During its long history, Jerusalem has been destroyed at least twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times. The part of Jerusalem called the City of David was settled in the 4th millennium BCE.⁷⁵

At some point in time, during these events, the Ottoman Empire (under Turkish rulers) reign intermittently from 1517 (the Palestinians were there) till the British took over from them in 1921 at the battle of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, occupied predominantly, not by Jews but Palestinians, was under the British Mandate, during which time some Jews returned as refugees to co-exist with the Palestinians who objected to it from the onset. After the war, in 1947, and considering the Holocaust, the United Nations approved a partition plan that provided for two states — one Jewish, one Arab — with Jerusalem governed by a “special international regime” owing to its unique status. The Arabs rejected the partition plan, and a day after Israel proclaimed its independence in 1948, the Arab countries attacked the new state. They were defeated.⁷⁶ Jerusalem was divided: The western half became part of the new state of Israel (and its capital, under an Israeli law passed in 1950), while the eastern half, including the Old City, was occupied by Jordan. The walls built around Jerusalem under Suleiman the Magnificent, in 1538, define the Old City, which has been traditionally divided into four quarters —known since the early 19th century as the Armenian, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Quarters. Modern Jerusalem has grown far beyond the Old City's boundaries.⁷⁷

ii. Recent past – present day

Jerusalem today, is a city that straddles the border between Israel and the West Bank. It's home to some of the holiest sites in both Judaism and Islam, and so both Israel and Palestine sought to make it their capital. For the first 20 years of Israel's existence, Jerusalem was divided. Israel controlled the parts of Jerusalem and its suburbs inside the red dotted line on this map, while Jordan controlled everything outside of it (blue dotted lines separate Jerusalem proper from suburbs). See map below. In Sunni Islam, Jerusalem is the third-holiest city, after Mecca and Medina. In Islamic tradition in 610 A D, it became the first Qibla, the focal point for Muslim

⁷⁴ Eddy, Paul Rhodes and Gregory A. Boyd (2007). *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition*. Baker Academic. p. 172

⁷⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem#cite_note-15

⁷⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/05/world/middleeast/jerusalem-history-peace-deal.html>

⁷⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem#cite_note-15

prayer (salat). Today the Old City is home to many sites of seminal religious importance, among them the Temple Mount with its Western Wall, Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Outside the Old City stands the Garden Tomb.⁷⁸

Though the US recognizes Jerusalem as Israel capital, the status of Jerusalem still remains one of the core issues in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. During the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, West Jerusalem was among the areas captured and later annexed by Israel while East Jerusalem, including the Old City, was captured and later annexed by Jordan. Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordan during the 1967 Six-Day War and subsequently annexed it into Jerusalem, together with the additional surrounding territory. One of Israel's Basic Laws, the 1980 Jerusalem Law, refers to Jerusalem as the country's undivided capital. All branches of the Israeli government are located in Jerusalem, including the Knesset (Israel's parliament), the residences of the Prime Minister and President and the Supreme Court. Whilst the international community rejected the annexation as illegal and treats East Jerusalem as Palestinian territory occupied by Israel, Israel has a stronger claim to sovereignty over West Jerusalem. In 2015, Jerusalem had a population of some 850,000 residents, comprising ca. 200,000 secular Jewish Israelis, 350,000 Ultra-Orthodox Jews, and 300,000 Palestinians.⁷⁹



Jordan controlled the Temple Mount, a hill in the map's brown splotch. The hill hosts the Western Wall, a retaining wall of an ancient Jewish temple and one of Judaism's holiest

⁷⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem#cite_note-15

⁷⁹ Ibid.

sites, and two of Islam's most important landmarks, the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. Israeli Jews weren't allowed to pray in the area while Jordan controlled it. During the 1967 war, Israel took control of East Jerusalem and all that lies within it.⁸⁰

⁸⁰<https://www.vox.com/cards/israel-palestine/jerusalem>

V. Author's Opinion

- Given the United States' hegemonic status, she can exit international bodies caring less about the consequences compared to smaller countries doing the same. However, given this withdrawal, that of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris Agreement, and threats to withdraw from other agreements including NATO, NAFTA, and The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, I posit that these could be suggestive of an ominous handwriting on the walls of global approaches to issues: These events are the beginning of a presage to a wider disengagement by the US from many other global initiatives and bodies, and, could as a tipping point, set forth a downward spiral for other nations to do the same i.e. Israel also quitted UNESCO shortly after the US decision. On the one hand, it is inimical to global progress, while on the other hand, it compels our rethinking and the subsequent redefining of our global worldview and approaches to issues. From time to time, we must examine our modus operandi and modus vivendi under the microscope. The majority might not always be correct, while sometimes, the minority could be right.
- At the same time, this action on the part of the United States doesn't only reduce her morale, it also reduces her respect and influence internationally. Her role as a leading decision maker comes into questioning – A part of the influence one has also come from his/her leadership role in global organizations. These international organizations provide a platform that lends to your opinionated voice and the spread of your concepts. When a recurring pattern of withdrawal from such bodies are observed, you tend to lose respect in the eyes of the world and cannot hold sway over the affairs of others as in previous times. Hence, the US is gradually losing its authority, voice, and reputation in global issues. Nations that once looked up to them, might be now, very well redefining their focus.
- The US negotiating power-circle reduces: The US involvement had given her some degree of leverage on related issues. A withdrawal limits her deal-making chances.
- Given the current trend of a global perspective in favor of Palestine, with time, the Palestinian territories as an independent member-state called Palestine might very well be accepted in many UN bodies/organizations. So, it begs the questions: will the US withdraw from every UN body that recognizes Palestine? Can the US still play its role as mediator in the conflict? The US opposes any move by UN bodies to recognize the Palestinians as a state, insisting that this must await a negotiated Middle East peace deal. The US argues that sub-U N bodies like UNESCO should have waited for the Palestine application to the UN at a general level for membership to be resolved before admitting her into smaller bodies. A thing which should only come about through negotiations with Israel being fruitful.

- Reduce UNESCO morale: when a superpower like America withdraws, the prestige of UNESCO is affected. The credibility, bargaining power, and weight of the institution in the eyes of other global organizations and the world are watered down. It would be unwise for people to underestimate the pattern of withdrawals and the cumulative effect of these costs. However, by this time, the organization should have been used to not receiving funding from the US which makes the financial aspect not much of a difference. Notwithstanding, it leaves UNESCO with an additional challenge to repair its image and redeem its confidence in the eyes of the world.
- Since UNESCO is truly preserving cultures and World Heritage Sites, then knowing the Jewish historical roots (that dates far back as over 3,000 years) to the land should have been something to consider in all of her recent past anti-Israel resolutions that were in favor of Palestine. A respect for the historical tombs of Jewish Patriarchs should have been something to highly esteem when passing these resolutions which have become the basis for these actions. It is not a secret that Jerusalem is the home of the Jews, a city named by King David, the patriarch over 3000 years ago. To give such a sacred heritage with strong attachments which have deep meanings and symbols for the Christian and the Jewish faith, to a people of seemingly rival faith, Islam, is tantamount to exasperating the existent conflict. Picture it this way: had it been the other way around – this situation was in Mecca, and where Mohammed was buried was in contestation, and UNESCO ruled it to be given to a people of the Christian or Jewish faith, what would the Muslims have done? For Israel, it is more than just a piece of land: It is the sacred and symbolic attachments involved, its patriarchal heritage, and the prophetic pointers to future events i.e. the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem which Israel has been gathering materials for over the last few years.
- While it is true that Palestine, now enjoys the blessings of the nations which voted her into UNESCO, the chances of a peace deal with Israel are greatly reduced, even though it wasn't so much, to begin with.
- Could this be an opportunity for non-western countries to increase the influence in the organization? Being wounded, would UNESCO take more decisions against Israel?
- Israel's decision – both the timing of and the decision itself are a bit awkward to me. Did Israel really want to quit at this time, or it is an unplanned abrupt decision she felt pressured into?

Israel's announcement to leave comes a day or two after she had celebrated some major diplomatic success. On October 11, 2017, the organization's Executive Board unanimously agreed to delay voting on a pair of anti-Israel resolutions: "The decisions you just adopted are, I hope, a wind of change that will mark the future of this organization," Israel's ambassador to UNESCO, Carmel Shama-Hacohen, said right after the vote. "When Israel became a member of UNESCO 68 years ago, we shared a dream of a better world, a dream of a better future. We still hold this dream, and we still

believe that UNESCO is able to contribute to a better world for our children,” he declared.⁸¹ Could it be that the US’ decision took Israel by surprise, and giving that anti-Israel bias is one of the major reasons for this decision, Israel, probably, felt compelled to follow suit? Did the US leave Israel with no better choice? How does it look for a superpower to claim they are leaving an organization because of its bias against you and you continue to remain a member of the said organization? Wouldn’t that appear ungrateful?

- The decision came at a time when UNESCO was voting for its new head and Qatar’s Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kawari, who is considered by the US and Israel to have a record of fostering anti-Semitic agenda, led France’s Audrey Azoulay and Egyptian hopeful Moushira Khattab in the first voting rounds. Both the US and Israel felt if he becomes the next Director-General for UNESCO, matters could go worse for Israel and get better for Palestine as far as UNESCO activities are concerned. Surprisingly, on October 13, one day after the announcement by Israel of its intention to leave UNESCO — Audrey Azoulay, a French-Jewish woman with relational ties in Israel, defeated her Qatari rival and was elected the agency’s director-general.

In remarks immediately after her success, Azoulay pleaded that member states must “get involved” in the organization at what she called “a time of crisis,” and “not leave it.”⁸² Had the US and Israel knew that she was going to win, would they have announced their decisions to quit the organization at the time it was done? Yes, Israel has had to face many anti-Israel resolutions passed by UNESCO in recent years which deny her a Jewish connection to the land of her patriarchs and holiest historical sites in the Land of Israel. Yet, she remained a part of the organization with the hope that fighting from within to improve it is better than quitting in an attempt to probably delegitimized the organization. Is this quitting a fight after victory, or it is another aspect of the fight? Would this bring about a desired change in the organization? Whichever way, it seems withdrawing from the withdrawal is late. Netanyahu on Oct. 15 said: I hoped UNESCO would abandon its “anti-Semitic” ways but added that he was not optimistic. “Therefore, my directive to leave the organization stands and we will move forward to carry it out,” he declared.⁸³

- In retrospect of the US accusation against UNESCO of continuing anti-Israel bias, one might be poised to agree and further posit that said bias is present in other UN bodies as well given the following: As of 2013, Israel had been condemned in 45 resolutions by United Nations Human Rights Council. Since its creation in 2006—the Council had resolved almost more resolutions condemning Israel than on the rest of the world combined. The 45 resolutions comprised almost half (45.9%) of all country-specific resolutions passed by the Council.⁸⁴ According to UN Watch which monitors the United

⁸¹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/unesco-delays-anti-israel-resolutions-as-it-picks-new-head/>

⁸² <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-planned-withdrawal-from-unesco-unlikely-to-improve-anything/>

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_Nations_resolutions_concerning_Israel

Nations, the General Assembly from 2012 – 2015 has adopted 97 resolutions against individual nations with 83 of those resolutions focusing on Israel alone. That is 86 % of the resolutions is against one nation with the remaining 14% on the rest of the world.⁸⁵ Noting their human rights record in comparison to Israel, consider the questionable reputations of some of the countries who are condemning Israel and criticizing the US for disrupting peace in the Middle East and possibly global peace, how many resolutions have been adopted against them?

- A) Myanmar: possible crimes against humanity against the Rohingyas from 2012 - 2017
- B) North Korea: lack of basic human rights, to begin with
- C) Venezuela: a country in humanitarian disaster with violence in the streets and human rights abuse by the government, starving families joining street gangs to meet ends
- D) Syria: a seven-year civil war that has left millions displaced and killed half a million People with the president being accused of using chemical weapon against his citizens including children
- E) Yemen, which helped draft the resolution condemning the US: seven million Yemenis are on the brink of starvation due to the civil war.
- F) EU states have failed to introduce a single UNGA resolution on the human rights situation in China, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Belarus, Cuba, Turkey, Crimea, Pakistan, Vietnam, Algeria, or on 175 other countries.⁸⁶

Is Israel truly deserving the condemnation of 86% of those resolutions or is something else afoot?

- Given the religious undertone in the claims on both sides (Israel and Palestine), there is likely no agreeable solution to be reached by both parties as both leaders seem unbending on compromising. Making concessions could be viewed as one betraying the faith. However, it is worth noting that the Palestinians are in favor of the two-state solution with Jerusalem being undivided, but Israel has refused. For Palestine, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, which is Islam third holiest shrines are present in East Jerusalem as well. It is believed that Muhammed visited the site where the Al-Aqsa Mosque was built long after his death, Surah 17:1. They will not compromise on East Jerusalem as they see it as their future capital. For Israel, considering their peculiar attachment to the land of the patriarchs as portrayed by biblical and ancient history dating to over 3,000 years ago (even before Palestinians came there), and the prophecies concerning the future of the city, a place where the new temple is to be built by the Jews (they have gathered almost all the materials for building the new temple in Jerusalem), it seems preposterous and incomprehensible for them to surrender the city to a people of another faith or a secular governing body i.e. UN. Seeing the fulfillment of a long-awaited dream come through now, strengthens her resolve.
- The Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, which is Islam third holiest shrines was built on the very ruins and foundation of the Jewish Temple that was destroyed by

⁸⁵ <https://www.unwatch.org/2017-unga-resolutions-singling-israel/>

⁸⁶ <https://www.unwatch.org/2017-unga-resolutions-singling-israel/>

Titus, the Roman General, in 70 AD. One might ask the question: Of all places in the earth and in that specific region, why would the Muslims build a mosque so dear to them on the exact spot where the Jewish Temple was, especially, that the Jews would someday return to rebuild their temple, why? Couldn't they build the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, somewhere else in the world so as to avoid conflict?

- The convolutions of the reality of the situation is also buried deep within not just the mixed historical and religious aspects, but also the demography: They physically co-exist, yet they are divided by culture, belief, and tradition. Jews lived in East Jerusalem which is at the heart of the Palestinians while Palestinians live in West Jerusalem which is at the heart of the Jews with road networks developed by Israel connecting them both.

VI. Inference

For some, this withdrawal might have sent a strong global message not only to UNESCO but other global bodies concerning the need to restructure. Washington maintains that it doesn't oppose a future Palestinian State, but that it should come about only through peace talks with Israel and not through other UN bodies admitting Palestine into their membership. This decision by UNESCO might have made things difficult for a peace deal between Israel and Palestine. On all sides, there is a need to reexamine the current actions and situations that contributed to them. Israel and its allies in UNESCO are far outnumbered by the Arab countries and their allies, as such, any voting on issues involving Israel and Palestine will go in favor of Palestine. With the new French-Jewish Director-General of UNESCO, one would have thought that the situation, though a diplomatic confusion, could still be remedied with negotiations. Especially that the US' decision takes effect Dec. 2018, and she desires a permanent non-member observer seat, which leaves room for talks. Moreover, this is not the first time the US is withdrawing from UNESCO, meaning, they could return again. It's obvious that the US returning would mean Israel will eventually return.

However, with the decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and relocate the US Embassy to Jerusalem, the window for reconsideration isn't as promising as one would think. Instead, it seems that the US has taken an uncompromising path. At this stage, predicting a suitable peace deal (two-state solution) between Israel and Palestine seems unpredictable. The annoyance by the Palestinians and the Arab world at this move on the part of the US could incite violence in Israel between Jews and Palestinians, affect diplomatic relations between the US and many nations as well as spur undesired alternatives. Or Perhaps, an optional resolution with more unique details would be considered.

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