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Tamara Lorincz's revealing article on NATO's connection to Israel is Chapter 6 of

PALESTINE IS A CANADIAN
WOMEN, PEACE AND
SECURITY ISSUE:
OBLIGATIONS AND
OPPORTUNITIES

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selected quote:

“After Gallant’s briefing to NATO last October (2023), Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that “Israel does not stand alone.” Stoltenberg announced that members of the Alliance would give Israel “practical support,” which meant more weapons and political cover. NATO allies, in particular the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany are the primary weapons exporters to Israel, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s (SIPRI) 2023 Trends in International Arms Transfers report.”

NATO, Israel, and Canada

by Tamara Lorincz

This article traces the troubled history of the close ties among the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Canada, and the State of Israel. It also makes visible the role of NATO in the genocide in Gaza. NATO is a nuclear-armed military alliance led by the United States with 31 European members and Canada. NATO has partners around the world, including Israel. For the past seven decades, the Euro-Atlantic allies have firmly supported Israel, despite its apartheid regime and illegal occupation of Palestinian territory. In 2019 when Israel's President Reuven Rivlin visited

Ottawa, Prime Minister Trudeau stated:

“A long-standing relationship between our two countries, with close cooperation that extends far beyond matters of security. We went on to become not only steadfast allies, but dear friends. Friends who stand up for each other and support one another in good times and in bad times. Friends who share the same values of peace, freedom and the rule of law.”

Trudeau ended his speech by emphasizing Canada’s “special bond” with Israel. Canada’s Foreign Minister similarly described Canada’s relationship with Israel as “ironclad.” Canada’s other “ironclad” relationship is with NATO, as recently declared by Defence Minister Bill Blair. NATO has been the cornerstone of Canadian defence and foreign policies. The bonds between Canada-Israel-NATO have perpetuated violence and dispossession against the Palestinians.

On October 12, 2023, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant briefed the NATO defence ministers by video conference on Hamas’ armed incursion from Gaza that led to the killing and hostage-taking of Israelis. NATO allies called Hamas’ attack “unjustifiable acts of terror,” yet they did not acknowledge Israel’s cruel and illegal 16-year blockade of Gaza and detainment of thousands of Palestinians without charge or trial in Israeli jails for years. They also did not mention Israel’s violent occupation of Palestinian land since 1948.

Also, NATO defence ministers overlooked Israel’s shameful history of “mowing the grass,” a military strategy to “maintain order” in Gaza, whereby the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) routinely shell and bomb the besieged strip, leading to massacres of Palestinians and destruction of the cities.

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Kingdom, and Germany are the primary weapons exporters to Israel, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) 2023 Trends in International Arms Transfers report.

Arms sales between NATO allies and Israel have always been the priority in the relationship. Israel was established in 1948 with the support of the same major powers, including settler colonial States, the United States, and the United Kingdom, which formed the Alliance a year later. Canada, one of the twelve founding members of NATO, was one of the first countries to recognize the State of Israel over the objections of the Palestinian people and Arab countries.

As the New York Times reported in 1957, the Allies were supplying Israel with weapons to secure its new borders that dispossessed Palestinians of their land and to conduct operations to prevent the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East [1]. Over time, Israel became a strategic garrison State that provided the Euro-Atlantic alliance with intelligence gathering and armed forces in the region.

In 1987, United States President Ronald Reagan designated Israel as a major non-NATO ally, which is a formal designation just under full NATO membership. The designation enabled allies to cooperate more closely with Israel on weapons research, development and production, and training and operations. The United States strengthened ties between Israel and the Alliance even though the IDF had conducted massacres in Lebanon and while the Central Intelligence Agency was conducting "dirty wars" in Central and South America with Israel's involvement in the 1980s.

During the Reagan administration, the United States was funding right-wing governments, arming death squads, and repressing, torturing, and murdering community leaders, leftist activists, and peasant movements in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras,

and Nicaragua. Al Jazeera reported that Israel trained and armed many of these death squad leaders and soldiers during that period. The United States and Israel also backed the dictatorship of General Efraín Ríos Montt, who committed genocide against the poor Indigenous people in Guatemala in the 1980s. Now, the United States and NATO are arming the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as it commits genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza.

In 1994, NATO established the Mediterranean Dialogue with five countries, including Israel and Morocco, which has been illegally occupying Western Sahara. The Mediterranean Dialogue was supposed to bring stability and security to the region bordering the sea. However, it has done the exact opposite. In the past thirty years, there has been greater instability, terrorism, and a refugee crisis across the Middle East and North Africa, especially since NATO's illegal bombing of Libya in 2011, which Canada led.

As the United States and NATO were fighting wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, Israel signed an Individual Cooperation Programme (ICP) under the Alliance's enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue in 2006. This facilitated a closer partnership between NATO and Israel on counter-terrorism operations. However, for the U.S., which dominates NATO, and Israel, the "terrorists" on their lists are Palestinian liberation groups and the Lebanese resistance army, Hezbollah. These so-called "counter-terrorist operations" by NATO and Israel serve to prevent Palestinian self-determination and undermine a peace process.

Two years after the ICP was signed, the IDF launched Operation Cast Lead and pounded the densely populated Gaza strip with bombs and white phosphorus munitions, killing 1,100 Palestinians and injuring 5,200 more. It is NATO allies that have supplied Israel with the bulk of its weapons, which have targeted Palestinians and destroyed civilian infrastructure.

In 2014, Israel formally announced its adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). This resolution is supposed to ensure that countries engage women to prevent conflict, mediate, and build peace. Yet that same year, the IDF launched a vicious assault called Operation Protective Edge against Gaza that caused tremendous harm and trauma, especially to women and children. According to the United Nations Works and Relief Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Israel killed over 2,000 Palestinians, injured 11,000 people, and destroyed healthcare facilities, mosques, and homes. Israel's illegal blockade of Gaza, occupation of Palestinian territory, and system of apartheid are antithetical to the WPS agenda.

Despite Israel's severe violation of human rights against the Palestinians, NATO welcomed Israel's Permanent Mission to its headquarters in Brussels in 2016. Stoltenberg said that the Euro-Atlantic Alliance and Israel are partners with "shared values" and would increase cooperation in the Middle East. Yet for years, Türkiye had blocked Israel from establishing an office at the NATO headquarters because of the IDF's deadly raid on a Turkish aid ship, the Mavi Mara, that was sailing to Gaza in 2010. Israeli commandos stormed the ship, killed ten humanitarian activists, and injured many others on board. Ankara later capitulated to NATO's demand, and Israel's Ambassador to the European Union, Aharon Leshno-Yaar, became Tel Aviv's first official representative to the Alliance.

Since Israel established its mission in NATO, there have been more high-level visits between Brussels and Tel Aviv. In January 2019, NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller visited Israel to discuss "practical cooperation" and "common interests" in the region. She participated in a meeting on Israel's approach to WPS issues that includes mandatory service in the Israeli military for Israeli women. Gottemoeller urged Israel to promote more women into the upper echelons of the

government and the armed forces. NATO and Israel are militarizing the WPS agenda by pushing more women in the military and disregarding conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding measures. Worse still, Gottemoeller gave no consideration to the impacts of Israel's violent occupation and military operations that are harming 26 Palestinian women and girls in Gaza and preventing a peaceful resolution.

Two years later, with its newly acquired F-35 stealth fighters from the United States and parts from NATO allies, Israel launched another large-scale air assault against Gaza, damaging infrastructure and injuring and killing many civilians. Israel boasts that its weapon systems are "battle-tested" against Palestinians. Every spring in Ottawa, Israeli arms dealers sell their "battle-tested weapons" and wine and dine with Canadian government officials and military officers at the CANSEC exhibition.

The close relationship between Israel and the Alliance is also exemplified by the visit of the Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, to Tel Aviv on September 27-28, 2023. Lieutenant General Hertzl Halevi, Chief of the General Staff of the IDF, coordinated Admiral Bauer's trip. Admiral Bauer received a briefing from the IDF and was taken to the Gaza border crossing, which coincidentally took place a week before the Hamas attack and hostage-taking. NATO and Israel have the most highly sophisticated intelligence gathering, reconnaissance and surveillance technologies, and espionage operations in the world, and they closely coordinate with each other. An independent public inquiry should be held to determine what NATO and Israel knew in advance of October 7 and what they were planning.

Despite NATO having a WPS policy and allies having WPS National Action Plans, they have provided "military assistance," weapons, to Israel as it deploys extreme violence against the Palestinians. The allies' bullets, bombs,

missiles, sniper rifles, and fighter jets are used by the IDF to injure and kill women and girls and make the lives of all Palestinians more insecure. This has resulted in the weaponization of WPS as NATO allies are exporting arms and prolonging the genocide in Gaza.

Canada needs to be accountable for its complicity in Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, system of apartheid and genocide in Gaza, and to withdraw from NATO. We want justice and liberation for the Palestinian people, the genuine implementation of the WPS agenda, the abolition of the United States-led military alliance, and peace in the Middle East.

[1] ISRAELI LEADERS STUDY ARMS DEAL: FORMULA SOUGHT FOR LINKS WITH NATO. Special to The New York Times. New York Times (1923-); Dec 27, 1957; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times pg.3