

Video: Why Does the US Support Israel? Michael Hudson and Ben Norton

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Ben Norton: Why does the United States so strongly support Israel?

In this video today, I'm going to be explaining the geopolitical and economic reasons why Israel is such an important part of U.S. foreign policy and Washington's attempt to dominate not only the region of the Middle East, but really the entire world.

For this analysis today, I had the privilege of being joined by the economist Michael Hudson. I will bring him in later to provide further details about this topic. But first, I want to highlight some very important basic context to understand this relationship.

It is crucial to stress that Israel is an extension of U.S. geopolitical power in one of the most critically important regions of the world.

In fact, it was current U.S. President Joe Biden, back in 1986, when he was a senator, who famously said that, if Israel didn't exist, the United States would have to invent it:

Biden/Video: If we look at the Middle East, I think it's about time we stop, those of us who support, as most of us do, Israel in this body, for apologizing for our support for Israel.

There is no apology to be made. None. It is the best \$3 billion investment we make.

Were there not an Israel, the United States of America would have to invent an Israel to protect her interest in the region; the United States would have to go out and invent an Israel.

I am with my colleagues who are on the floor of the Foreign Relations Committee, and we worry at length about NATO; and we worry about the eastern flank of NATO, Greece and

Turkey, and how important it is. They pale by comparison...

They pale by comparison in terms of the benefit that accrues to the United States of America.

Ben Norton: First of all, it goes without saying that the so-called Middle East, or a better term is West Asia, has some of the world's largest reserves of oil and gas, and the entire economic infrastructure all around the world relies on fossil fuels.

We are gradually moving toward new energy sources, but fossil fuels are still absolutely critical to the entire global economy. And Washington's goal has been to make sure that it can maintain steady prices in the global oil and gas markets.

But this is about something much bigger than just oil and gas. The U.S. military's stated policy since the 1990s, since the end of the Cold War and the overthrow of the Soviet Union, is that the United States has tried to maintain control over every region of the world.

This was stated very clearly by the U.S. National Security Council in 1992 in the so-called Wolfowitz Doctrine. The [U.S. National Security Council wrote](#):

[The United States'] goal is to preclude any hostile power from dominating a region critical to our interests, and also thereby to strengthen the barriers against the reemergence of a global threat to the interests of the U.S. and our allies. These regions include Europe, East Asia, the Middle East/Persian Gulf, and Latin America. Consolidated, nondemocratic control of the resources of such a critical region could generate a significant threat to our security.

Then, in 2004, the U.S. government published its [National Military Strategy](#), in which Washington stressed that its goal was "Full Spectrum Dominance – the ability to control any situation or defeat any adversary across the range of military operations".

Now, historically, when it came to the Middle East, the U.S. relied on a so-called "twin pillar" strategy. The west pillar was Saudi Arabia, and the east pillar was Iran. And until the 1979 revolution in Iran, the country was governed by a dictator, a shah, the monarch, who was backed by the United States and served U.S. interests in the region.

However, with the 1979 revolution, the U.S. lost one of the pillars of its twin pillar strategy, and Israel became increasingly important for the United States to maintain control over this crucially strategic region.

It's not just the massive oil reserves and gas reserves in the region; it's not just the fact that many of the world's top oil and gas producers are located in West Asia. It's also the fact that some of the most important trading routes on Earth also go through this region.



Port of Suez, Egypt is featured in this image photographed by an Expedition 16 crewmember on the International Space Station. The Port of Suez is located in Egypt along the northern coastline of the Gulf of Suez. The port and city are the southern terminus of the Suez Canal that transits through Egypt and debouches into the Mediterranean Sea near Port Said. (Licensed under the Public Domain)

It would be difficult to overstate how important Egypt's Suez Canal is. This connects trade from the Middle East going into Europe, from the Red Sea into the Mediterranean, and around [30 percent of all of the world's shipping containers](#) pass through the Suez Canal. That represents around 12% of the total global trade of all goods.

Then, directly south of the Suez Canal, where the Red Sea enters the Arabian Sea, you have a crucial geostrategic choke point known as the [Bab al-Mandab Strait](#), right off the coast of

Yemen. And there, more than 6 million barrels of oil pass through every single day.

Historically, the United States has tried to dominate this region in order to maintain control not only of energy supplies, but also to ensure these global trade routes that the entire globalized neoliberal economic system is built on.

And as U.S. influence in the region has weakened in an increasingly multipolar world, Israel has become increasingly important for the United States to try to maintain control.

We can see this clearly in the discussions over oil prices through OPEC, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, which has essentially been expanded and is now known as OPEC+ to include Russia.

Now Saudi Arabia and Washington's archenemy, Russia, play a key role in determining global oil prices.

Historically, Saudi Arabia was a loyal U.S. proxy, but increasingly Riyadh has been maintaining a more non-aligned foreign policy. And a very big reason for that is that China is now the biggest trading partner of many of the countries in the region. For a decade, China has been the largest importer of oil and gas from the Persian Gulf.

Furthermore, through its global infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative, China is moving the center of world trade back to Asia. And in the Belt and Road Initiative, the "road" in particular is a reference to the New Silk Road.

Can you guess which region is absolutely crucial in the New Silk Road and the Belt and Road Initiative? Well, of course, it's the Middle East – or, again, a better term is West Asia, and that term actually much better explains the geostrategic importance of this region, because it connects Asia to Europe.

This also explains why the United States has been so desperate to try to challenge the Belt and Road with its own attempts to build new trade routes. In particular, the U.S. is trying to make a [trade route going from India into the Persian Gulf](#), and then up through Israel.

So in all of these projects, Israel plays an important role, as an extension of U.S. imperial power in one of the most important regions of the world. That is why Biden said back in 1986 that if Israel didn't exist, the U.S. would have to invent it.

That is also why Biden repeated this in a White House [meeting with Israel's President Isaac Herzog](#) on October 27, 2022:

We're also going to discuss the ironclad commitment – and this is, I'll say this 5000 times in my career – the ironclad commitment the United States has to Israel, based on our principles, our ideas, our values; they're the same values.

And I have often said, Mr. President [Herzog], if there were not an Israel, we would have to invent one.

And even as recently as October 18, 2023, Biden once again repeated the same thing in a [speech he made in Israel](#): "I have long said, if Israel didn't exist, we'd have to invent it".

In that speech in 2023, Biden traveled to Israel in order to support the country as it was

carrying out a brutal bombing campaign in Gaza, and ethnically cleansing Palestinians as part of what [many experts](#) around the world have referred to as a “[textbook case of genocide](#)”.

Top United Nations experts have warned that the [Palestinian people are in danger of genocide by Israel](#).

And the United States has steadfastly been supporting Israel, because once again, as Joe Biden said, Israel is an extension of U.S. imperial power in West Asia; and if it didn't exist, Washington would have to invent it.

Now, on that note, I am going to go to the interview that I did with friend of the show Michael Hudson, the brilliant economist and author of many books, including *Super Imperialism: The Economic Strategy of American Empire*.

Here is a brief clip from our conversation:

Michael Hudson: Israel is a landed aircraft carrier in the Near East. Israel is the takeoff point for America to control the Near East...

The United States has always viewed Israel as just our foreign military base... When England first passed the act saying that there should be an Israel, the Balfour Declaration, it was because Britain wanted to control the Near East and its oil supplies...

And then after that, of course, when Truman came in, the military immediately saw that America was replacing England as the chief of the Near East...

What we're really seeing is, having fought Russia to the last Ukrainian, and threatening to fight Iran to the last Israeli, the United States is trying to send arms to Taiwan to say, wouldn't you like to fight to the last Taiwanese against China?

And that's really the U.S. strategy all over the world; it's trying to fuel other countries to fight wars for its own control.

Ben Norton: Michael, thanks for joining me today. We are speaking on November 9, and the latest death toll in the war in Gaza is that Israel has killed more than 10,000 Palestinians.

The United Nations has referred to Gaza as a “[graveyard for children](#)”. More than 4,000 children have been killed. About 40% of the casualties are children.

And the United States has continued to support Israel, not only diplomatically and politically, not only by, for instance, vetoing resolutions in the U.N. Security Council that call for a ceasefire, but furthermore, the U.S. has been sending billions of dollars to Israel.

Not only the \$3.8 billion that the U.S. always gives to Israel every year in military aid, but additionally, tens of billions of dollars more.

So I am wondering if you could provide your analysis of why you think the U.S. is investing so many resources in supporting Israel while it is clearly committing war crimes.

Michael Hudson: Well, certainly it is supporting Israel, but it's not supporting Israel because this is an altruistic act.

To the United States, Israel is its landed aircraft carrier in the Near East. Israel is the takeoff point for America to control the Near East.

And from the very time there was talk of creating an Israel, it was always that Israel was going to be an outpost, first of England, then of Russia, then of the United States in the Near East.

And I can give you an anecdote. Netanyahu's main national security advisor for the last few years has been Uzi Arad. I worked at the Hudson Institute for about five years, 1972 to '76. And I worked very closely with Uzi there.

Uzi and I made two trips to Korea and Japan to talk about international finance. So we had a good chance to get to know each other. And on one trip, we stopped over from New York to San Francisco. And in San Francisco, there was a party or a gathering for people to meet us.

And one of the U.S. generals came over and slapped Uzi on the back and said, you're our landed aircraft carrier over there. We love you.

Well, I could see Uzi feeling, tightening up and getting very embarrassed and didn't really have anything to say. But the United States has always viewed Israel as just our foreign military base, not Israel.

So of course, it wants to secure this military base.

But when England first passed the act saying there should be in Israel the Balfour Declaration, it was because Britain wanted to control the Near East and its oil supplies.

When Israel was formed in the United Nations, the first country to recognize it was Stalin and Russia, who thought that Russians were going to have a major influence over Israel.

And then after that, of course, when Truman came in, the military immediately saw that America was replacing England as the chief of the Near East. And that was even after the fight, the overthrow of the Mossadegh government in Iran in 1953.

So from the United States, it's not Israel's wagging the American tail, just the opposite. You mentioned that America is supporting Israel. I don't think America is supporting Israel at all, nor do most Israelis, nor do most Democrats.



President Joe Biden participates in a restricted bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Hotel Kempinski in Tel Aviv, Israel, Wednesday, October 18, 2023. (Official White House Photo by Cameron Smith)

America is supporting Netanyahu. It's supporting Likud, not Israel. The majority of Israelis, certainly the non-religious Israelis, the core population of Israel since its founding, is opposing Likud and its policies.

And so what really is happening is that to the United States, Netanyahu is the Israeli version of Zelensky in the Ukraine.

And the advantage of having such an unpleasant, opportunist, and corrupt person as Netanyahu, who is under indictment for his bribery and corruption, is precisely that all of the attention now of the whole world that is so appalled by the attacks going on in Gaza, they're not blaming the United States.

They're blaming Israel. They're blaming Netanyahu and Israel for it, when it's the United States that has been sending plane load after plane load of bombs, of guns. There are 22,000 machine guns, automatic guns, that are banned for sale in the United States that America is sending for the settlers to use on the West Bank.

So there's a pretense of good cop, bad cop. You have Mr. Blinken telling Netanyahu, when you bomb hospitals, make sure you do it according to the rules of war. And when you kill 100,000 Gaza children, make sure it's all legal and in the war. And when you talk about ethnic cleansing and driving a population out, make sure that it's all done legal.

Well, of course, it's not the rules of war, and there are war crimes being committed, but the United States is pretending to tell Netanyahu and the Israeli government, use smaller bombs. Be more gentle when you bomb the children in the hospital, when actually this is all for show.

The United States is trying to say, well, we're only there to give help to an ally. The whole world has noticed that the U.S. now has two aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean, right off the Near Eastern shore, and it has an atomic submarine near the Persian Gulf.

Why are they there? President Biden and Congress say we are not going to have American troops fighting Hamas in Gaza. We're not going to get involved. Well, if the troops are not going to get involved, why are they there?

Well, we know what the American planes are doing. Yesterday, they bombed yet another airport and a fuel depot in Syria. They're bombing Syria. And it's very clear that they're there not to protect Israel, but to fight Iran.

Again and again, every American newspaper, when it talks about Hamas, it says Hamas is acting on behalf of Iran. When it talks about Hezbollah, and is there going to be an intervention from Lebanon against northern Israel, they say Hezbollah are the Iranian puppets.

Any time they talk about any Near Eastern leader, it's really that all these leaders are puppets of Iran, just like in Ukraine and Central Europe, they talk about Hungary and other countries as all being puppets of Putin in Russia.

Their focus, really – America isn't trying to fight to protect Ukraine. It's fighting for the last Ukrainian to be exhausted in what they'd hoped would be depleting Russia's military. Well, it hasn't worked.

Well, the same thing in Israel. If the United States is pushing Israel and Netanyahu to escalate, escalate, escalate, to do something that at a point is going to lead Nasrallah to finally say, okay, we can't take it anymore. We're coming in and helping rescue the Gazians and especially rescue the West Bank, where just as much fighting is taking place. We're going to come in.

And that's when the United States will then feel free to move not only against Lebanon, but all the way via Syria, Iraq, to Iran.

What we're seeing in Gaza and the West Bank today is only the catalyst, the trigger for the fact that the neocons say we are never going to have a better chance than we have right now to conquer Iran.

So this is the point for the showdown, that if America is to control Near Eastern oil, and by controlling Near Eastern oil, by bringing it under the US control, it can control the energy imports of much of the world.

And therefore, this gives American diplomats the power to cut off oil and gas and to sanction any country that tries to go multipolar, any country that tries to resist US unipolar control.

Ben Norton: Yeah, Michael, I think you're really hitting such an important point, which is how this is one of the most geostrategic regions of the world, especially when it comes to hydrocarbons.

The entire global economy is still very heavily reliant on oil and gas, and especially considering the US is not part of OPEC, and especially now considering that OPEC has really

expanded essentially to OPEC+ and now includes Russia.

That means that Saudi Arabia and Russia essentially can help control global oil prices. And we've seen this really, in fact, in the United States in the past few years with the rise of consumer price inflation.

We saw that the Biden administration was concerned about gas prices, in particular in the lead up to the midterm elections. And the Biden administration has been releasing a lot of oil from the strategic oil reserves of the United States.

And we can also see these kinds of statements in particular when we go back and look at the Bush administration. There are numerous people involved in the Bush administration and the so-called "War on Terror" who openly talked about how important it was for Washington to dominate this region.

And I'm really thinking of, in 2007, when the top US general and NATO commander Wesley Clark famously disclosed that the Bush administration had made plans to overthrow seven countries in five years. And those were countries in North Africa and West Asia.

Specifically, he revealed in an [interview with journalist Amy Goodman on Democracy Now](#) that Washington's plans were to overthrow the governments of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and finally Iran:

Wesley Clark: About 10 days after 9/11, I went through the Pentagon and I saw Secretary Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz. I went downstairs just to say hello to some of the people on the Joint Staff who used to work for me.

And one of the generals called me and he said, "Sir, you've got to come in and talk to me a second".

I said, "Well, you're too busy". He said, "No, no". He says, "We've made the decision; we're going to war with Iraq".

This was on or about the 20th of September. I said, "We're going to war with Iraq, why?" He said, "I don't know". He said, "I guess they don't know what else to do".

So I said, "Well, did they find some information connecting Saddam to al-Qaeda?" He said, "No, no". He says, "There's nothing new that way. They've just made the decision to go to war with Iraq".

He said, "I guess it's like we don't know what to do about terrorists, but we've got a good military and we can take down governments".

And he said, "I guess if the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem has to look like a nail".

So I came back to see him a few weeks later, and by that time we were bombing in Afghanistan.

I said, "Are we still going to war with Iraq?" And he said, "Oh, it's worse than that".

He said, he reached over on his desk, he picked up a piece of paper, and he said, "I just

got this down from upstairs”, meaning the Secretary of Defense’s office today, and he said, “This is a memo that describes how we’re going to take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and finishing off Iran”.

I said, “Is it classified?” He said, “Yes, sir”. I said, “Well, don’t show it to me”.

And I saw him a year or so ago, and I said, “You remember that?” And he said, “Sorry, I didn’t show you that memo! I didn’t show it to you!”

Amy Goodman: I’m sorry, what did you say his name was? (laughs)

Wesley Clark: I’m not going to give you his name. (laughs)

Amy Goodman: So go through the countries again.

Wesley Clark: Well, starting with Iraq, then Syria and Lebanon, then Libya, then Somalia and Sudan, and then back to Iran.

Ben Norton: And since then, we of course saw the U.S. war on Iraq. We of course saw the proxy war in Syria that still goes on in many ways. The U.S. is occupying one-third of Syrian territory, including the oil rich areas.

And Trump himself, President Donald Trump, boasted in a 2020 interview with Fox News host Laura Ingraham that he was leaving U.S. troops in Syria to take the oil:

Donald Trump: And then they say, “He left troops in Syria”. You know what I did? I left troops to take the oil. I took the oil. The only troops I have are taking the oil. They’re protecting the oil.

Laura Ingraham: We’re not taking the oil. We’re not taking it.

Donald Trump: Well, maybe we will, maybe we won’t.

Laura Ingraham: They’re protecting the facilities.

Donald Trump: I don’t know, maybe we should take it. But we have the oil. Right now, the United States has the oil.

So they say, “He left troops in Syria”. No, I got rid of all of them, other than we’re protecting the oil; we have the oil.

Ben Norton: We also saw the U.S. impose sanctions on Lebanon, which contributed to hyperinflation and the destruction of the Lebanese economy. And that was largely because Hezbollah is part of the government, and the U.S. has been pressuring the Lebanese government to create a new government without Hezbollah.

We also saw, of course, that NATO destroyed the Libyan state in 2011. Somalia also has a failed state. And Sudan was divided in no small part thanks to the U.S. and Israel supporting South Sudan’s separatist movement on ethno-religious lines, using religious sectarianism.

So if you look at the list of countries that Wesley Clark named in 2006, the seven countries in five years, again, that was Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and finally Iran;

the only country that really has been able to maintain state stability, that has not been completely devastated by the United States, is Iran.

Of course, it took longer than five years, but the U.S. was pretty successful. And of course Israel has played an important role in this U.S. goal to destabilize those governments in the region.

Michael Hudson: Well, let's look and see how this was done. Remember after America was attacked on 9/11, there was a meeting at the White House, and everybody knew that the pilots were Saudi Arabians, and they knew that some of the pilots had been staying at the Saudi embassy in Los Angeles, I think, in the United States.

But after 9/11, there was a cabinet meeting, and Rumsfeld said to the people there, look and find any link you can get to Iraq, forget Saudi Arabia, no problem, Iraq is the key. And he directed them to find it, and 9/11 became the excuse for attacking not Saudi Arabia, but Iraq, and going right on with it.

Well, you needed a similar crisis in Libya. They said in Libya, there was some, I think, fundamentalists in the suburbs of one of the [cities], not the capital city, that were causing problems. And so you have to "protect" the innocent people from [Muammar Gadhafi], and you go in and grab all of their gold reserves, all of their money, and you take over the oil on behalf of France's oil monopoly.

Well, this is the role of the fighting in Gaza today. Netanyahu's fight against Gaza is being used as the excuse for America moving its warships there, its submarines, and bombing, along with Israel, the Syrian airport so that the Syrians are not able to move weapons or any kind of military support either to Lebanon, to the west, or Iran, to the east.

So it's obvious that all of what we're seeing is somehow to soften up public opinion for the fact that, well, just like we had to invade Iraq because of 9/11, we have to now finally fight and take out the oil refineries of Iran and their scientific institutes and any laboratories where they may be doing atomic research.

And Iran realizes this. Last week, the Iranian press TV said that their defense minister says that if there's any attack on Iran, whether by Israel or by anyone else, the U.S. and its foreign bases are going to be hit hard.

Iran, Russia, China have all looked at the Gaza situation not as if it's an Israeli action, but as if it's the U.S. action. They all see exactly that it's all about Iran, and the American press only says when it talks about Gaza or Hamas or Hezbollah or any other group, it's always the Iranian tool so-and-so.

They're demonizing Iran in the same way that the neocons have demonized Russia to prepare for America declaring an undeclared war against Iran. And they may even declare war.

[Click here to read the full transcript.](#)

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