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France's Approach to the Palestinian Question

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Extended Abstract

Background

The Palestinian Question has remained one of the most protracted and contentious international conflicts since the early twentieth century. Beyond its territorial dimension, it encompasses issues of international law, human rights, statehood, diplomacy, regional security, and great-power competition. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and a country with deep historical, political, and strategic ties to the Middle East, France has consistently sought to position itself as an influential diplomatic actor in the management of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. French governments have repeatedly emphasized their commitment to international law, the protection of human rights, and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state

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alongside Israel within the framework of the two-state solution.

Nevertheless, despite this normative discourse, numerous observers have argued that French foreign policy demonstrates a persistent inconsistency between official declarations and practical implementation. France simultaneously condemns Israeli settlement expansion, supports Palestinian self-determination, and advocates international humanitarian law while maintaining extensive diplomatic, military, technological, and economic cooperation with Israel. These contradictions have generated significant academic debate regarding the real motivations underlying French policy toward Palestine.

Objective

This study aims to examine France's approach to the Palestinian Question by analyzing the consistency between its diplomatic discourse and foreign policy practices. Specifically, the research evaluates French policy through three principal dimensions: human rights, the two-state solution, and Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. The study seeks to answer the following research question:

What approach has France adopted toward the Palestinian Question, and to what extent are its declared principles reflected in its practical foreign policy?

The principal hypothesis argues that although French diplomacy officially promotes a balanced position between supporting Palestinian statehood and guaranteeing Israel's security, its practical policies reveal a considerable divergence between rhetoric and action. This divergence largely reflects France's strategic interests rather than its declared normative commitments.

Theoretical Framework

The study employs Classical Realism as its analytical framework. Classical Realism views states as rational actors operating within an anarchic international system where national interests, security, power, and survival constitute the primary objectives of foreign policy. Ethical principles and international norms are regarded as secondary considerations whenever they conflict with strategic interests.

Within this framework, France's behavior toward Palestine is interpreted as a rational balancing strategy designed to maximize national interests while pre-

serving diplomatic flexibility. French policy seeks simultaneously to maintain strategic relations with Israel, preserve historical influence in the Arab world, strengthen France's international diplomatic status, and reinforce its role as an independent European power. Consequently, the apparent contradiction between official discourse and practical policy is understood not as policy inconsistency but as the predictable outcome of realist calculations.

Methodology

The research adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology based on documentary and library research. Primary and secondary sources include scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, official publications of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, reports issued by the French Senate and National Assembly, European Union documents, international legal instruments, and recent academic literature in both English and French.

Data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis, enabling the identification of recurring patterns in French diplomatic discourse and comparison with practical policy implementation across different historical periods and policy domains.

Findings

The findings indicate that French policy toward Palestine has evolved significantly over the past seven decades while preserving an underlying strategic continuity. During the 1950s and early 1960s, France maintained exceptionally close military and strategic cooperation with Israel, largely driven by regional security concerns, the Suez Crisis, and the Algerian War. Following the rise of Arab nationalism and the increasing geopolitical importance of Arab energy resources, French foreign policy gradually shifted toward a more balanced diplomatic position under President Charles de Gaulle.

Since then, France has consistently advocated a negotiated political settlement based upon the establishment of two independent states. However, closer examination demonstrates that French diplomacy frequently prioritizes strategic considerations over normative commitments.

Regarding human rights, France regularly condemns civilian casualties, hu-

manitarian crises, violations of international humanitarian law, and deteriorating living conditions within the occupied Palestinian territories. French diplomatic institutions actively support humanitarian assistance and repeatedly emphasize the protection of civilians and respect for international law. Nevertheless, these declarations have rarely been accompanied by concrete political or economic measures capable of influencing Israeli policy. Military cooperation, technological partnerships, intelligence exchanges, and commercial relations with Israel have continued despite repeated criticism of Israeli actions.

The study further demonstrates that France's support for the two-state solution represents one of the clearest examples of the gap between rhetoric and practice. While successive French governments have repeatedly described the two-state framework as the only viable solution to the conflict, France historically refrained from formally recognizing the State of Palestine despite acknowledging the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. According to the analysis presented in this article, recent French announcements concerning possible recognition of Palestine should be interpreted primarily as diplomatic instruments intended to preserve French influence within a changing regional geopolitical environment rather than as evidence of a fundamental transformation in French foreign policy.

The analysis of Israeli settlement activities reveals a similar pattern. France consistently considers settlements established in territories occupied since 1967 to be illegal under international law and has supported several European Union initiatives designed to distinguish Israel proper from settlements in the occupied territories. However, implementation has remained limited, and bilateral agreements between France and Israel generally lack sufficiently explicit territorial restrictions. Consequently, practical cooperation frequently continues without fully enforcing the legal distinction officially advocated by French diplomacy.

Discussion

The evidence presented throughout this study demonstrates that French foreign policy cannot be adequately understood solely through normative approaches emphasizing human rights or international law. Instead, Classical Realism provides a more convincing explanation by highlighting the central role of national

interests and strategic calculations.

France continuously attempts to reconcile several competing objectives: maintaining close relations with Israel, preserving political influence throughout the Arab world, protecting economic and security interests, reinforcing European diplomatic leadership, and projecting itself as an independent international mediator distinct from United States policy. This multidimensional balancing strategy inevitably generates contradictions between discourse and practice.

Rather than representing isolated inconsistencies, these contradictions constitute structural features of French foreign policy. Human rights advocacy, support for Palestinian statehood, criticism of settlement expansion, and commitment to international law coexist with pragmatic diplomatic restraint whenever stronger measures might jeopardize broader strategic interests.

The article further argues that recent regional transformations—including shifting Arab alliances, increasing American influence, evolving security dynamics, and changing geopolitical competition—have reinforced France's pragmatic approach.

Conclusion

This study concludes that France's approach to the Palestinian Question is best characterized as pragmatic classical realism rather than principled normative diplomacy.

The persistent discrepancy between official rhetoric and practical behavior is particularly visible in France's responses to human rights violations, recognition of Palestinian statehood, and Israeli settlement expansion. French diplomacy therefore illustrates how middle powers frequently employ normative discourse to reinforce international legitimacy while simultaneously pursuing strategic objectives through cautious and interest-based foreign policy.

Ultimately, France's policy toward Palestine reflects an enduring effort to preserve diplomatic influence, maintain regional balance, and maximize national interests within an increasingly complex international system. As long as these strategic considerations remain unchanged, the gap between French discourse and practice is likely to continue shaping its approach to one of the world's longest-standing international conflicts.

Key words: France, Palestinian Question, Zionist Regime, Two-State Solution, Human Rights, Israeli Settlements

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.