

# Embassy of the State of Palestine

The General Delegation of Palestine  
to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand  
and the Pacific



INTERN POLICY REPORT

Contradictions in Australian Foreign  
Policy: The Israel-Palestine Conflict

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## **Executive Summary**

*Contradictions in Australian Foreign Policy: The Israel-Palestine Conflict* scrutinises the inconsistencies between Australia's stated position on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the impact of its policies. The paper begins with an analysis of the historical patterns in Australians foreign policy toward Israel and Palestine. This historical analysis demonstrates a pattern wherein Australia claims to be neutral while taking actions that systematically advantage Israel and disadvantage Palestine. I then examine Australia's voting record at the United Nations General Assembly between 2007 – 2020. This analysis shows that the historical pattern of claimed neutrality and effective bias persists in modern Australian foreign policy, in both left-wing and right-wing governments. Through these analyses I identify key areas wherein these contradictions manifest and provide recommendations as to how the Australian Government can avoid this in future.

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## Introduction

Australia has long claimed to uphold and defend international law. In 2017 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, under the leadership of former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, released a Foreign Policy White Paper setting out a framework for Australia's engagement with the world. A key principle repeated throughout the White Paper is respect for international law. The document states that "Australia's national interests are best advanced by an evolution of the international system that is anchored in international law, support for the rights and freedoms in United Nations declarations, and the principles of good governance, transparency and accountability."<sup>1</sup> To this day the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade states that "Australia is committed to enhancing the adherence to international law to prevent conflict and restore peace and security."<sup>2</sup>

However, there seems to be a discrepancy between the position Australia claims to hold and its actions on world stage. This discrepancy is particularly evident in Australia's voting record on the issue of Palestine. The following paper provides an analysis of Australia's voting record at the UN General Assembly on recurring resolutions pertaining to Palestine over a 14-year period. Most resolutions are resubmitted annually while others are ad hoc, arising in response to a particular circumstance. The following analysis focuses on the annually recurring resolutions and is grounded in the historical context of Australia's relationships with Israel and Palestine. It investigates whether or not Australia's policies are consistent with its stated position, particularly in regard to support for the rights and freedoms articulated in the UN declarations and Australia's stated devotion to international law and the international system.

## Australia and the Israel-Palestine Conflict: Historical Patterns

In a statement to the House of Representatives in February of 2019, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison condemned the "biased and unfair targeting of Israel in the UN General Assembly".<sup>3</sup> Morrison pointed to the concrete actions his government had taken to defend Israel from these attacks including the opposition of six resolutions in the UN General Assembly. In 2020, the Morrison

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<sup>1</sup> Australia., Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade., Foreign Policy White Paper 2017, |Page 7|

<sup>2</sup> "International Law," Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/international-organisations/un/Pages/international-law>

<sup>3</sup> Morrison, Scott. 2019. "Australia-Israel Relationship: 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary." Recorded at House of Representatives, February 19, 2019. [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/chamber/hansardr/f39eb4a6-3718-4d51-8b1a-b396d70b6859/0003/hansard\\_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/chamber/hansardr/f39eb4a6-3718-4d51-8b1a-b396d70b6859/0003/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf).

government continued to defend Israel from criticism by submitting an observation to the International Criminal Court. The submission claimed that the court has no jurisdiction to investigate war crimes in Palestine as Palestine is “not a state”.<sup>4</sup> While there has been a clear shift in Australia’s UN General Assembly voting pattern on the issue of Palestine since the Morrison government took office in 2018, there is a long history of unequitable behaviour toward the two parties. To understand this, we must look at the historical context.

Australia has been involved in the region since before the establishment of Israel. In 1947 Australia was one of the eleven neutral countries selected to sit on the UN Special Committee on Palestine.<sup>5</sup> The committee released a major report, supported by seven countries which recommended the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish, with an economic union and Jerusalem as an international city. Three committee members released a minority report recommending a federal state in Palestine including Arabs and Jews. Australia supported neither of these reports and abstained from voting on the matters.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately the UNSCOP put forward a recommendation for partition in UNGA resolution 181. The resolution passed with a two thirds majority, and Australia voted in its favour.

In May of 1948 Australia was among 37 countries that voted for resolution 273 which permitted Israel as a member state of the United Nations.<sup>7</sup> Comparatively, the first time a representative of the Australian government ‘expressed support for the creation of a Palestinian state’ was twenty-six years later in 1974, following Arafat’s first address to the UNGA. Despite this, Australia still abstained from resolution 3237 which granted the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) UNGA observer status.<sup>8</sup> This refusal to support giving the PLO observer status calls into question the supposed impartiality of the Australian government. Furthermore, in contemporary speeches, Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock openly expressed his preferential view of the “democratic and enlightened society” of Israel over the PLO “terrorists”. Clearly the Minister held certain biases against the Palestinians and for the Israelis. Though Australia condemned violence on both sides, the label of ‘terrorist’ which was applied exclusively to the PLO was used as justification for a host of penalties, including voting against granting the PLO observer status. The key distinction between what was deemed aggression versus terroristic behaviour is statehood. Israel’s statehood provided a legitimacy to its

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<sup>4</sup> “*Situation in the State of Palestine.*” Observation by Australia. 14 February 2020. |Page 3| [https://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2020\\_00465.PDF](https://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2020_00465.PDF)

<sup>5</sup> Eulalia Han and Halim Rane, “Australian Foreign Policy on the Israel-Palestine Conflict,” in *Making Australian Foreign Policy on Israel-Palestine : Media Coverage, Public Opinion and Interest Groups* (Melbourne, VIC: Melbourne University Publishing, 2013), |Page 44|

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

actions that the PLO did not have. Notably, Australia helped to establish this statehood by voting yes on resolution 181.

By March of 1980 Minister Peacock presented a perspective on the conflict with a greater emphasis on the Palestinian struggle and the government criticised Israel's annexation and brutal treatment of civilians. In 1983 Bob Hawke's Labor government established a set of guiding principles for Australian policy on the Israel Palestine Conflict (IPC).<sup>9</sup> These were (1) direct negotiations between the parties; (2) Arab recognition of Israel; (3) Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories; (4) the Palestinian right to self-determination including an independent state; (5) and a freeze on Israeli settlements (described as 'illegal' and 'contradictory to international law'). These principles have endured in Australian foreign policy on the IPC to this day. So, what effect do these principles have on the situation?

Principle 1 ostensibly encourages communication between both parties. However, Israel is an established state with wealth, legitimacy, and military capacity, as well as the support of extremely powerful states like the United States. The PLO clearly did not have these advantages. It is unreasonable direct negotiations between these parties could produce a fair and just result. Furthermore, direct negotiations are not consistent with Australia's stated belief in the international system.

Principle 2 requires the Arab recognition of Israeli statehood. Though this may seem like a reasonable expectation, it is notable that the Hawke government did not necessitate Israel's recognition of Palestine. By demanding one-sided recognition rather than mutual recognition, this principle further entrenches the inequality between the two parties.

Principles 3, 4 and 5 do not have a negative impact on the situation. However, while Australia has called for an end to occupation and condemned Israel's increasing settlements, it has failed to support these words with action. In fact, there are reports that Australia hopes to finalise a bilateral trade agreement with Israel by the end of 2021. Such a deal would seem to reward Israel's behaviour by showing that there are no consequences to Israel's illegal activities on Palestinian territories. As for support of Palestinian self-determination and independence, Australia's voting record at the UNGA communicates a very different stance than its stated position. It is clear that the principles Australia holds on the IPC are either unhelpful or unenforced.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

# Understanding the Recurring Resolutions on Palestine

Between 2007 and 2020, there have been sixteen annually recurring resolutions pertaining to Israel and Palestine, fifteen of which were adopted by vote. Below is a brief description of the fifteen resolutions, along with a summary of Australia's voting record on each of the resolutions. The resolutions have been numbered for future reference.

## 1 – The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights on the Palestinian People

Rudd	2007	No
Rudd	2008	No
Rudd	2009	No
Gillard	2010	No
Gillard	2011	No
Gillard	2012	No
Abbott	2013	No
Abbott	2014	No
Turnbull	2015	No
Turnbull	2016	No
Turnbull	2017	No
Morrison	2018	No
Morrison	2019	No
Morrison	2020	No

Figure 1

This resolution expresses support for Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Right of the Palestinian People. It recognises the Committee's annual report and "requests the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, to support the Middle East peace process and to mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people."<sup>10</sup> The right to self-determination is outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 which was signed by Australia in 1972 and ratified in 1980.<sup>11</sup>

## 2 – Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat

Figure 2

This resolution expresses support for the work of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in assisting the Committee. It recognises the Divisions "useful and constructive contribution to raising international awareness of the question of Palestine and generating international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine."<sup>12</sup>

Rudd	2007	No
Rudd	2008	No
Rudd	2009	No
Gillard	2010	No
Gillard	2011	No
Gillard	2012	No
Abbott	2013	No
Abbott	2014	No
Turnbull	2015	No
Turnbull	2016	No
Turnbull	2017	No
Morrison	2018	No
Morrison	2019	No
Morrison	2020	No

<sup>10</sup> "UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People - GA Resolution - Question of Palestine," United Nations, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-186365/>

<sup>11</sup> "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." 16 December 1966. Treaty Series, Vol. 999, p. 171. [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?chapter=4&clang=\\_en&mtdsg\\_no=IV-4&src=IND](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?chapter=4&clang=_en&mtdsg_no=IV-4&src=IND).

<sup>12</sup> "Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat :." United Nations. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/264934/usage?ln=en>.

### 3 – Special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat

Rudd	2007	No
Rudd	2008	No
Rudd	2009	No
Gillard	2010	No
Gillard	2011	No
Gillard	2012	No
Abbott	2013	No
Abbott	2014	No
Turnbull	2015	No
Turnbull	2016	No
Turnbull	2017	No
Morrison	2018	No
Morrison	2019	No
Morrison	2020	No

This resolution calls for the continuation of the Special Information Programme. It acknowledges the Programme's role in "raising the awareness of the international community concerning the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East and that the programme is contributing effectively to an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and supportive of the peace process."<sup>13</sup>

Figure 3

### 4 – Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine

This resolution calls for a speedy end to the occupation. It urges Israel to comply with international law by easing restrictions on movement in Palestinian population centres, ceasing all acts of violence, and ceasing construction of the wall in Occupied Palestinian Territories. It also urges the member states to "expedite the provision of economic, humanitarian and technical assistance to the Palestinian people."<sup>14</sup>

Rudd	2007	No
Rudd	2008	No
Rudd	2009	No
Gillard	2010	No
Gillard	2011	Abstain
Gillard	2012	Abstain
Abbott	2013	Abstain
Abbott	2014	Abstain
Turnbull	2015	Abstain
Turnbull	2016	Abstain
Turnbull	2017	Abstain
Morrison	2018	No
Morrison	2019	No
Morrison	2020	No

Figure 4

<sup>13</sup> "Palestine Question/DPI Special Information Programme on QoP - GA Resolution - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-178362/>.

<sup>14</sup> "Palestine Question/Peaceful Settlement/Quartet Efforts - GA Draft Resolution - Adopted - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-185885/>.



Rudd	2007	Abstain
Rudd	2008	Abstain
Rudd	2009	Abstain
Gillard	2010	Abstain
Gillard	2011	Yes
Gillard	2012	Yes
Abbott	2013	Abstain
Abbott	2014	Abstain
Turnbull	2015	Abstain
Turnbull	2016	Abstain
Turnbull	2017	Abstain
Morrison	2018	No
Morrison	2019	-
Morrison	2020	-

## 5 – Jerusalem

This resolution stresses the illegality of Israel’s occupation, and the imposition of Israeli laws, jurisdiction and administration, in the city of Jerusalem. UN Security Council resolution 446 of March 1979 and various resolutions thereafter have confirmed the illegality of Israel’s occupation.<sup>15</sup> This is relevant as Security Council resolutions are legally binding as opposed to General Assembly resolutions which are generally non-binding.

Figure 5

## 6 – Assistance to Palestine Refugees

This resolution notes the failure to implement resolution 194 (III) paragraph 11, which calls for the repatriation or compensation of Palestinian refugees. It also “affirms the necessity for the continuation of the work [UNRWA].”<sup>16</sup>

Rudd	2007	Yes
Rudd	2008	Yes
Rudd	2009	Yes
Gillard	2010	Yes
Gillard	2011	Yes
Gillard	2012	Yes
Abbott	2013	Yes
Abbott	2014	Yes
Turnbull	2015	Yes
Turnbull	2016	Yes
Turnbull	2017	Yes
Morrison	2018	Yes
Morrison	2019	Yes
Morrison	2020	Yes

Figure 6

<sup>15</sup> "Mideast Situation/Jerusalem - GA Resolution - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-182532/>.

<sup>16</sup> "Assistance to Palestine Refugees – GA Resolution - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/assistance-to-palestine-refugees-ga-resolution/>.

## 7 – 1967 Displaced Persons

This resolution “reaffirms the right of all persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities to return to their homes or former places of residence in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967.”<sup>17</sup> This right is clearly affirmed under Article 12 of the ICCPR, a treaty to which Israel is a party.

Rudd	2007	Yes
Rudd	2008	Yes
Rudd	2009	Yes
Gillard	2010	Yes
Gillard	2011	Yes
Gillard	2012	Yes
Abbott	2013	Yes
Abbott	2014	Yes
Turnbull	2015	Yes
Turnbull	2016	Yes
Turnbull	2017	Yes
Morrison	2018	Abstained
Morrison	2019	Abstained
Morrison	2020	-

Figure 7

Rudd	2007	Yes
Rudd	2008	Yes
Rudd	2009	Yes
Gillard	2010	Yes
Gillard	2011	Yes
Gillard	2012	Yes
Abbott	2013	Yes
Abbott	2014	Yes
Turnbull	2015	Yes
Turnbull	2016	Yes
Turnbull	2017	Yes
Morrison	2018	Abstained
Morrison	2019	Abstained
Morrison	2020	Abstained

Figure 8

## 8 – Operations of UNRWA

This resolution “acknowledges the support provided by the host Governments to the Agency, ...urges the Government of Israel to speedily compensate the Agency for damage to its property and facilities resulting from actions by the Israeli side... [and] calls upon Israel particularly to cease obstructing the movement and access of the staff, vehicles and supplies of the Agency.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> "Persons Displaced as a Result of the June 1967 and Subsequent Hostilities - Secretary-General Report - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-183378/>.

<sup>18</sup> "UNRWA Operations - GA - Draft Resolution - Adopted - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-180276/>.

## 9 – Palestine Refugees’ Properties and their Revenues

This resolution “reaffirms that the Palestine refugees are entitled to their property and to the income derived there from... [and] calls once again upon Israel to render all facilities and assistance to the Secretary-General in the implementation of the present resolution.”<sup>19</sup>

Rudd	2007	Yes
Rudd	2008	Yes
Rudd	2009	Yes
Gillard	2010	Yes
Gillard	2011	Yes
Gillard	2012	Yes
Abbott	2013	Yes
Abbott	2014	Yes
Turnbull	2015	Yes
Turnbull	2016	Yes
Turnbull	2017	Yes
Morrison	2018	Abstained
Morrison	2019	Abstained
Morrison	2020	Abstained

Figure 9

## 10 – Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices

Rudd	2007	No
Rudd	2008	No
Rudd	2009	No
Gillard	2010	No
Gillard	2011	No
Gillard	2012	No
Abbott	2013	No
Abbott	2014	No
Turnbull	2015	No
Turnbull	2016	No
Turnbull	2017	No
Morrison	2018	No
Morrison	2019	No
Morrison	2020	No

This resolution commends the Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The resolution “reiterates [the Committee’s] demand that Israel cooperate [and] deplores those policies and practices of Israel that violate the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "Palestine Refugees - Properties and Revenues - SecGen Report - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-180669/>.

<sup>20</sup> "Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories - GA Resolution - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-182738/>.

## 11 – Applicability of the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention

This resolution reiterates the applicability of the fourth Geneva Convention in Occupied Palestinian Territories and “calls upon all High Contracting Parties to the Convention to continue to exert all efforts to ensure respect for its provisions by Israel.”<sup>21</sup> The fourth Geneva Convention is a universally ratified treaty which relates to the protection of civilian persons in times of war.<sup>22</sup>

Rudd	2007	Abstained
Rudd	2008	Yes
Rudd	2009	Yes
Gillard	2010	Yes
Gillard	2011	Yes
Gillard	2012	Yes
Abbott	2013	Abstained
Abbott	2014	Abstained
Turnbull	2015	Abstained
Turnbull	2016	Abstained
Turnbull	2017	Abstained
Morrison	2018	Abstained
Morrison	2019	-
Morrison	2020	-

Figure 11

## 12 – Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan

Rudd	2007	No
Rudd	2008	Yes
Rudd	2009	Yes
Gillard	2010	Yes
Gillard	2011	Yes
Gillard	2012	Yes
Abbott	2013	Abstained
Abbott	2014	Abstained
Turnbull	2015	Abstained
Turnbull	2016	Abstained
Turnbull	2017	Abstained
Morrison	2018	Abstained
Morrison	2019	Abstained
Morrison	2020	Abstained

This resolution states that the Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory are both illegal and an “obstacle to peace and economic and social development,” and calls on Israel to accept the applicability of the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 12

<sup>21</sup> "Applicability of Fourth Geneva Convention to OPT and Other Arab Territories - GA Resolution - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-178619/>.

<sup>22</sup> Sean D. Murphy, Principles of International Law (St. Paul, MN: West Academic Publishing., 2018), |Page 607-610|

<sup>23</sup> "Israeli Settlements in the OPT, including Jerusalem and Occupied Syrian Golan - SecGen Report - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-184243/>.

### 13 – Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem

This resolution calls on Israel to comply with the provisions of the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention and cease all actions that violate the human rights of the Palestinian people. It condemns all acts of violence, including the firing of rockets against Israeli civilian areas. The resolution “emphasizes the need to preserve the Palestinian institutions and infrastructure; [and] stresses the need for respect for the unity and territorial contiguity and integrity of all of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and for guarantees of the freedom of movement of persons and goods within the Palestinian territory.”<sup>24</sup>

Rudd	2007	No
Rudd	2008	No
Rudd	2009	No
Gillard	2010	No
Gillard	2011	No
Gillard	2012	No
Abbott	2013	No
Abbott	2014	No
Turnbull	2015	No
Turnbull	2016	No
Turnbull	2017	No
Morrison	2018	No
Morrison	2019	No
Morrison	2020	No

Figure 13

### 14 – Right of the Palestinian People to Self-determination

Rudd	2007	No
Rudd	2008	Abstained
Rudd	2009	No
Gillard	2010	Yes
Gillard	2011	Yes
Gillard	2012	Yes
Abbott	2013	Yes
Abbott	2014	Yes
Turnbull	2015	Yes
Turnbull	2016	Yes
Turnbull	2017	Yes
Morrison	2018	Abstained
Morrison	2019	Abstained
Morrison	2020	Abstained

This resolution “reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including the right to their independent State of Palestine [and] urges all States and the specialized agencies and organizations of the UN system to continue to support and assist the Palestinian people in the early realization of their right to self-determination.”<sup>25</sup> As mentioned previously, right to self-determination is outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 which was signed by Australia in 1972 and ratified in 1980.<sup>26</sup>

Figure 14

<sup>24</sup> "Israeli Practices Affecting Palestinian Human Rights - GA Resolution - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-188220/>.

<sup>25</sup> "Right of Peoples to Self-determination/Right of Palestinian People to Self-determination - Secretary-General Report to GA (Excerpts) - Question of Palestine." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/right-of-peoples-to-self-determination-right-of-palestinian-people-to-self-determination-secretary-general-report-to-ga-excerpts/>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; Interim Report: Legal Foundations of Religious Freedom in Australia. Report. November 2017. [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportjnt/024110/toc\\_pdf/InterimReport.pdf;fileType=application/pdf](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportjnt/024110/toc_pdf/InterimReport.pdf;fileType=application/pdf).

## 15 – Permanent Sovereignty Over Natural Resources in OPT and Golan

This resolution “calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, not to exploit, damage, cause loss or depletion of, or endanger the natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem... [and] recognizes the right of the Palestinian people to claim restitution as a result of any exploitation, damage, loss or depletion, or endangerment of their natural resources resulting from illegal measures taken by Israel.”<sup>27</sup>

Rudd	2007	No
Rudd	2008	No
Rudd	2009	No
Gillard	2010	No
Gillard	2011	Abstained
Gillard	2012	Abstained
Abbott	2013	Abstained
Abbott	2014	Abstained
Turnbull	2015	Abstained
Turnbull	2016	Abstained
Turnbull	2017	Abstained
Morrison	2018	Abstained
Morrison	2019	Abstained
Morrison	2020	Abstained

Figure 15

## Analysing Australia’s Voting Record

### Trends in Australia’s Voting Record

There are five resolutions to which Australia has predominantly voted yes. These are resolutions 6, 7, 8, 9 and 14. Four out of the five specifically address issues related to Palestinian refugees. The one standout is the resolution 14 which addresses the topic of Palestinian self-determination.

There are five resolutions to which Australia has predominantly voted no. These are resolutions 1, 2, 3, 10 and 13. Resolutions 1, 2 and 3 are similar in that they support the work of UN bodies and programs which advocate for the rights of Palestinian people. These are the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights on the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, and the Special information programme on the question of Palestine. Resolutions 10 and 13 are similar in that they both concern Israeli violations, resolution 10 focusing on the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices and resolution 13 on Israeli practices that violate the human rights of Palestinians.

There are four resolutions to which Australia has consistently abstained. These are resolutions 5, 11, 12 and 15. These four resolutions address the illegality of the Israeli occupation, jurisdiction in occupied territories, the treatment of occupied peoples, and ownership of natural resources in occupied areas.

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<sup>27</sup> "Permanent Sovereignty of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab Population in the Occupied Syrian Golan over Their Natural Resources :." United Nations. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/614439?ln=en>.

There are two notable conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis of Australia’s predominantly yes, no and abstention votes. Firstly, Australia overwhelmingly supported resolutions related to Palestinian refugees. This indicates that supporting refugee rights is considered less controversial or diplomatically harmful by the Australian government than supporting Palestinian self-determination or the enforcement of international law against Israel. Secondly, Australia consistently voted Yes to resolution 14 which affirms the right of Palestinian people to self-determination, yet Australia consistently voted against resolutions on UN programs which advocate for Palestinian rights. This voting pattern is reflective of the discrepancy in Australia’s position on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Australia claims to support a two-state solution but stands against the actions necessary to bring about long-lasting peace. This is part of the historical pattern discussed earlier wherein Australia claims to be neutral while enacting policies and positions that favour Israel and disadvantage Palestine.

### Voting Record by Party and Administration

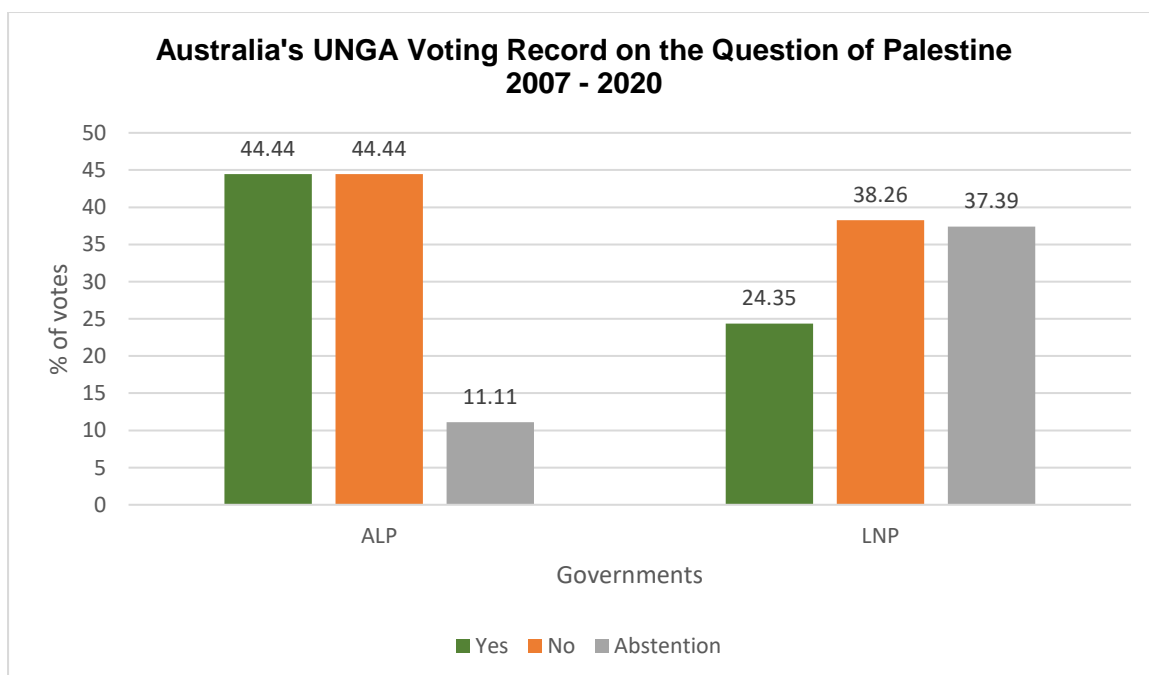


Figure 16

Overall, ALP governments voted Yes on Palestine resolutions almost twice as often as LNP governments. However, the ALP voted No as frequently as it voted Yes. One significant takeaway is that ALP governments were more likely to take a firm stance, with only 11% of votes being abstentions. By contrast, the LNP was far more likely to abstain or vote No than to vote Yes. Its percentage of abstentions surpasses its percentage of Yes votes by 13% and almost equals its percentage of No votes.

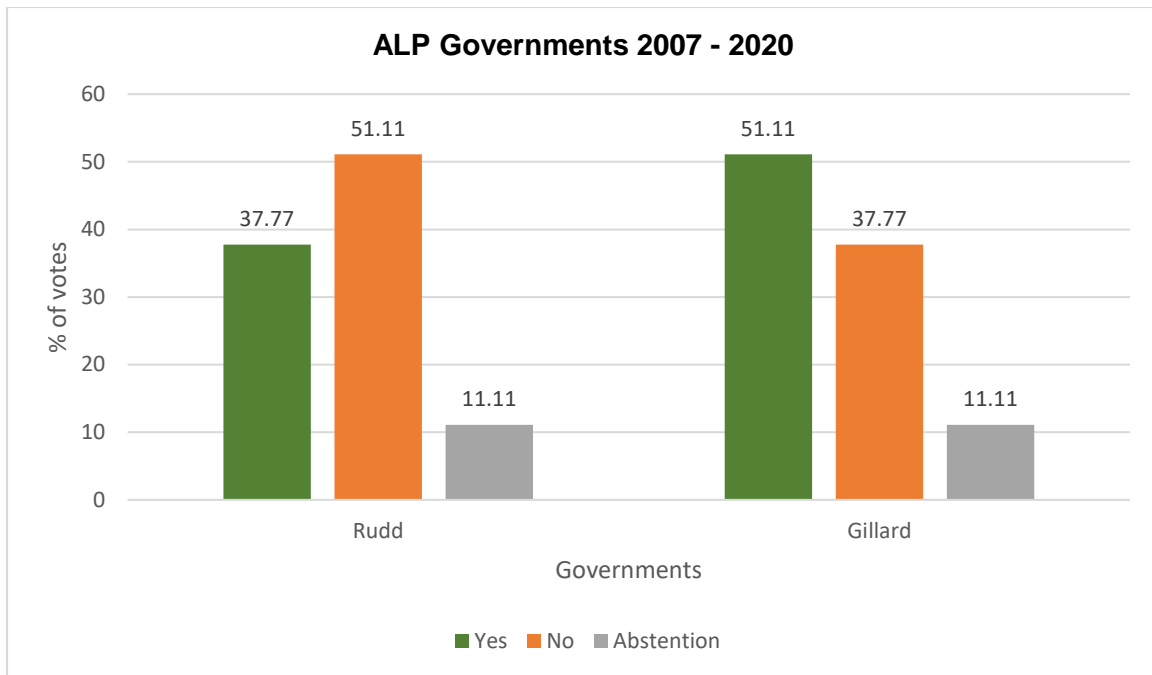


Figure 17

When comparing individual governments, the Gillard government was the most favourable to Palestine, voting Yes to 51% of the recurring resolutions, No to 38% and abstaining 11%. This is followed by the Rudd Government, with approximately 38% Yes votes, 51% No votes and 11% abstentions.

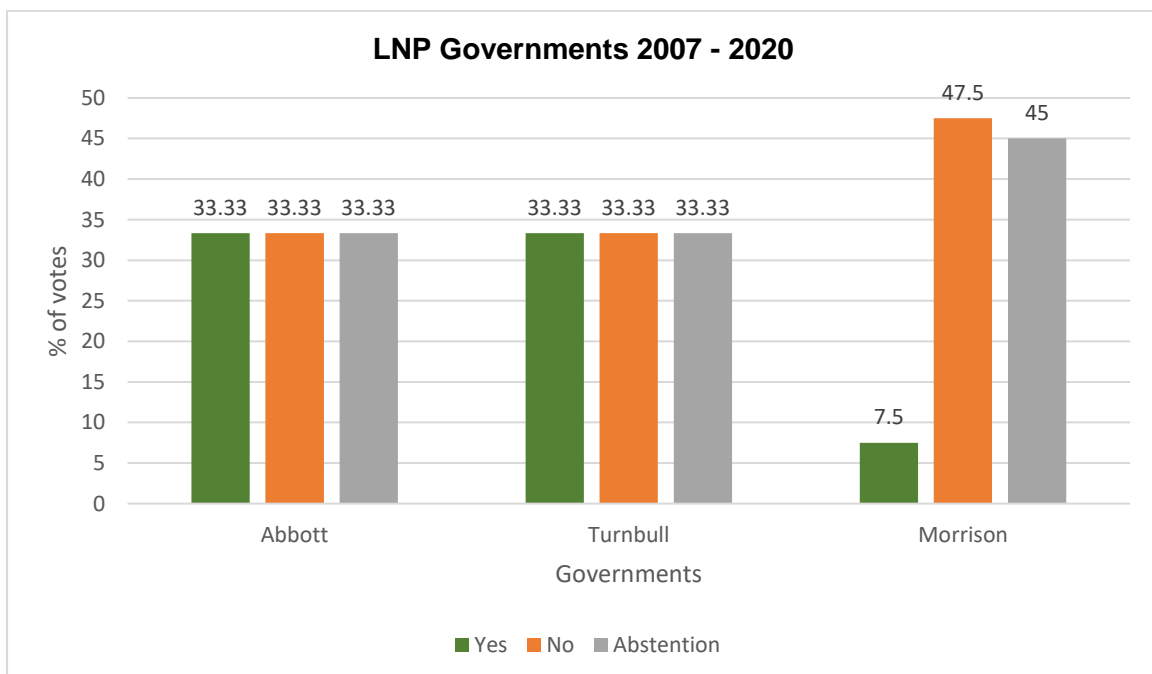


Figure 18



The Abbott and Turnbull governments voted 33% Yes, 33% No and abstained 33%. This steep increase in abstentions marks a shift from the ALP governments. The biggest shift occurred with the Morrison government which voted Yes 7.5%, No 47.5% and abstained 45%.

All in all, Australia's voting record at the UNGA is evidence that the historical pattern of supporting Palestinian human rights while undermining efforts to ensure these rights are protected persists in modern Australia foreign policy. Even under ALP governments, Australia has often been in the minority of countries that abstain or vote against these recurring resolutions. However, there has been a clear increase in equivocation and outright opposition to resolutions on the IPC since the LNP regained government.

## **Conclusion**

Since before the establishment of Israel, Australia has actively bolstered the legitimacy of an Israeli state. While Australia claims to support Palestinian self-determination, and believe in the international system, international law and the rights and freedoms of the UN Declarations, Australian foreign policy on the IPC contradicts this position in several ways.

Firstly, Australia enacts policies that systematically disadvantage Palestine. By its historical support for Israeli statehood while voting against granting the PLO observer status in the UNGA, Australia helped to establish the inequality between the two parties. In its ongoing support for a direct negotiation between the two unequal parties, Australia has worked against the self-determination of the Palestinian people and rebuffed the international system.

Secondly, Australia continually and increasingly votes against UNGA resolutions that fund advocacy for Palestinian human rights and that hold Israel accountable for violations of international law. These actions go against its claimed support for Palestinian self-determination and statehood, as well as its support for international law.

The Australian government justified support for the creation of an Israeli state on the basis that it was necessary for the protection of the Jewish people following the extreme violations of human rights that occurred during the holocaust. Yet, Australia has consistently failed to provide similar support for a Palestinian state to ensure that Palestinians receive the same protection from human rights violations perpetrated by Israel.

## **Recommendations**

In order to resolve the contradictions between its stated position and the impact of its policies, Australia must:

1. Re-evaluate its current policies in light of the negative effects of current Australian policy highlighted in this report.
2. Consider the effect of power dynamics and state legitimacy on the bilateral negotiations between Israel and Palestine, and how these effects may be mitigated through the participation of an impartial international body.
3. Reconsider its relationship with Israel, and the messages it may be communicating or behaviour it may be implicitly endorsing by strengthening this relationship even further.

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