

 DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

**ISRAEL/PALESTINE
IN THE 2020
DEMOCRATIC
PRIMARY:**

ELIZABETH WARREN

OVERVIEW

Elizabeth Warren has served as a Democratic senator from Massachusetts since 2013. Prior to entering the Senate, she served as an advisor to President Obama on the Consumer Financial Protection Board (2010-2011), which she cofounded, and a tenured professor at Harvard Law School from 1993 to 2013.¹ An expert in consumer protection law, she has dedicated much of her career in legal academia and politics to warning about the danger posed by large financial institutions.

FRAMING OF THE ISSUE

In July 2019, Warren responded with an immediate “yes... I’m there” to activists from the Jewish progressive group IfNotNow asking her to “push... the Israeli government to end the occupation.”^{2*} Although Warren was criticized for this stance by Republican New York congressman Lee Zeldin on Fox News³ and the Republican Jewish Coalition,⁴ she has not changed course or retracted her remarks.

In June 2019, Max Berger, a cofounder of Jewish anti-occupation group IfNotNow,⁵ joined the Warren campaign as director of progressive partnerships.⁶ The hire sparked outcry from pro-Israel groups like the Democratic Majority for Israel⁷ and Zionist Organization of America.⁸ Berger, a longtime activist involved with groups from Occupy Wall Street to Justice Democrats and the social movement incubator Momentum, is still on the campaign staff.⁹ (Full disclosure: as a cofounder of IfNotNow, I know Max personally.)

Warren’s general preferred framing of the issue has emphasized Israel’s “security” and the Palestinians’ “dignity and self-determination.”¹⁰ She has advocated for returning to the Obama administration’s strategy of attempting to pressure Israel toward negotiating for a two-state solution, without including conditions on military aid.^{11,12}

Warren released an overall foreign-policy vision in November 2018. Its two main emphases are 1) undoing the antidemocratic, unequal, corruption-inducing impacts of globalization, and 2) revitalizing US alliances with other liberal democracies.¹³ Warren’s foreign-policy statement does not specifically mention Israel/Palestine, but other public statements have shown that she considers Israel an important liberal democratic ally in the Middle East.¹⁴

When Netanyahu, at Trump’s urging, banned two Muslim women of color US Congresswomen from visiting Israel in August 2019, Warren tweeted: “Israel doesn’t advance its case as a tolerant democracy or unwavering US ally by barring elected members of Congress from visiting because of their political views. This would be a shameful, unprecedented move. I urge Israel’s government to allow [Ilhan Omar] and [Rashida Tlaib] entry.”¹⁵ This was Warren’s third-ever tweet to mention Israel.

In her second-ever tweet about Israel, in February 2019, Warren applied the “corruption” frame to Netanyahu: “First embracing right-wing extremism. Now manipulating a free press, accepting bribes, and trading government favors. The allegations against Prime Minister Netanyahu are serious and cut to the heart of a functioning democracy.”¹⁶

This line of criticism reinforces the ideas of shared democratic values and the importance of criticizing US allies: “Corruption—in Israel, in the US, or anywhere else—is a cancer that threatens democracy. We need to fight back. And we can start by having the courage to call it out wherever it occurs. Even among our allies. Especially here at home.”¹⁷

Notably, Warren has not mentioned human rights or Palestinian suffering when asked about how she would approach Israel/Palestine, and has even mentioned “demographic realities—births and deaths” that will affect Israel’s decision-making.¹⁸

ON THE CURRENT ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP

In April 2018, Warren followed Bernie Sanders in condemning the Israeli government’s violence toward Palestinian protesters in the Great March of Return. “I am deeply concerned about the deaths and injuries in Gaza,” Warren said. “As additional protests are planned for the coming days, the Israel Defense Forces should exercise restraint and respect the rights of Palestinians to peacefully protest.”¹⁹

Warren was one of ten senators, all Democrats, to sign a November 2017 letter written by Bernie Sanders urging Netanyahu not to demolish the West Bank villages of Susiya and Khan al-Ahmar.²⁰

In 2015, Warren skipped Netanyahu’s address to a joint session of Congress.²¹ She voted for the Obama administration’s Iran nuclear deal, which Netanyahu and AIPAC strongly opposed.²²

SETTLEMENTS

In February 2019, when pressed about the problem that settlement construction poses to the peace process, Warren argued that the Trump administration has made it clear that the US is on Israel’s side in the negotiations, and that the US should instead return to the Obama administration’s pressure toward a two-state solution. She pivoted to the question of the Jerusalem embassy rather than making a specific statement about settlements.²³

AID TO ISRAEL

During the war on Gaza in 2014, Warren voted for \$225 million in increased funding to the Iron Dome, and defended her vote by citing Israel’s “right to defend itself,” America’s “special relationship with Israel,” and Israel’s location in “a part of the world where there aren’t many liberal democracies and democracies that are controlled by the rule of law.”²⁴

AID TO THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY (PA) AND THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (UNRWA)

In April 2019, Warren stated unequivocally that she would restore funding to UNRWA if elected.²⁵ In September 2018, she signed an open letter urging Trump to restore funding to the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA.²⁶

BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS (BDS)

Warren opposes BDS but also opposes efforts to ban it. This has been her public position since August 2017.²⁷ In February 2019, she voted against the Strengthening America’s Security in the Middle East Act (S.1), a bill which allocated \$38 billion over ten years in military aid to Israel and which allowed states to penalize BDS supporters. In a

statement to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency news service, Warren said: “I oppose the boycott. But I think penalizing free speech activity violates our Constitution, so I oppose this bill.”²⁸

RELATIONSHIPS

J Street

J Street endorsed Warren in her reelection bid for Senate in 2018.²⁹ J Street contributed \$17,116 to Warren’s 2018 Senate reelection bid.³⁰

In total, Warren received \$42,337 from pro-Israel lobbies in 2018.³¹ Of that money, \$2,500 came from the Joint Action Committee for Political Affairs,³² a PAC “committed to the special relationship between the US and Israel and a social agenda that includes reproductive choice and separation of religion and state.”³³ The remaining \$22,721 came from individual contributions.³⁴

OTHER POLICIES

Warren has criticized Trump’s relocation of the US embassy to Jerusalem, describing it as “not our decision” and “one of the things that should have been decided by the parties.”³⁵ However, asked by Axios in July 2019 if she would move the embassy back to Tel Aviv, Warren did not respond.³⁶

ANTISEMITISM / WHITE NATIONALISM

In August 2019, President Trump made explicitly antisemitic statements American Jews who vote for Democrats (seventy-nine percent of American Jews voted Democratic in 2018).³⁷ Trump said that American Jews who vote for Democrats show “either a total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty,”³⁸ and then clarified that “If you vote for a Democrat, you’re being disloyal to Jewish people and you’re being very disloyal to Israel...Only weak people would say anything other than that.”³⁹ Warren made no public statements in response to these comments.⁴⁰

Warren came to Rep. Ilhan Omar’s defense in March 2019, after Omar was criticized for tweets about AIPAC; Warren differentiated between criticism of Israel and antisemitism, and emphasized the importance of a public debate about US policy toward the Middle East.

“We have a moral duty to combat hateful ideologies in our own country and around the world, and that includes both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. In a democracy, we can and should have an open, respectful debate about the Middle East that focuses on policy,” Warren said. “Branding criticism of Israel as automatically anti-Semitic has a chilling effect on our public discourse and makes it harder to achieve a peaceful solution between Israelis and Palestinians. Threats of violence—like those made against Omar—are never acceptable.”⁴¹

After the Tree of Life synagogue massacre in October 2018, Warren participated in a national “Show Up For Shabbat” initiative, leading the “Prayer for Our Country” at Temple Emanuel, a Conservative synagogue in Newton, MA. “This act of pure evil was an attack on the Jewish community not just in Pittsburgh, but all across our country,” Warren said. “Anti-Semitism is at the root of so many vile and hateful acts. The danger anti-Semitism poses is real and tangible.”⁴²

*Disclosure: I am a cofounder of IfNotNow and organized with the group for years, although I am not currently active with the organization.

ENDNOTES

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