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United States Sophistry on the Palestinian Resolution for Statehood

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors

May 2012

Honors Capstone Project in Communication and Rhetorical Studies

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Abstract

This project examines the rhetorical devices and practices used by the Obama Administration to express and construct opposition to the Palestinian Authority's statehood bid. This study focuses on uncovering the ideology embedded within President Obama's Speech to the United Nations General Assembly during the opening of the 66th Session. By conducting an ideology rhetorical analysis of this text, this examination will uncover the reasoning that Obama deploys to make sense of and define the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more specifically, the Palestinian bid for statehood. This ideology has contributed to the perpetuation of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories; thereby, denying the Palestinians the right to self-determination.

This thesis is organized as follows: Section I introduces Obama's speech to the UNGA through a brief overview of the text and outlines my analyses' goals. Section II contextualizes the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and summarizes Obama's speech to the UNGA. Section III presents a description of the ideological approach to rhetorical criticism, contributions to the field of ideological criticism, examples of the method's application, and a rationale for its selection. Section IV reports the findings of my analysis of Obama's speech to the UNGA and evaluates the contribution that my analysis makes to the understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Section V provides a brief update on Palestine's UN bid following Obama's speech.

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Advice to Future Honors Students

- Overload your course schedule at least once.
 - This will not only provide you with a challenge, but may also help you graduate early.
- Pick a capstone topic that you're interested in.
 - You do not want your research and writing experience to be boring.
- Make sure that the topic you choose is unique.
 - It is an excruciating process to bring numerous sources together for the sole purpose of paraphrasing. Contribute to human understanding by incorporating your own ideas and thoughts.
- Apply for scholarships that will aid you in your research.
 - The Honors Department offers amazing scholarships that will assist in funding your travels. Why sit in a library reading books when you can gather your own data overseas?
- Take a course that relates to capstone topic
 - Nothing is more rewarding than having the opportunity to write about a single topic for two courses. Of course, check with your professor and the Honors Department first to make sure that it is okay.
- Aim to get it published
 - Success in academia is all about the credentials.
- Stick with Capstone timetable
 - Do not wait to the last minute. No one wants to spend Senior Week in Club Bird.

I. Introduction

On September 21, 2011, US President Barack Obama addressed the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) during the opening of the 66th session by covering a wide range of international issues. He focused on the so-called “Arab Spring,” the controversial issue of the Palestinian statehood bid, nuclear weapons and disarmament, and lastly, wider socioeconomic issues such as education and human rights. I conducted an ideological critique on the 846 words that he used to frame and construct an opposition to the Palestinian Authority’s plans to submit a formal resolution seeking statehood and full membership status to the United Nations Security Council. The structure of my thesis is organized following Sonja Foss’ five major components of a critical essay:

(1) an introduction, in which you discuss the research question, its contribution to rhetorical theory, and its significance; (2) a description of the artifact and its context; (3) a description of the method of criticism [in this case, ideological analysis]; (4) a report of the findings of the analysis, in which you identify the ideology manifest in the artifact and the rhetorical strategies that promote it over other ideologies; and (5) a discussion of the contribution the analysis makes to rhetorical theory (Foss 220).

The Obama administration’s foreign policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been heavily criticized on both sides of the political spectrum. The left, and some international European and Middle Eastern allies, have called him out on his double standard approach of supporting self-determination and resistance movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, but not in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The right, on the other hand, has accused him of not being supportive enough of Israel (Shapiro 2). The current official United States

position is that Palestinian statehood should not be determined by the United Nations; rather, it is a subject for direct bilateral negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. Moreover, the United States threatened to use its veto power, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), to block any resolution seeking statehood (Rogin 1).

Standing in front of the international community at the UN General Assembly, Obama had an opportunity to explain his administration's opposition to the Palestinian bid to join the world body. He reminded the international delegates that he stood at the same podium in September 2010 calling for an independent Palestinian state within the year. But, here he was a year later, doing his best to avoid a UN showdown by thwarting the same outcome that he himself promised the previous year. Near the beginning of his speech's section that focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Obama described his effort to break the "stalemate" in negotiations (3). Getting to the issue at hand, Obama then spoke about the failures of the negotiations and alluded to the Palestinian statehood issue:

Now, I know many are frustrated by the lack of progress. I assure you, so am I ... there is no short cut to the end of a conflict that has endured or decades. Peace is hard work. Peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the United Nations -- if it were that easy, it would have been accomplished by now ... Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians -- not us -- who must reach agreement on the issues that divide them: on borders and on security, on refugees and Jerusalem (3).

Obama then asserted that "America's commitment to Israel's security is unshakable. Our friendship with Israel is deep and enduring ... [and Palestine's friends] do them no favors" by refusing to recognize Israel and its position (4).

In describing the Jewish people as having been victimized throughout history and having “forged a successful state of their own,” while larger hostile neighboring nations “threaten to wipe it off the map,” Obama was predominately speaking to an American and Israeli domestic political audience (Adams 3). He mentioned neither illegal Israeli settlement construction on land that will potentially become a part of the future Palestinian state nor the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory. While lecturing sympathizers of the Palestinian struggle that their hostile attitude towards Israel does not help their cause, he ignored the plight of Palestine and the Palestinians. Furthermore, other than in vague terms, Obama did not make a direct case against the Palestinian statehood bid or substantively explain the US position. Rather than using the UN General Assembly as a forum to discuss the issues surrounding Palestinian self-determination and its impact on the interests of the Israeli and American people substantively, he appeared to be more focused on improving his domestic approval rating and re-election prospects by resorting to empty rhetoric and vague narratives in his construction of an opposition to the Palestinian statehood vote (Adams 4).

To succeed in American presidential politics, candidates must express the importance of Israel as a strategic American ally and reaffirm their commitment to Israel’s perceived security interests. A candidate's stalwart support for the State of Israel is important not only to Jewish-American voters who have emotional and/or familial ties to the state, but also to evangelical Christians who largely support the state out of theological obligation. Basically, to win votes and

to secure a large source of campaign donations, he should use any opportunity that presents itself to wrap himself in an Israeli flag - metaphorically speaking - whether during a televised debate or on the campaign trail. For powerful lobby groups in Washington, the strong backing of Israel is nothing short of a litmus test (Kitfield 1). For Obama, a first-term president with a low approval rating and little more than a year left before the 2012 presidential campaign, this speech at the UNGA, just like every other high-profile one, was a campaign speech (Hechtkopf 1).

As a student of rhetorical criticism, I seek to understand how Obama organizes and employs language and its effects in his UNGA address. James Herrick, professor of communication at Hope College, offers his insight on the relationship between rhetoric and persuasion in his piece, “An Overview of Rhetoric:”

There is more to rhetoric than persuasion alone, rhetoric has been traditionally concerned with the techniques for gaining compliance. ... This close association [between rhetoric and persuasion] has always been at the heart of the conflict over whether rhetoric is a neutral tool for bringing about agreements, or an immoral activity that ends in manipulation and deception (3).

Obama’s political speech seeks to persuade his audience that the United Nations is the wrong forum for the Palestinians to seek statehood recognition, and to enlist his audience’s compliance to oppose the Palestinian statehood bid.

Herrick later defines rhetoric as the “systematic study and intentional practice of effective symbolic expression” (7). Furthermore, he explains that rhetorical theory is “the systematic presentation of the art of rhetoric, descriptions of rhetoric's various functions, and explanations of how rhetoric achieves its

goals” (7). Although many scholars use the terms rhetoric and communication synonymously, Herrick argues that doing so “ignores genuine and historically important distinctions among types of communication ranging from information and reports through casual conversations to outright propaganda” (7-8). There are six distinguishing characteristics of rhetorical discourse that set it apart from other types of communication, with rhetorical discourse being the “marks” that the art of rhetoric leaves on messages. The rhetoric that Obama, as the rhetor, employed in his UNGA speech contained these six characteristics of rhetorical discourse: planned, adapted to an audience, shaped by human motives, responsive to a situation, persuasion seeking, and concerned with contingent issues (8).

Planned: Given that Obama’s address to the UNGA was indeed a speech, the rhetorical discourse employed involved some level of forethought or planning. Whether Obama wrote the speech himself or collaborated with members of his staff, decisions were made as to how Obama should address his audiences. Furthermore, regardless of the speech’s goal, Obama’s desire to achieve this goal governed the planning and adaption process that marked his rhetoric concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Everything from word choice and phrasing to inclusion and omission of content was consciously thought-out. The writer(s) of the speech chose to employ specific language that would more effectively achieve its purpose, whether it be persuasion, mutual understanding, clarity, or beauty. Some of the issues that might have arisen during this process include uncertainty about which arguments to address, which evidence to use, and how to arrange the arguments and evidence.

Adapted to an audience: Obama had to attempt to identify his primary audience (domestic critics or supporters, special interest groups, international allies) and he had to keep this imagined audience in mind while forming a link between his own views and theirs. This link would allow him to attend to his targeted audience's experiences, beliefs, values, aspirations, and social status (Herrick 9). However, Obama must also have attempted not to alienate or offend his secondary and tertiary audiences by emphasizing various subtle "enthymemes," which were the arguments built from the values, beliefs, or knowledge held in common between himself and his audience (Herrick 10). For example, while possibly dedicating a majority of his UNGA speech to appeasing the wealthy and influential pro-Israel crowd by reaffirming the United States "unshakeable" commitment to Israel, Obama also may have tried to mitigate the negative reaction of the pro-Palestinian crowd by justifying his arguments as based on their shared value of furthering peace (Obama 3-4).

Shaped by human motives: By engaging in rhetoric, Obama, as a head of state, acted symbolically in response to various motives, which consisted of the commitments, goals, desires, or purposes that collectively led him to deliver his speech. Not only would Obama have addressed his audience with his goals in mind, but also the planning and adaption process that marked his rhetoric would have been governed by his desire to achieve his goals. Although no one, other than Obama himself, knows his internal motives with certainty, rhetorical critics can generally speculate that they may have included making converts to a point of view, building a consensus that enables group action, forging an agreement that

makes peaceful existence possible, a combination of the three, or something else entirely. Moreover, critics can assume that Obama had to align his motives with his audience's commitments. Therefore, Obama and/or his speech writers would have attempted to understand his audience's values, identify factors prompting them to action, and grasp the symbolic resources for drawing them together (Herrick 10-11).

Responsive to a situation: As previously mentioned, throughout the first half of 2011, Obama was suffering from low domestic approval ratings and was receiving extensive criticism of his Middle East foreign policy record by a formidable right-wing opposition that seeks to unseat him in the upcoming 2012 presidential election (Shapiro 2). After Obama declared that a future Palestinian state should be based on "the 1967 borders with mutually agreed land swaps" in an address to the State Department, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticized Obama in a statement saying that this could leave Israel with borders that were "indefensible" (Netanyahu 1). Fearing that his Middle East Policy was perceived as being too hostile to Israel, Obama began to intensify his pro-Israeli rhetoric, which further encouraged the Palestinian Authority to carry out its plans to seek statehood recognition at the United Nations. Obama now had to use his opportunity to address the UNGA to please powerful domestic lobbying groups and Jewish-American and Evangelical voting demographics that have an interest in ensuring that Palestinians do not receive UN membership status (Kitfield 1). Thus, Obama faced the challenge of rallying international opposition to the

looming Palestinian statehood bid, while simultaneously trying to mend US relations with the Arab world.

Persuasion Seeking: Since it was the United States position that Palestinian statehood is a subject for peace negotiations rather than something to be determined by membership in the United Nations, Obama had to express his opposition to the Palestinian statehood bid effectively (Memmott 1). To do this, he had to construct a persuasive narrative as to why a move by the Palestinian Authority to seek Palestine's full membership as a state at the United Nations threatens the Middle East Peace Process. Assisting this possible goal of persuading the international community that a "yes" vote for Palestinian statehood would be detrimental to regional peace and stability, Obama used the following four symbolic resources: arguments, appeals, arrangement, and aesthetics. The application of these resources, as detailed in section IV, provides evidence that Obama's rhetoric was carefully planned discourse, adapted to a particular audience, revealing human motives, and responsive to a set of circumstances (Herrick 15).

Concerned with continent issues: The section of Obama's speech concerning the Middle East Peace Process addresses real and unresolved issues. Also, it engages our decision-making capacities on our underlying value commitments to the Israelis and Palestinians. Since Obama's statements on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict embody neither inevitable facts nor virtual impossibilities, it is possible for the United States to adopt an alternative position on the peace process. This demonstrates that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

consists of issues that are subject to change overtime. As Obama attempts to resolve these contingent issues, rhetoric has come into play (Herrick 16).

In summary, all six of Herrick's characteristics of rhetorical discourse operate in the rhetoric Obama used to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in his UNGA speech. After balancing a variety of interests and goals, Obama consciously crafted a narrative that he thought would appeal to his targeted audience. Although I can only speculate as to whether or not Obama adapted his speech to a specific audience in order to advance a hidden and questionable agenda, his speech did appeal to some audiences more than to others. More specifically, while the speech's content portrayed itself as a serious attempt to explain why the United States opposes a move by Palestine to seek statehood recognition, a close examination reveals that it consists of strategically placed abstract words and phrases that collectively form a biased narrative. It is as if Obama not only rehearsed Israeli arguments against the Palestinian Authority's bid, but also adopted Israel's narrative on the conflict as well.

I argue that the speech, rather than substantively explaining the US stance on Palestinian statehood, sought to persuade other member states to follow the US lead in opposing the Palestinian Authority's statehood bid when it came time for them to vote in either the UNGA or UNSC. Yet the first half of Obama's speech failed to account for the many inconsistencies in US efforts to advance human dignity and freedom around the world during the "Arab Spring," and became even less persuasive once he reached the Palestinian question. After praising democratic self-determination in the Arab world, Obama insisted that the only

true route to Middle East peace along with Palestinian statehood must come from direct bilateral negotiations with the Israelis, as “there are no shortcuts” (Obama 1-4). This incongruous message offered Palestinians no incentive to change course, and if anything, reinforced the Palestinian UN argument.

My role as an ideological critic of Obama’s UNGA speech is to understand the reasoning Obama deploys to make sense of and define the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more specifically, the Palestinian bid for statehood. Since Obama’s words reflect the position of the United States, a permanent member of the UNSC with veto power, the underlying ideology that the speech articulates becomes hegemonic. In this case, the ideology manifested in Obama’s speech concerning Palestinian statehood consists of the following pattern of beliefs, each stated explicitly within the speech: “Palestinian people deserve a state of their own;” “Genuine peace can only be realized between the Israelis and Palestinians themselves;” “Peace will not come through statements and negotiations at the United Nations;” “Peace depends on compromise among the Israelis and Palestinians;” “The path to a Palestinian state will be through negotiations between the parties” (Obama 3). These components of the ideology will shape future discourse about whether or not the United Nations is an appropriate forum for the realization of a Palestinian state.

The research question that guides my analysis is the following: what rhetorical devices and practices does Obama use to construct an opposition to the Palestinian Authority’s statehood bid? After applying an ideological criticism to the text of Obama’s speech and laying out the results of my analysis, I discuss the

contribution my analysis makes to rhetorical theory. To articulate this contribution, I move away from my critique of Obama's UNGA speech and answer my research question more generally and abstractly. For example, I am interested in how Obama's construction of an opposition to the Palestinian statehood bid simultaneously works to perpetuate the Israeli occupation over the Palestinian territories.

II. Context of the Artifact and Its Description

This section details the relevant historical context leading up to United States President Barack Obama's speech at the United Nations General Assembly. After providing the background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the reasoning behind the Palestinian resolution for statehood, I highlight how the Obama administration and international community has addressed the conflict in recent years. The inclusion of these historical narratives informs my investigation of the rhetorical construction of Obama's speech. At the end of this section, I provide an update on the Palestinian's bid for statehood following Obama's speech to illustrate the impact of Obama's efforts to construct an opposition to the statehood bid.

Brief Background of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Since 1920, when Great Britain received the mandate of Palestine from the League of Nations, there has been armed conflict between the Jewish and Arab populations living in Palestine. For instance, there was a nationalist uprising by Palestinian Arabs from 1936-1939, known as the Arab Revolt, against British colonial rule, land transfers, and mass Jewish immigration (Benny 129). Despite pressure to allow increased immigration of Holocaust survivors following World War II, the British limited Jewish immigration to quell the revolts and advocate a binational state (British White Paper). As a response, between 1944-1948, the Jewish Resistance Movement waged a guerrilla war against both British troops and Palestinian Arabs. Consisting of paramilitary groups, the Movement aimed to

oust the British authority, to allow the unrestricted immigration of Jews, and to form a Jewish state (Silver 51).

In an attempt to settle the dispute between Jewish nationalists and Arab nationalist movements, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) introduced Resolution 181, which was approved on November 28, 1947. The resolution, also known as the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, terminated the British Mandate and authorized a complete withdrawal of the British armed forces. Furthermore, it outlined the boundaries for the future independent Arab and Jewish States and a Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem. While the proposed plan was accepted by the largely migrant Jewish community in Palestine, it was rejected by the largely indigenous Arab community in Palestine, along with members of the Arab League (A/RES/181 II). The Arab League claimed the plan was unbalanced and unfair to the Arab population living within the territory, as the amount of land given to the Arabs compared to the Jews was noncontiguous, indefensible, and not proportional to their population size (A/AC.21/7; See Table A).

On May 14, 1948, eight hours before the end of the British Mandate of Palestine, David Ben-Gurion declared an independent state of Israel (“The Declaration of the State”). Rejecting this declaration and asserting “that the rule of Palestine should revert to its inhabitants, in accordance with the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations and [the Charter] of the United Nations,” a coalition of Arab forces (Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Iraq) and Palestinian Arab forces responded by attacking Jewish nationalist forces (Arab

League 3). Following a ceasefire on January 7, 1949, protracted peace talks led to an armistice agreement that allowed Jewish nationalists to control nearly one-third more of the territory than was allocated by the United Nations Partition Plan (See Image A). These Armistice Demarcation Lines eventually became known collectively as the “Green Line.” During the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the Civil War that preceded it, roughly 711,000 to 725,000 Palestinian Arabs left, fled, or were expelled from their homes by Zionist forces to ensure a decisive Jewish majority in the future state of Israel (McDowall and Claire 10).

The armed truce between Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs, punctuated by raids and reprisals, lasted until 1956. When Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, Israel - backed by Great Britain, the United Kingdom, and France - launched a successful combined air and ground assault into Egypt's Sinai peninsula. Many members of the international community condemned this action against Egypt as a Western plot to regain control of the canal and remove Nasser from power. Israel had captured several key objectives, including the Gaza Strip and Sharm el Sheikh, which it turned over to the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) for guaranteed access to the Gulf of Aqaba in 1957 before the eventual ceasefire (Alteras 230-275).

A decade later, Israel launched surprise air strikes against the United Arab Republic (Egypt, Jordan, and Syria) in what became known as the Six-Day War of 1967. The victory allowed Israel to control the final 22% of Palestine - the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip - along with the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt and the Golan Heights of Syria. On November 22, 1967, UNSC Resolution

242 was unanimously adopted, making it illegal to acquire territory by warfare; therefore, the United Nations considers the Palestinian territories as being “occupied” by Israel (S/RES/242).

Since that time, there have been repeated waves of armed or popular resistance by Palestinian Arabs against the occupation - notably, two major Arab-Israeli Wars (the 1973-1974 Yom Kippur War and the 1982 War), the intifada of 1987-1990, failed peace processes (Oslo Accords, 1993-2000), the intifada of 2000-2005, Hamas control of Gaza (elections of 2006 and control in 2007), and Palestinian militancy (Hamas rocket fire). Each time, Israel has responded with overwhelming military force, repression, and economic sanctions - for example, the recent Israeli invasion of Gaza (Operation Cast Lead, December 2008-January 2009). Using economic leverage, the Israelis gradually restored relations with Palestinians and a relative calm. However, over the past four decades, any period of peace easily reversible. For the Palestinians living in the occupied territories, the outcomes of this pattern have been the steady erosion of development potential, the degradation of human capital, the gradual depletion of natural resources, and the loss of territory to illegal Jewish settlements (Khalidi and Samour 6-7; See Image B).

Currently, Jewish settlements are accelerating throughout the occupied Palestinian territories. This colonization deprives Palestinian refugees of their national, civil, and human rights. The failure of an armed struggle campaign has led the Palestinian Authority (PA) to adopt an alternative strategy of seeking liberation of a fraction of historical Palestine through negotiations and diplomacy.

This non-violent strategy has also been futile in achieving Palestinian self-determination, as the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships are far from reaching an agreement on the “final status settlement” by implementing a two-state solution. Moreover, neither party has been willing to accept the preconditions posed by the other side: Palestinians would have to accept Israel as a Jewish state and Israelis would have to place a moratorium on settlement expansion and retreat from the illegal settlements (“PM Netanyahu Speech”).

Fatah, the ruling political party of the PA, initially integrated its call for Palestinian self-determination into the broader anti-colonial struggle that sought to establish a “just world order.” However, once in power, the leadership failed to deliver on its promises, and instead secured special privileges for the national bourgeoisie and international investor by consolidating power. Leveraging neocolonial power relations, the PA launched neoliberal economic programs which promised to deliver “growth” and “prosperity” to their Palestinian constituency. However, this policy failed to challenge the parameters of occupation and offered no real strategy for resistance (Khalidi and Samour 7-8; See Table B). Aiming to realize a Palestinian state by mid-2011, the PA recently initiated an institution-building plan in hopes that a plea to the United Nations for international recognition of statehood would deliver some promising results on the ground. To date, this strategy has failed because of an American threat to veto any resolution that would establish Palestine as a member state of the United Nations.

Palestinian Resolution for Statehood

One day after the Israelis celebrate their Independence Day, known as Yam Ha'atzmaut, the Palestinian people commemorate the year of their expulsion - known as the Nakba, catastrophe. However, during the month of commemoration in May 2011, President of the PA and member of Fatah, Mahmoud Abbas, gave the Palestinian people cause for hope when he announced that Palestinians would request that their state be admitted as a full member rather than observer to the United Nations. This request would require the international recognition of the State of Palestine on the 1967 border (Abbas 1-3).

In a letter to the *The New York Times* entitled "The Long Overdue Palestinian State," Abbas acknowledged that many people are skeptical of the value of such a recognition as the Israeli occupation continues, while others have accused him of impeding the peace process. However, he argues, a state for the Palestinian people, which "remains a promise unfulfilled," has "tremendous value for all Palestinians - those living in the homeland, in exile, and under occupation" (1). Abbas argued that Palestine's admission to the United Nations would "pave the way for the internationalization of the conflict as a legal matter, not only as a political one," and allow Palestine to pursue claims against Israel at the United Nations in human rights treaty bodies or the International Court of Justice (1).

Currently, the PLO has met all statehood prerequisites listed in the *Montevideo Convention* of 1933, which outlined the rights and duties of states. The potential Palestinian state has a permanent population, will have a defined territory within the 1967 lines, a government in the form of the PA, and the

capacity to enter into relations with other states - notably the 120 of 193 UN member states that already recognize the independent state of Palestine, and fifteen others that have diplomatic relations with the PA (Khalidi 1).

Furthermore, intergovernmental organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Union have all indicated that Palestinian institutions are currently prepared for statehood, while other intergovernmental organizations such as the Arab League and Organization of Islamic Cooperation have already admitted Palestine as a full member state (Abbas 2).

Near the end of his letter, Abbas claimed, “only the occupation of our land hinders us from reaching our full national potential; it does not impede United Nations recognition” (2). Once admitted to the United Nations, the Palestinian leadership would make the key focus of negotiations on “reaching a just solution for Palestinian refugees based on Resolution 194, which the General Assembly passed in 1948” (3). Abbas concluded, “Palestine would be negotiating from the position of one United Nations member whose territory is militarily occupied by another, however, and not as a vanquished people ready to accept whatever terms are put in front of us” (3).

This move by the PLO to seek Palestinian statehood at the United Nations comes at a time when Palestinians, as a whole, seem to be making a strategic shift in their mode of confrontation with Israel. In their campaign against Israeli occupation, Palestinians went from the occasional military attacks toward a more nonviolent and political confrontation, as they recognized the lack of impact that

armed struggle has had on changing Israeli policies. This development is further influenced by the effective nonviolent protests that were a hallmark of the “Arab Spring” of 2011-2012, in which unarmed civilians openly confronted their government oppressors.

Three clear examples of nonviolent political struggle in support of Palestine, as opposed to militarism, have accompanied the Palestinian Authority’s bid for statehood. The first is the two-day symbolic march of Palestinian refugees to the borders of Israel to proclaim their right to return to their homes on May and June of 2011. The second is the flotilla of ships that set sail from nearby Mediterranean ports to break the Israeli siege of Gaza on July 2011. The third is the continued development of the global movement for a campaign of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel (Khouri 2). These campaigns send an integrated message that condemns Israel for continuing to act with impunity and criminality against the Palestinians, and demonstrates that people from around the world are taking action to get Israel to comply with its legal obligations. In the same way that Israel demands respect for the rights of Jews and Israelis globally, much of the international community is demanding that Israel respect Palestinian rights (Khouri 2). Even the United States, longtime ally of Israel, supports a negotiated two state solution (US State Department).

In reality, the statehood bid is not actually a matter of “declaring” Palestinian statehood, as the PLO already declared Palestinian independence in 1988. Yet, the PLO and PA have never enjoyed sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over the territory of their proclaimed “state” of Palestine. Moreover, the

PA's legal existence technically lapsed in 1999 in accordance to the Oslo Accords, and currently remains under the full authority of Israel as an interim self-governing authority (Khalidi 1). However, international statehood recognition of Palestine would place Israelis and Palestinians on a more level playing field, where the operating criteria consist of political sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference (Treaty of Westphalia).

Israel is the only entity within the territory of former Mandatory Palestine that has any attributes of sovereignty. Although Israel has no internationally recognized sovereign rights in the occupied territories, it still maintains a de facto military jurisdiction and control over them. Furthermore, Israel does not have any serious constraints on its freedom of action, as it has made a norm of routinely violating the provisions of the accords with the PLO that were meant to limit Israel's jurisdiction and control (Khalidi 1). Thus, it is arguable that irrespective of how far the PLO gets at the United Nations with its bid, the Palestinians will not have a real state of their own in the near future without Israeli withdrawal from their territory. According to the United States, neither the UNGA nor the UN Security Council (UNSC) is an appropriate forum for discussing or resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United States also rejects UN authority to contravene previous agreements signed between the parties and promised to veto any UNSC resolution, thereby, blocking Palestine from becoming a member state (Levy 1-3).

Expected failure of a formal UNSC vote on Palestinian statehood suggests that the Palestinian Authority must have an agenda that does not actually involve

obtaining UN membership. While it is possible that the Palestinian leadership is using the bound-to-fail statehood bid to create conditions for a new round of violence in the form of a third intifada, I argue that a more likely reason for the bid is its timing during a period of stalled direct bilateral negotiations.

Continuous US threats to veto a UNSC resolution on Palestinian membership simultaneously backs Palestinian claims of American bias towards Israeli interests. As confidence in American management of the peace process declines and American influence in the Middle East wanes, support for the Palestinian statehood bid will rise. Therefore, even if a resolution never goes to vote, Palestinians will still gain political leverage in their negotiations with Israel during a time in which Israel suffers increasing alienation and isolation by the international community.

On the other hand, if a Palestinian statehood resolution did eventually pass, then the stalled negotiations would receive a “jump start.” Palestinian UN membership as a state would powerfully entrench the two-state solution, upsetting many who support a one-state solution to the conflict - namely, the more absolutist Palestinian rights camp and those in the Greater Israel settler camp. The passage of this resolution would also clarify that the territory of the Palestinian state would be based on the 1967 lines, allowing for modifications to that line only on the basis of mutually agreed land swaps with East Jerusalem serving as its capital (See Table C). Grounding future negotiations in more realistic terms, this resolution would also ensure that the two-state arrangement is not endlessly flexible, undermining the Israeli negotiation tactics that only seek to

delay any meaningful progress for the Palestinians to establish a viable state by changing what Netanyahu refers to as “the facts on the ground” (Massad 1-4).

Occasion for Obama

As the Obama administration’s recent policies on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have suffered negative feedback internationally and domestically, the timing of the Palestinian statehood bid, which the administration will veto if it comes to a vote, could not be any worse. In 2010, despite appeals by the Obama administration, the Israeli government refused to renew a partial moratorium on settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territories. Along with the recognition that Obama himself would not be able to accomplish anything other than merely managing the conflict until the 2012 Presidential elections, Israeli settlements were one of the major reasons that the new PA policy of seeking-statehood became a necessity. At the time, it was clear that the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was only interested in Israel’s security, as he took a rejectionist approach to negotiations, refusing an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines, and rejecting shared sovereignty in Jerusalem and an Israeli withdrawal from the Jordan Valley. As a result, direct negotiations stalled.

Putting aside the US monopoly of the Oslo framework for bilateral negotiations, the West Bank’s PA began to craft an alternative policy. PA officials in Ramallah decided it was time to promote nonviolent mass action to reclaim sovereignty in the West Bank and to end the schism between Fatah’s West Bank and Hamas’ Gaza authorities. Abbas’ escalated state-building agenda and diplomatic offensive at the United Nations to recognize Palestine as a state

along the 1967 lines was paired with a move to have the European Union, United Nations, and Russia “internationalize” ownership of the negotiations along with the United States. Moreover, Abbas insisted that there will be no further talks until there is a settlement freeze and a clear reference to the 1967 lines (Ravid and Issacharoff 1).

Diplomacy at the United Nations was the priority of the PA agenda over the next several months. In February 2011, Arab nations introduced a UN Security Council resolution condemning Israel’s settlement policy as illegal. Israeli settlement construction damages the chances for an internationally-backed peace plan that would permit the Palestinians to create a viable, contiguous state. Despite US support for the applicability of the Geneva Convention to settlements in a 1978 State Department legal opinion and past speeches made by President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton criticizing the settlements, the United States vetoed the resolution (Skarzynski, Melle, and Byker, 1-5). The US Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan E. Rice, issued a statement explaining the vote on the grounds that the United States opposed new Israeli settlements, but believed that taking the issue to the UN would only complicate efforts to resume stalled negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians on a two-state solution (Rice 1). As a result, Arab countries and Palestinian supporters around the world heavily criticized US legitimacy as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

The vetoed resolution had the support of 123 co-sponsors of 192 UN member states, and gained the votes of fourteen of the Security Council’s fifteen

members (“United States Vetoes” 1). This vote isolated the United States and Israel on one side of the settlement issue, while most of the international community was on the other. Furthermore, the veto triggered a démarche by three EU members on the Council. Although Britain, France, and Germany still agreed with the United States that only bilateral negotiations could resolve the conflict, they also agreed with the PA that the peace process could not be open-ended. Britain, backed by France and Germany, laid down four parameters that any future Israeli-Palestinian negotiations would have to meet: borders based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed land swaps; security arrangements that put an end to the occupation and simultaneously prevent the resurgence of terrorism; a shard capital in Jerusalem; and a just solution to the refugee question (Usher 61).

Following Mahmoud Abbas’s acceptance of these parameters as bases for negotiations, the démarche prompted President Obama to make a statement concerning the Middle East Peace Process in his address on the Arab Spring at the State Department on May 19, 2011. Obama declared, “The borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed land swaps, so that secure and recognized borders are established for both states” (8). This statement received furious backlash from the Israeli government, Republican, and other domestic pro-Israel lobbies. Benjamin Netanyahu, a day before receiving three standing ovations during a joint session of Congress, strongly criticized the “indefensible” 1967 lines as a basis for negotiations (Netanyahu 1). This event represented the depth of congressional disapproval - Democrat and Republican -

of Obama's Middle-East Policy as being hostile to Israel and exposed the deep divide that doomed any US bid to revive peace talks.

Presumably fearing the perception of being anti-Israel before the 2012 Presidential Campaign, Barack Obama has had to intensify his pro-Israel rhetoric not only to win Jewish American votes in crucial swing states, but also to secure his Jewish constituency's donations for reelection (Kitfield 1). While Congress passed a resolution in July threatening to block the annual \$500 million in aid to the PA if statehood membership was pursued, the Obama administration was busy using diplomacy to prevent the international community from supporting the statehood bid. Backed by a long-standing US precedent of stating that the UN is the wrong forum for addressing a "bilateral" dispute between the Israelis and Palestinians, Washington continued to denounce the unilateral Palestinian move for self-determination.

When the Quartet of the United States, European Union, Russia, and the United Nations finally met on July 11, after the State Department cancelled the April and May meetings, the United States finally submitted a draft statement for the return to negotiations. However, the statement was so heavily tilted towards Israel, it prompted senior European diplomats to reportedly say, "responsibility for the failure of the meeting lies with the United States, which proposed a one-sided wording for an announcement that favored Israel and which had no chance of being accepted by the Palestinians" (Ravid 2). The statement would have endorsed two of Israel's main recent demands: Palestinian acknowledgement of Israel as a Jewish state and accommodation of major Israeli settlements on

Palestinian territory. Furthermore, it mentioned that “peace” would not come via UN decisions, and that no country could be expected to negotiate with a terrorist organization. There was no reference to a settlement freeze or to mutually agreed land swaps (“Report: US sought” 1).

Recently, President Obama faced yet another challenge when preparing his speech for delivery to the UNGA on September 21, 2011. As the Head of State, he had to declare the US position on the greater Israeli-Palestinian conflict along with an implicit response to the looming Palestinian recommendation for statehood. This speech came at a time when the President had a domestic approval rating of 41% and suffered fierce opposition from the neoconservative right (Gallup 1). He had to avoid a UN showdown, while simultaneously trying to improve US relations with Arab nations. Summing up the troublesome circumstances for President Obama’s preparation for the UNGA speech, Helene Cooper, reporting for *The New York Times*, wrote:

For Mr. Obama, the challenge in crafting the much-anticipated General Assembly speech was how to address the incongruities of the administration’s position: the president who committed to making peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians a priority from Day One, now unable to get peace negotiations going after two and a half years; the president who opened the door to Palestinian state membership at the United Nations last year, now threatening to veto that membership; the president determined to get on the right side of Arab history but ending up, in the views of many Arabs, on the wrong side of it on the Palestinian issue (1).

At the UNGA opening session, all eyes and ears were on Obama to see if his speech would represent a historic shift in an unpopular US foreign policy towards Israel and Palestine.

Obama's Speech to the UN General Assembly

On September 21, 2011, President Barack Obama delivered his speech to the United Nations General Assembly, expressing the US position on various contemporary international matters. This event marked the third time that Obama has stood at the podium for the UN General Debate since his first as President in 2009, with each speech marking a shift in his policy towards the Middle East peace process. Two years ago, he abandoned his call for a freeze of settlements in the West Bank, as Israel flatly refused to comply. Then last year, he delivered an impassioned call for Palestinian statehood, to be recognized in the United Nations, within the next year. This year, he tried to acknowledge the newest shift in policy, recalling his pledge and his belief that then, as now: although “the Palestinians deserve a state of their own ... genuine peace can only be realized between Israelis and Palestinians themselves” (1).

Standing before UN delegates, Obama went from congratulating the democratic movements in the Ivory Coast, Tunisia, and South Sudan, to blocking the “Arab Spring’s” manifestation in the Palestinian territories. Implicitly declaring US opposition to the PA’s bid for statehood at the UNSC, Obama warned world leaders that trying to create a Palestinian state by decree instead of through negotiations was bound to fail in creating peace between the Israelis and Palestinians: “Peace will not come through statements and negotiations at the United Nations -- if it were that easy, it would have been accomplished by now” (6). Obama argued that a statehood resolution approved over the objection of Israel would only make it harder to return to direct peace talks over final borders,

the status of Palestinian refugees and their descendants, and the future of Jerusalem. While Mahmoud Abbas could be seen putting his forehead in his hand several times throughout the speech, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel called the speech a “badge of honor” (Cooper 2).

This artifact - President Obama’s Speech to the UNGA during the opening of the 66th Session - is particularly useful in analyzing how the United States has expressed and constructed opposition to the Palestinian statehood resolution for a number of reasons.

- First and foremost, the purpose of a UNGA speech - for a Head of State to represent his/her nation’s foreign policy platform - provides the rhetor (Barack Obama) a forum to express his ideological positions on various international matters, each of which can be analyzed using the tools of rhetorical discourse analysis.
- Secondly, the timing of this speech comes two days before the PA submitted its application seeking “state membership,” to the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, on September 23.
- Thirdly, although Obama did not refer to the resolution explicitly in the speech, he mentioned Palestine’s need to find peace with Israel before seeking a formal solution through UN decrees.
- Lastly, this speech provides an overview of the US position on the Palestinian resolution for statehood, echoing previous White House and State Department Press Releases, and past speeches made by Susan E.

Rice and Barak Obama regarding the US position on the Palestinian resolution for statehood.

The next section describes the method of rhetorical criticism used to analyze Obama's speech.

III. Description of the Method of Analysis

This section articulates the ideological approach to rhetorical criticism by defining the method's key concepts and laying out its basic tenets and procedures. After providing examples of how scholars have contributed to the development of ideological criticism in the communications field, I describe how and why I apply the method to critique President Barack Obama's speech to the United Nation's General Assembly.

The Ideological Approach

I use ideological criticism in order to frame my rhetorical analysis. In her book, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, Sonja Foss explains and illustrates the theory of ideological criticism and provides various examples of its application. She defines ideology as a "pattern of beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world" (209). As a student of rhetorical criticism, I am interested in discovering the beliefs, values, and assumptions that are suggested beyond the surface structure of an artifact. Since beliefs reflect a group's "fundamental social, economic, political or cultural interests," conducting ideological criticism allows me to understand the "mental framework ... that a group deploys to make sense of and define the world or some aspect of it" (van Dijk 69), (Foss 209).

As Foss further explains, "the primary components of an ideology are evaluative beliefs - beliefs about which there are possible alternative judgments." She illustrates this concept by providing a set of beliefs about the issue of immigration such as the following: "too many people come to our country;"

“immigrants only come here to live off of welfare;” and “the government must send back illegal immigrants.” These beliefs comprise an ideology around immigration that “serve as the foundation for the knowledge, attitudes, motives, and predilections of groups that adhere to this ideology.” Other examples of ideologies include nationalism, Islamism, liberalism, and anti-capitalism.

There are multiple competing ideologies within any given society, and they manifest themselves in rhetorical artifacts. Some ideologies become more privileged, while alternative or oppositional perspectives may be repressed. As a result, the privileged ideologies become hegemonic. As Sonja Foss elaborates, “it thus constitutes a kind of social control, a means of symbolic coercion, or a form of domination by more powerful groups over the ideologies of those with less power. (Foss 210). Essentially, inviting “us to understand the world in certain ways, but not in others” (O’Connor 36). Furthermore, these dominant or hegemonic ideologies establish social norms by controlling what participants see as natural or obvious. While a hegemonic ideology asserts that its meanings are natural and real by providing a sense that things are the way they have to be, any viewpoints that challenge this will appear abnormal.

Foss cites the Iraq War initiated by the United States in 2003 as an example of dominant discourse based on ideology. Whether or not the United States should have invaded Iraq was hotly debated by many different groups and individuals such as pacifists, politicians, President George W. Bush, Iraqi citizens, each using different perspectives and ideologies reflected in the discourse. Yet, as Foss argues, the “dominant perspective that emerged and functioned as

hegemonic was that of the president and his cabinet members” due to their access to classified information and their ability to hide or release that information, their ability to converse with world leaders, and guaranteed media coverage of their words and actions (Foss 210). Thus, “their perspective became privileged over that of other perspectives” (Foss 210).

Contributions

The ideological approach to criticism is constantly developing as communication scholars influence it. Some of the more prominent scholars include Teun A. van Dijk, Philip C. Wander, Michael Calvin McGee, Raymie E. McKerrow, Janice Hovker Rushing and Thomas S. Frenzt, Lawrence Grossberg, Celeste Michelle Condit, and Dana L. Cloud. In their development of ideological criticism, each of these scholars have been influenced by a number of different perspectives and philosophies, including structuralism, Marxism, postmodernism, cultural studies, articulation, and feminism.

Michael Calvin McGee, for example, published an essay in 1980 entitled “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology.” In the beginning of his essay, McGee suggests that “ideology in practice is a political language, preserved in rhetorical documents, with the capacity to dictate decision and control public belief and behavior” (5). He continues, “the political language which manifests ideology seems characterized by slogans, a vocabulary of ‘ideographs’ easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy” (5). An “ideograph,” being an abstract word or phrase such as

“property” or “rule of law,” provides a naming function within society to select, deflect, or reflect a version of reality through symbols. Furthermore, ideographs are used as tools to shape public consciousness through their persuasive power of representing valid interpretations of the world. The author concludes with the suggestion that a “complete description of an ideology” should consist of the following: 1) “the isolation of a society’s ideographs,” 2) “the exposure and analysis of the diachronic structure of every ideograph,” and 3) “characterization of synchronic relationships among all the ideographs in a particular context” (16).

Using McGee’s interpretation of rhetorical theory, many scholars who apply an ideological approach of criticism to their artifact analyze the artifact’s use of “ideographs” to draw conclusions about the rhetor and his or her world view. This method allows critics to explore the relationship between rhetoric and power. Examples of ideographs in American political mythology include religion, privacy, freedom of speech, property, liberty, and rule of law - terms described by McGee as being “more pregnant than propositions ever could be,” as each term carries with it a very abstract meaning (7). The task of the analyst is to determine the associations between ideals and national/cultural identities across time, and to determine how the ideals have been promoted, appropriated, and sublimated, and by whom.

This essay represents one of the many ideological approaches to rhetorical criticism. Although various scholars of ideological criticism have embraced different perspectives, their primary goal as ideological critics has been to “discover and make visible the ideology embedded in an artifact” (Foss 213).

Ideological analysis seeks “to explicate the role of communication in creating and sustaining an ideology and to discover whose interests are represented in that ideology” (Foss 213). This process provides a “critical distance on existing relations, clearing a space in which existing arrangements can be evaluated and perhaps altered” (Foss 214). Conducting an ideological criticism of Obama’s UNGA speech is the best approach to use in order to fulfill this project’s primary goal of understanding how the United States has constructed an opposition to the Palestinian statehood bid. An ideological critique of the speech not only revealed hints as to whose interests it serves, but also provided insight as to where the *status quo* can be altered for the betterment of society.

Application

My analysis follows Sonja Foss’ general guidelines in applying the ideological approach of criticism to the artifact. According to Foss, a critic will follow four steps when exploring a rhetorical artifact for the ideology it manifests. The first step is the identification of “presented elements” in the artifact that “provide clues to its ideology.” These elements or signs are often the assumptions or premises behind the artifact that point to its ideological tenets. The critic should make a list of the presented elements that they code from their artifact. These elements can be anything from particular terms, major arguments, images, metaphors, used in the artifact’s text (215).

The second step is the identification of “suggested elements.” To identify these, the critic should analyze the list of presented elements and articulate certain meanings attributed to them, such as their suggested themes, allusions, concepts,

references, or ideas. These suggested elements are basically the meanings behind the presented elements. To illustrate this step, I use Foss' example of identifying the elements in the Humana Building. After viewing the building for its presented elements, Foss observed that it was made out of granite and had an "L" shape. From those presented elements, she was then able to identify the elements that they might suggest. For instance, the granite might represent permanence, durability, and wealth, while its "L" shape might reference a tombstone, memorial, or even a cash register. Although the presented and suggested elements should not appear in the essay in actual list form, they will be used as tools to help the critic discover the artifact's ideology (216).

The third step, "formulating an ideology," comes after the critic creates a list of an artifact's suggested elements. Focusing only on the suggested elements, the critic should be able to spot the themes, ideas, or ideational clusters that characterize most or all of them. After grouping the elements into categories and organizing them into a coherent framework, the critic should be able to "formulate the ideology of [the] artifact clearly and succinctly" (218). If it takes more than one to three sentences to explain the ideology, then the critic has yet to discover the "core" idea of the ideology. Building upon the previous example of the Humana Building to illustrate this step, Foss mentions that the suggested elements of the building cluster into two major categories - death and wealth. After a more detailed ideological analysis of the Humana Building, both Sonja Foss and Marla Kanengieter were able to articulate the following ideology:

The Humana Building is a memorial to those who have suffered or died because of its system of health care - a system that emphasized profit over

charity ... The images of death linked to the Humana Corporation serve as monuments to those whom Humana has served not for reasons of charity but for reasons of profit - and the service has been less than it would have been in a hospital dedicated to care rather than profit (Foss and Kanengieter 220).

The last step involves “identifying the functions served by the ideology.”

In this step, the critic’s task is to “discover how the ideology [the critic] constructed from the artifact functions for the audience who encounters it and the consequences it has in the world” (Foss 220). When formulating the research question it is important for the critic to understand what ideology is manifested in the artifact, whose interests are served by the ideology, and the ideology’s implications for the environment in which it influences. Once the critic has completed the four steps of analysis, it is time to write the critical essay.

Sonja Foss provides sample essays that conduct ideological criticism to illustrate this critical process. One essay, “From the Closet to the Loft: Liminal License and Socio-Sexual Separation in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*,” by Celeste Lacroix and Robert Westerfelhaus, examines the ideology of Bravo’s “unscripted” reality television series, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. The authors note that the show became very popular, and from a queer theory perspective, the series offered “much to celebrate” due to “the visibility of openly gay men, the positive way they are represented, and their easy fraternization with straight men.” However, after a close and detailed analysis of the series, the authors discovered many causes for critical concern - namely, the reaffirmation of the straight/gay dichotomy, the characters’ reinforcement rather than challenge of traditional stereotypes, and *Queers Eye*’s illustration of the construction by the

mainstream media of a new version of Closet, “the Loft,” that still functions to contain queers and queer sexuality (11-13).

Lacroix and Westerfelhaus remind readers of the power that the media has in entertaining and informing us while also “offering powerful ritualized experiences that draw from and reinforce core social values” (12-13). The authors explain how during each episode, the five homosexual protagonists, referred to as the “Fab Five,” are integrated into a straight-man’s life for a limited time to provide his wardrobe, physical appearance, or home with a make-over . Typically, towards the end of each episode, after salvaging an endangered heterosexual relationship by making the man or his place more attractive to his female partner, the Fab Five are “ensconced in their well-appointed loft” (13). This process is described by the authors as being an “inverted ritual order” which “allows queers temporary and controlled access to the cultural mainstream while ensuring that they pose no threat of socio-sexual contamination by their continued presence there” (13).

The authors provide an extensive description and analysis of the themes present in *Queer Eye* such as an inverted rite of passage, a liminal license, and the loft as socio-sexual separation. They conclude that although the airing of a television series that celebrates the lifestyle of openly gay men is a positive thing, it is equally important for the producers to represent gay characters positively in such a way that does not serve to tame and contain queer experience. By discovering the suggested elements, the authors deduce that:

Through the socio-sexual distancing they promote, media rituals of the type analyzed here negotiate the tension between the heterosexist social

order and the increased visibility and growing political power of gays. This tension is managed by taming queers - and containing queer experience while seemingly celebrating them (18).

Methodology

The artifact being used in this study is Obama's speech to the UNGA opening of the 66th Session. To engage in critical rhetoric of analysis by unmasking the discourse of power, I conducted an ideological criticism of the 846 words that Obama used in his speech to address the issues surrounding the Israelis and Palestinians. Performing an ideological analysis, I looked beyond the surface of his speech to discover the beliefs, values, and assumptions that it suggests.

Subsequently, I discovered and made visible the ideology embedded in the artifact and explicated the role of communication, which performs to make that ideology hegemonic. As a result of my ideological analysis, I sought to learn whose interests are being represented in that ideology. My purpose was to describe the relationships that exist within Obama's speech and between that speech and its context; thereby, calling them into question. Using Sonja Foss' rhetorical criticism, I provide a critical analysis of the existing relations to enable the envisioning of new kinds of relationships.

As in Lacroix and Westerfelhaus' analysis, I followed Sonja Foss's general guidelines for ideological criticism and identified the presented elements within Obama's speech. To identify these presented elements, I examined the various ideographs Obama used to construct an opposition to the Palestinian statehood bid. Furthermore, to aid in discovering any suggested elements, I articulated the meanings attributed to the ideographs by contextualizing them.

My ideological analysis of Obama's UNGA speech adds to our knowledge of how political speeches support hegemonic ideology; synthesize two polarizing positions; advocate a stance in the name of furthering peace; and give legitimacy to state institutions as representative entities. Using ideological criticism to frame my rhetorical analysis, I identified the reasoning that Obama's rhetoric deploys to make sense of and to define the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The next section reports the results of this analysis.

IV. Analysis of Obama's 2011 UNGA Speech

This section conducts a rhetorical analysis to discover and critique the ideology embedded in United States President Barack Obama's speech to the UNGA opening of the 66th Session on September 21, 2011, concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more specifically, the Palestinian Authority's statehood bid. After I examine the underlying beliefs and narratives that the text of Obama's speech purveys, I evaluate the contribution my analysis makes to rhetorical theory.

A Test for Principles and American Foreign Policy

Obama begins his speech on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by affirming the importance of the issue:

Now, I know, particularly this week, that for many in this hall, there's one issue that stands as a test for these principles and a test for American foreign policy, and that is the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. (3)

The most important aspect of Obama's opening statement is his recognition that he was addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during a "particular" week. This demonstrates that he was well aware of the Palestinian Authority's plans to submit a resolution seeking Palestinian statehood within the week. Therefore, later in the speech when he describes his administration's position that "peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the United Nations," Obama was specifically referring to the Palestinian Authority's resolution (3).

Furthermore, using the term "test," Obama is recognizing that the international community is critically evaluating certain principles and American

foreign policy pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Obama is likely referring to the principle of self-determination and democracy behind the notion “that each nation must chart its own course to fulfill the aspirations of its people,” as he spent the first half of his speech congratulating the recent democratic movements that took place across the Arab world (1-3). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a test for these principles because both parties want to secure their own interests, which are often interpreted as being mutually exclusive. For example, Israel has an interest in preserving its “defensible borders” at the expense of Palestinian interest in acquiring more territory for a “viable” future state. Obama later reaffirms this idea when he states, “each side has legitimate aspirations -- and that’s part of what makes peace so hard” (4).

American foreign policy is also being tested due to the influential US role in the Middle East peace process as a member of the Quartet on the Middle East (QME). The United States has a unique diplomatic and sociocultural tie to both Israel and the Palestinian territories as it hosts the largest Jewish population outside of Israel along with a growing Arab-American population. In addition, Washington has historically provided Israel with the highest amount of military and financial assistance of any foreign country due to American perception that Israel is a crucial economic and political ally in the oil-rich Middle East. However, the United States has recently urged Israel to engage in negotiations with Palestinians to resolve the issue of establishing an autonomous Palestinian state (Butterworth 1).

From 2010 to 2011: Obama's Advances and Retreats

Obama continues his speech recalling previous statements he has made concerning Palestinian statehood during his September 2010 address to the UNGA and May 2011 address to the State Department:

One year ago, I stood at this podium and I called for an independent Palestine. I believed then, and I believe now, that the Palestinian people deserve a state of their own. But what I also said is that a genuine peace can only be realized between the Israelis and the Palestinians themselves. One year later, despite extensive efforts by America and others, the parties have not bridged their differences. Faced with this stalemate, I put forward a new basis for negotiations in May of this year. That basis is clear. It's well known to all of us here. Israelis must know that any agreement provides assurances for their security. Palestinians deserve to know the territorial basis of their state. (3)

To analyze the ideology manifested in Obama's 2012 UNGA speech, I compare his administration's previous positions on Palestinian statehood with his administration's current position. This comparison demonstrates how his administration's position has altered over time.

In his September 23, 2010, address to the UN General Assembly during the opening of the 65th session, Barack Obama devoted 1,060 words out of his 4,090 word speech to the Middle East Peace Process. Acknowledging that many were "pessimistic" about the peace process bearing fruit and describing how the alternative involved "more blood [being] shed," Obama stated, "I refuse to accept that future ... each of us must choose the path of peace" (2). After expressing his administration's support of extending a moratorium on settlement construction, stressing the importance of a peaceful reconciliation, and urging Palestinian supporters to stop attempting to delegitimize Israel, Obama expressed how we should "not let terror, or turbulence, or posturing, or petty politics stand in the

way” of resolving the conflict (3). He closed the speech by suggesting that if we “draw upon the teachings of tolerance” and “reach for what’s best within ourselves” then “we can have an agreement that will lead to a new member of the United Nations - an independent, sovereign state of Palestine” (3).

In his May 19, 2011, address to the State Department on the Middle East and North Africa, Barack Obama devoted 1,134 words out of his 5,452 word speech to the Middle East Peace Process. Obama began the section of his speech referring to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict disagreeing that the peace process cannot move forward. Shortly after, he made a reference to the Palestinian Authority’s statehood bid: “For the Palestinians, efforts to delegitimize Israel will end in failure. Symbolic actions to isolate Israel at the United Nations in September won't create an independent state” (8). Acknowledging the stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Obama embraced the democratic change sweeping the Arab world by using stronger language to express his disappointment with the lack of fruit bore by the peace process:

The international community is tired of an endless process that never produces an outcome. The dream of a Jewish and democratic state cannot be fulfilled with permanent occupation. Ultimately, it is up to Israelis and Palestinians to take action. No peace can be imposed upon them, nor can endless delay make the problem go away. (8)

Obama closed his speech by declaring that negotiations should result in two states, with negotiations “based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders are established for both states” (9).

The “1967 lines” refer to the “Green Line” of demarcation established through the 1949 armistice between Israel and its Arab neighbors - Egypt, Jordan,

Lebanon and Syria - that ended the 1948 Arab-Israeli war over the establishment of the Jewish state. Roughly 18 years later, Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan and the Gaza Strip from Egypt as a result of the Six Day War. The Israelis then established an occupation, and allowed Jews to build settlements in both territories. Eventually, in 2005, Israel withdrew troops and settlers from the Gaza Strip, which is now run by Hamas, a Palestinian Islamic party (“Factbox” 1). Hamas, historically rejecting peace with Israel, recently signed a reconciliation agreement with Fatah, the ruling Palestinian party in the West Bank. Leadership in both Fatah and Hamas call for an establishment of a future Palestinian state within the 1967 lines, as an independent Palestine would span from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem serving as its capital (Waxman 2).

The concept of “mutually agreed swaps” refers to the criteria that Israelis and Palestinians swap territory on either side of the 1967 border. Israel has an interest in annexing territory that contains large settlement populations, as there are over 500,000 Jews living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (Myers and Landler 2; “Factbox” 2). Palestinians seek concession of territory of equal value in return. The specific underlying criteria of these land swaps have progressively developed over the past decade, as the ratio of land to be swapped has become more egalitarian (See Table B).

Moving on to the topic of security, Obama provided an overview of his basis of negotiations that would ensure Israel is able to “defend itself ... by itself ... against any threat:”

Provisions must also be robust enough to prevent a resurgence of terrorism, to stop the infiltration of weapons, and to provide effective border security. The full and phased withdrawal of Israeli military forces should be coordinated with the assumption of Palestinian security responsibility in a sovereign, non-militarized state (9).

Obama recognizes that these principles, which ensure that Palestinians have a territorial basis for state while Israelis have their basic security concerns met, will still not provide a solution to the “wrenching” issue concerning a divided Jerusalem and the “emotional” issue concerning Palestinian refugees to return to Israel (9). Still, Obama’s 2011 State Department speech as a whole represented a minor adjustment in American policy from suggesting to outlining the ideal outcome of negotiations .

According to a *New York Times* article by Mark Lander and Steven Myers, officials reported that on the same day Obama was to give his State Department speech Israeli PM Netanyahu “held an angry phone conversation” with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton “[demanding] that the president’s reference to 1967 borders be cut” from the speech before deliverance to the State Department (1). Although Obama made some last minute changes to his speech that delayed his appearance by 35 minutes, White House officials said that Obama did not alter the text under Israeli pressure and lobbying efforts (1). In response, Netanyahu sent

out a statement shortly after Obama's address that said, "Israel believes that for peace to endure between the Israelis and Palestinians, the viability of a Palestinian state cannot come at the expense of the viability of the one and only Jewish state"

(1). In addition, the Israeli Prime Minister later went on to critique Obama's reference to the 1967 lines "which are both indefensible and which would leave major Israeli population centers in Judea and Samaria beyond those lines" (1).

Netanyahu either must genuinely not have been assured that Israel would be secure through Obama's negotiation principles of "mutually agreed swaps" and various security provisions or he must have been concerned with how Obama's rhetoric influenced American policy on the peace process. Glenn Kessler, reporting for *The Washington Post*, argues that Obama's State Department statements represented a "major shift," as the 1967 boundaries were no longer just a "Palestinian goal" but also "American policy" (3). Yet, Jeffry Goldberg of the *Atlantic* points out that the Obama's language use is very similar to that of former US President George W. Bush. While George W. Bush stated that it is "unrealistic to expect ... a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949," Obama's "mutually agreed swaps" concept would ensure that the boundaries are different than those of 1967 and would not be set without Israeli approval (1). Furthermore, the idea of "land swaps" would allow what Israelis call Judea and Samaria to become a part of the Israeli state. For these reasons, Jack Tapper's alternative view that Netanyahu's real concern is not about Obama's reference to

the 1967 lines, but rather the idea that Palestinians can essentially show up at negotiations with the 1967 borders as the “American position.” Reporting for ABC News, Tapper asserts, “[Obama’s] position essentially gives the Palestinians an achievement at the bargaining table without having conceded anything in return” (1).

While delivering his address to a joint session of the US Congress the very next day, Netanyahu stated his agreement with Obama that “the [Israeli-Palestinian] border will be different than the one that existed on June 4th, 1967” (5). However, Netanyahu did not mention Obama’s criteria that negotiations include “mutually agreed swaps,” which raises the following question: where does Netanyahu believe lines would have to be drawn to provide Israel with “defensible” borders? While insisting that “Israel will be generous on the size of a Palestinian state,” there is a possibility that Netanyahu has an intent to annex resource-rich Palestinian land in the West Bank containing large and populous Jewish settlements without any reciprocation to the Palestinians (5). Palestinian leadership would not realistically be able to concede this land, which they find necessary for the viability of a future state. As a result, the peace process would be further stalled, and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories would continue.

Interestingly, Obama satisfied Netanyahu’s desire for omission of references to “1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps” in his 2011 UNGA speech.

Instead of explicitly reaffirming the criteria he laid down four months earlier, Obama merely stated that the “basis is clear” and “it’s well known to all of us here,” as previously quoted (3). This “voldemoritification” of the concept of “mutually agreed swaps,” as a topic that can be referred to but not explicitly mentioned, is unwarranted given the conclusion made by Middle East analysts that the borders of a new Palestinian state would inevitably be based on Israel’s boundaries before the 1967 Arab-Israeli war (Lander and Myers 2).

In comparison, Obama’s three speeches over the course of a year-- September 2010 UNGA, May 2011 State Department, and September 2011 UNGA--do not signal a major shift in America foreign policy. Although Obama used more colorful rhetoric expressing his frustrations with the past failures of the peace process in his May 2011 speech than his September 2010 speech, he still made it clear that the United States will oppose the Palestinian statehood bid at the United Nations. Yet, he significantly toned down his rhetoric in his 2011 UNGA speech concerning the prospects for a Palestinian state to be established in the near future. Moreover, Obama only referenced his basis of negotiations for a viable two-state solution, while simultaneously omitting the phrasing “1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps” to accommodate hardline pro-Israeli supporters.

The Palestinian Statehood Bid: Enemy of Peace?

In the next part of his speech, Obama constructs his opposition to the Palestinian Authority's statehood bid while framing the argument that statements and resolutions at the United Nations will not establish peace:

Now, I know that many are frustrated by the lack of progress. I assure you, so am I. But the question isn't the goal that we seek -- the question is how do we reach that goal. And I am convinced that there is no short cut to the end of a conflict that has endured for decades. Peace is hard work. Peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the United Nations -- if it were that easy, it would have been accomplished by now. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians who must live side by side. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians -- not us -- who must reach agreement on the issues that divide them: on borders and on security, on refugees and Jerusalem. (3)

These comments on Israeli-Palestinian peace are the most important to analyze in order to understand the reasoning Obama deploys to make sense of and define the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more specifically, the Palestinian bid for statehood.

Relying on repetition, Obama made the ideograph "peace" the controlling term throughout his speech concerning the Middle East and expressed the difficulty of establishing peace. Even before he got to the topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Obama stated "Let us remember: Peace is hard. Peace is hard" as a segue into a discussion about the Arab states currently facing political instability - namely, Iran, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain (3). Also, once he began to allude to the Palestinian statehood issue, Obama asserted, "there is no shortcut to the end of a conflict that has endured for decades. Peace is hard work" (3). And finally, the last comment he made in his speech concerning the conflict was

“There are no shortcuts. And that is what the United Nations should be focused on in the weeks and months to come” (4).

In summary, Obama said “peace is hard” three times, reminded his audience twice that “there are no shortcuts,” and noted that the conflict “has endured for decades.” Ironically he spoke these words in the same room where he previously assured his audience that peace could be only a year away.

Furthermore, this speech sounded like a confession that resolving the conflict involves more than just simply “not [letting] terror or turbulence, or posturing or petty politics stand in the way,” a claim he made a year prior (3). By repeatedly expressing the complexity and difficulty in establishing a comprehensive peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, Obama systematically attempted to persuade his audience that only through direct negotiations would both parties reach an “agreement on the issues that divide them” (3).

In his article, “Palestine Goes to the UN,” Khalid Elgindy provides an alternative view that “negotiations with Israel [are] already at a dead end,” and should the statehood bid fail or be defeated, “many Palestinians might conclude that no peaceful options remain” (8). He suggests that the PA statehood bid is designed to achieve political legitimacy in the country, to strengthen international support, and to increase influence in negotiations with Israel. The UN statehood strategy’s roots lie in the Palestinian belief “that two decades of ‘peace processing’ have failed to realize Palestinian national aspirations and have helped prolong and deepen Israel’s occupation while weakening Palestinian political institutions” (3). Palestinian leadership has concluded that the United States and

its international partners have failed to live up to their end of the bargain, while the Palestinians have done everything that was asked of them, such as continuing peace talks, enhancing security, and building institutions (Elgindy 3).

Although politically Abbas could not afford another round of failed peace talks, in September 2010, he eventually relented to US pressure and agreed to enter direct talks as long as Israel placed a moratorium on settlement construction and provided clear terms of reference. Eventually, the Palestinian Authority decided to change course radically as a result of the two following events: the rapid collapse of peace talks due to Washington's failure to even partially halt Israeli settlement construction and the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. As a prerequisite to ending the Israeli occupation, Hamas and Fatah signed a national reconciliation agreement that "helped eliminate another hurdle to [Abbas' statehood] bid: a still-divided Palestinian polity would not have been a credible candidate for statehood" (Elgindy 4). Although Hamas is considered a terrorist group by both Israel and the United States, both states should welcome this development for its potential to further peace prospects. The best way to prevent Hamas from engaging in violence is to give it a seat in government, as they will now have something to lose - political power, popular support, and patronage (Waxman 1).

To illustrate his claim that peace would only come through "compromise among people who must live together," Obama used the "lessons" of Northern Ireland and Sudan as grounds expressing how reconciliation and negotiations have previously led to peace. Of course, while Northern Ireland has experienced

a relative calm, North and South Sudan, on the other hand, have recently drawn closer to a full-scale war over disputes concerning borders and the sharing of oil revenue (Onyiego 1). Obama, therefore, provided examples that can serve simultaneously as both argumentative and supportive evidence of his assertion that successful negotiations establish lasting peace. In addition, Obama subsequently took another risk of acting as a “devil’s advocate” to his own arguments. While supporting his claim that the conflict has endured for decades, he implicitly recognized the unjust impact this ongoing conflict has had on the Palestinian population: “There’s no question that the Palestinians have seen [the vision of statehood and self-determination] delayed for too long” (4). This decade-long delay is the primary reason that the Palestinians are going to submit a resolution to the UNSC asking for UN membership as a state. Once the resolution is introduced to the international body, Palestinians will be able to jumpstart the peace process with Israel, as they will gain the political leverage needed to ensure that negotiation will provide them with a viable state.

Why did Obama dedicate so much time to persuade his audience to accept an idea that most people probably perceive as being a truism - specifically, the idea that two parties in agreement are not in conflict? Why did Obama do so little to support the most significant claim of his speech opposing the Palestinian statehood bid - specifically, the claim that “Peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the United Nations” (3). By asserting that the Palestinians are using the wrong forum in their attempt to resolve their conflict

with Israel at the United Nations, Obama confirmed the American double standard that favors Israeli self-determination over that of the Palestinians.

Three contradictions exist within the ideology that the Palestinians UN statehood bid is a threat to diplomacy and peace. First of all, the purpose of the United Nations is to serve as an arena for conflict resolution by means of diplomacy. Secondly, the Palestinian leadership has made a powerful statement by rejecting terrorism and declaring a determination to live in peace alongside Israel by taking their case to the United Nations. Third, it was originally through the UN General Assembly that the Jews of Palestine were able to become Israelis (Rosenburg 3). For reference, Israel's declaration of independence states:

On the 29th November, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz-Israel; the General Assembly required the inhabitants of Eretz-Israel to take such steps as were necessary on their part for the implementation of that resolution. This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their State is irrevocable. This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State ("The Declaration of the Establishment").

Of course, the United States voted in favor of this Israeli resolution, recognizing the right of the Jewish people to establish a state.

In fact, there are many similarities between the Israeli statehood bid of 1947 and the Palestinian statehood bid of 2011. According to foreign policy expert MJ Rosenberg, "Attempts at negotiations failed. The Palestinian leadership in the late 1940s was dominated by extremists who had no interest in compromise with the Jews. The Israeli leadership today is similarly inflexible" (Rosenburg 1). The United States is contradicting the historical precedent it set of

voting in favor of an Israeli resolution for statehood (at the expense of Arab opposition and peace) by currently opposing the Palestinian resolution for statehood.

Furthermore, alluding to the impact that the PA's UN effort has on furthering peace, Obama asserted, "if it were that easy, it would have been accomplished by now" (3). This idea undermines the realities of US influence in the United Nations and the nature of the conflict. All it takes for the Palestinians to gain UN membership as a state is nine of fifteen affirmative votes in the UN Security Council with no P5 veto and two-thirds of UNGA concurs. If it were not for a US veto threat and staunch US opposition, the Palestinians would be able to have their resolution passed. In addition, as previously argued, the peace process will be furthered once the Palestinian's gain UN membership. Obama, instead, perpetuated a non-peaceful status-quo by telling the Palestinians, who live under a violent and humiliating occupation, that their only hope of ever gaining a state of their own is by going back to the stalled negotiations. Unfortunately, peace will not come from bilateral negotiations given the power imbalance between the two parties, especially, when members of the Israeli leadership, who have an interest in continuing the occupation of Palestinian land, get the final say in the outcomes of negotiations.

A One-Sided Narrative

Julian Borger, writing in his “Global Security” blog for *The Guardian*, explained, “A good measure of the emotional slant of any speech on the Israel-Palestine question is the relative weight given to Jewish and Arab suffering. By that measure, the needle on Obama's [2011 UNGA] speech was far over to one side”

(1). Obama’s speech was so biased towards the Israeli narrative about the conflict that the ultra-right wing Israeli Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, said he could “sign on to that speech with both hands” (“Netanyahu, Lieberman Praise”

1). The line of Obama’s 2011 UNGA speech that sounded as though it could have been written by a publicist for the Israeli government drew the most criticism in the Arab world:

America’s commitment to Israel’s security is unshakeable. Our friendship with Israel is deep and enduring. And so we believe that any lasting peace must acknowledge the very real security concerns that Israel faces every single day. Let us be honest with ourselves: Israel is surrounded by neighbors that have waged repeated wars against it. Israel’s citizens have been killed by rockets fired at their houses and suicide bombs on their buses. Israel’s children come of age knowing that throughout the region, other children are taught to hate them. Israel, a small country of less than eight million people, look out at a world where leaders of much larger nations threaten to wipe it off of the map. The Jewish people carry the burden of centuries of exile and persecution, and fresh memories of knowing that six million people were killed simply because of who they are (4).

This statement led Hanan Ashrawi, a senior member of the PLO delegation in Washington, to exclaim, “Listening to [Obama], you would think it was the Palestinians who occupy Israel” (“Netanyahu, Lieberman Praise” 1).

In this speech, Obama gave a classic justification, including a token Holocaust reference, for Israeli occupation and exploitation of the Palestinian

territories. By employing such rhetoric, he sounded less like a liberal Democrat and more like a conservative Republican when he appealed to the far right in the Christian Zionist and Jewish communities. As a consequence, Obama has eroded America's image in the Middle East, as Arabs generally understand the nature of the conflict and realize when content, especially concerning the adverse impact this conflict has on the lives of the Palestinians, is being omitted from Obama's speech (Plitnick 1-2). Here, Obama made no mention of the violent Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories and its associated restraints on the Palestinian economy, the Israeli separation barrier in the West Bank, the Israeli construction of settlements on land that is suppose to become part of a future Palestinian state, and the degradation of Palestinian natural resources.

These conditions are well-documented. A report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) expresses how the Israeli occupation perpetuates the poor economic situation within the Palestinian Territories. These include jobless economic growth driven by foreign aid, an erosion of manufacturing capacity, and broad economic divergence between Gaza and the West Bank. UNCTAD also reports a high level of poverty and food insecurity, a deepened isolation from global markets caused by the separation barrier, heavy dependence on trade with Israel, and a worsening trade deficit. UNCTAD further observed high fiscal vulnerability despite austerity measures, fiscal instability aggravated by a withholding of Palestinian Authority custom clearance revenues, and a loss of Palestinian revenue due to indirect imports from Israel (1-16).

A survey conducted by the World Food Programme, the Food and Agricultural Organization, and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics illustrates the desperation caused by this poor economic situation on Palestinian individuals:

The most commonly used strategy for households to cope with economic crisis is to defer the payment of utility bills, to purchase food on credit, consume lower quality food and consume lower quantities of food. Forty-three percent of households reported deferring payment of utility bills and 42 percent of households reported purchasing food on credit. The third highest reported coping strategy is consuming lower-quality food (32 percent) followed by consuming less food (29 percent). Most of these coping strategies, even if they are reversible, can have a permanent cost on lives and livelihoods through poorer health and nutritional status, excessive indebtedness and loss of future opportunities for higher skills and better paid jobs (16).

All of these issues confronting the Palestinians are linked to their political situation impacted by Israeli occupation. While trade is disrupted by checkpoints, the separation wall, and general restriction on the movement of people and goods, attempts to reduce poverty are “hampered by stagnant trade and and compounded by the unpredictability of Israel’s relinquishing of customs moneys owed to the Palestinians” (Glennie 2).

Another pressing issue for the Palestinian people living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is the deficit in their fresh water supply (Al-Agha and Mortaja 157-160). This makes the population more dependent on contaminated wastewater. As a result, pathogenic microorganisms and chemicals in the water increase their chances of contracting a water-borne disease. The health implications of contraction are vast and detrimental to the health of the population as a whole, as they can suffer from either acute, chronic, or infectious health effects (Alfarra and Lubad 1-4). Unfortunately, the problem is getting worse over

time as infrastructure deteriorates and health services are close to collapse. Moreover, Israel is neglecting its duties under Hague and Geneva Conventions as an occupying power, and in many cases its practices and policies have been harmful and abusive (Amnesty International, 2009).

All of these issues caused by Israeli occupation not only have an adverse on the Palestinian population's health and material wellbeing but also systematically deteriorate Palestinian hopes for self-determination. These conditions explains the sense of urgency that defines the current Palestinian struggle and the resulting Palestinian militancy. While Obama alluded to the merits of Palestinian statehood based on human rights, history, sovereignty and justice, he never mentioned that without a viable state, Palestinian men, women, and children will stay impoverished and subjected to the violence and humiliation caused by occupation.

Results of the Findings of the Analysis

The peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians have been stagnant over the past two years. Mutual distrust and blame is the outcome from the formerly cooperative spirit of the Oslo Process during the 1990s and from two rounds of failed serious permanent status negotiations during the last decade. Neither the Israeli nor the Palestinian people benefit from this stalemate. For the Israelis, it energizes radicals on both sides of the conflict, fuels anti-Israeli sentiment, harms Israel's international status, and jeopardizes Israel's alliances. For the

Palestinians, the stalemate has meant a continued occupation, a stagnant economy, a deterioration of natural resources, and a lack of self-determination.

Unfortunately, the current Israeli leadership has resisted efforts to break the deadlock in negotiations. For example, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refused US President Barack Obama's request that Israel extend its settlement freeze. This refusal has not only harmed Israel's relations with its most important ally but also paints itself as an obstacle to peace. Israel now risks having a final settlement imposed on it by the international community.

The Palestinian leadership, on the other hand, have decided to go to the United Nations and introduce a resolution seeking statehood. Many Palestinians view the statehood bid as a diversion and a means to improve the PA administration's image, which is currently seen as corrupt and compromising (Elgindy 5). However, this move to upgrade Palestine's status is actually a part of a larger process of gaining recognition through intergovernmental institutions so that international law will play a larger role in resolving the conflict. If both the United States and Israel supported the resolution, this could jump start the peace process, strengthen the possibility of a two-state solution, and greatly improve Israel's position in the region. Instead, Israel has rejected the statehood bid and the Obama Administration has supported this rejection.

Israel's current leadership considers the PA's resolution a threat to its strategic interests in the country. Netanyahu would prefer not to have the United

Nations declare that Israel was occupying another sovereign state rather than some vague entity. If Palestine were to become a state, Israel would then have to commence negotiations over borders, security arrangements, refugees, holy places, and its withdrawal from the West Bank. This prospect would undermine Netanyahu's ability to seize more Palestinian land and to continue building settlements on the occupied West Bank.

The current US leadership is politically handcuffed to oppose the PA resolution by the powerful pro-Israel lobby, which pursues only right-wing interests rather than those of Palestinians, Israelis, or Americans. Also, the American media has been extremely sympathetic to Israel's positions on contested questions. In this context, Obama had to construct an opposition to the Palestinian statehood bid during his address to the UNGA. Recognizing how the political climate in the country has made a general American audience susceptible to be misled by a one-sided narrative, Obama was able to deliver a speech that provided numerous examples of the hardships that Israelis face from Arab violence while overlooking Israel's violations of international law. As a result, Obama assured US voters of his "unshakable" commitment to support America's "deep and enduring friendship" with Israel (4).

Both Israel and the United States risk suffering negative consequences as a result of their rejection of Palestine's statehood bid. Israel could see increased Palestinian unrest and violence, which would force Israel to respond in a way that

deepens its international isolation and paves the way for boycotts and sanctions on Israeli goods and companies. The United States could face similar international isolation and have its role as an objective mediator in the peace process denounced. Moreover, the historic transition taking place in the Middle East from western-friendly dictatorships to Islamic democracies makes the position of Israel and the United States more precarious than ever in Arab states.

Although a full-blown “Palestinian spring” has yet to come, many Palestinians communities have held demonstrations and protests opposing the separation barrier and the encroachment of Israeli settlements. Not only do they continue to endure the ordeal of occupation, but also they lose land, lose control over East Jerusalem, and suffer from the confiscation of residency permits and house demolitions. This experience makes it very hard for them to support a negotiated end to the conflict.

Khaled Elgindy argues, “Like their counterparts in other Arab countries, the [Palestinian people] are more loyal to principles and ideals than to ideological and factional affiliations; they seek not statehood but freedom, not negotiations but rights” (5). The Palestinian people are not tied down to the peace process nor the two-state solution. If the situation does not change soon, then they will begin to direct their anger at their own leaders. Thus, Mahmoud Abbas would have to chart a new course, which involves finding the courage to abandon the US mediated peace-process. The Palestine Authority would have to

“internationalize” the conflict by allowing more state actors such as Britain, France, and Brazil to have a larger role in directing the path of negotiations. If the statehood bid fails, then the Palestinian Authority would no longer be able to subcontract the Israeli occupation, and instead would have to take a more active role in the resistance. The future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains uncertain.

V. Brief Update on Palestine's Bid Following Obama's Speech

Fulfilling his promise, on September 23, 2011, PA President Mahmoud Abbas submitted a formal application for the Palestinian Authority to become a full member state of the United Nations. In his speech to a packed General Assembly, Abbas declared “This is a moment of truth. Our people are waiting to hear an answer from the world. Will it allow Israel to occupy us for ever” (1). This bid marked the beginning of a new PLO policy that is fed up with the failure of the Oslo Peace Process, Israeli settlement expansion, constant occupation, and denial of Palestinian access to land and holy places. Although negotiations with Israel still remains the first option of the PLO, its failure to provide an agreement has compelled the PLO to preserve the only remaining opportunity for a just and peaceful end to the conflict by turning to the international community for assistance. Abbas claimed, “the choice is not between Palestinian unity or peace with Israel; it is between a two-state solution or settlement-colonies” (2).

Although the Obama administration had made clear that it would veto the application in the Security Council, it may not need to, as it is still questionable whether the PA can secure enough “yes” votes in the council. In order to force a vote, it would need nine out of the available fifteen. The United States has been using diplomatic leverage to ensure that the Palestinians do not gain the last crucial votes in order to stall a vote on the resolution. When the Palestinian Authority first introduced the resolution, China, Russia, India, Lebanon, South Africa, Brazil, and Portugal supported it, United States, Germany, and Colombia opposed it, and France, Britain, Gabon, Nigeria, and Bosnia-Herzegovina were

ambivalent (Myers and Kirkpatrick 2-3). Thus, the Palestinian Authority needed to gain two more votes. Regardless of the Security Council blockade, the PA can invoke the “Uniting for Peace” framework. While the Uniting for Peace Resolution has been used to authorize peace operations in the face of UN deadlock, it has not yet been used for a question of admitting a member state to the United Nations. This maneuver would allow the Palestinian Authority to turn to the 193-member General Assembly, where a veto cannot be issued. Within this deliberative, policymaking, and representative organ of the United Nations, the PA has enough votes to approve an upgrade in its UN status from observer to a nonmember observer state, similar to the status of the Vatican. This upgrade would give the “state” of Palestine important rights that would strengthen Palestine’s claim to International Criminal Court jurisdiction over the occupied territories.

Palestinian resolve was greatly enhanced on November 3, 2011, when the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) accepted Palestine as a member state following a 107-14 vote (Laurenti 1). This development illustrates that Palestinians, despite the occupation of their territory, are getting approval from the international community of their claim of a right of self-determination and representation. A major concern of the United States and Israel is that this membership in UNESCO could set a “slippery slope” precedent of Palestine being treated as a state by the World Health Organization and other various parts of the UN system. The United States has marginalized itself in the

diplomatic area once again and has eroded its “soft power” capacity (Rosenberg 2).

However, the most damaging impact of the UNESCO decision to US interests are two laws, enacted in the early 1990s, that prohibit the United States from providing financial contributions to any United Nations entity that admits Palestine as a member. Withholding \$60 million of funds from UNESCO reveals how US interests and those of the Israeli government are at a crossroads. While it is a symbolic act for the Israeli government to deny recognition of Palestine at any forum without its permission, the ability of the United States to advance its interests and promote its ideals is at risk through the withdrawing of funds from important UN agencies because its members recognize Palestine (Rosenburg 2). Moreover, it is likely that Palestine will eventually receive admission into several other UN bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), both of which the United States currently uses as a tool to advance its interests around the world (Laurenti 1-2). While the WHO protects Americans from potential pandemics like the avian flu, the IAEA restrains Iranian and North Korean nuclear weapon development (Rosenberg 2). If the United States were to cut funding to these organizations, it would lose its leverage to influence policy that directly affects its national security.

Appendices

Table A. Representation of the figures given for the distribution of the settled population in the two proposed States, as estimated on the basis of official figures up to the end of 1946. (Data from UNSCOP Report of 1947 - A/364)

Territory	Arab and other population	% Arab and other	Jewish population	% Jewish	Total population
Arab State	725,000	99%	10,000	1%	735,000
Jewish State	407,000	45%	498,000	55%	905,000
International	105,000	51%	100,000	49%	205,000
Total	1,237,000	67%	608,000	33%	1,845,000

Table B. Overview of Israeli Redeployments in the Occupied Territories. (“Israeli Redeployments in the Occupied Territories”)

Agreement	Redeployment Stages	Area A (%)	Area B (%)	Area C (%)
Gaza-Jericho Agreement	(May 4, 1994) As part of the Gaza-Jericho accord, Israeli military forces withdrew from areas of Gaza and near Jericho, under the direction of the newly established Joint Israeli-Palestinian Security Coordination and Cooperation Committee. The withdrawals were completed on May 18, 1994.			
Oslo II, Sept. 28, 1995		2.0	26.0	72.0
Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron	(January 17, 1997) The Palestinian police assumed security responsibilities in Area H-1 (80% of Hebron) similar to those it had in other West Bank cities. Israel retained all powers and responsibilities for internal security and public order in Area H-2 (20%). In addition, Israel continued to have responsibility for the overall security of Israelis.			
Wye River Oct. 15-23, 1998	I Further Redeployment (Nov. 16, 1998)	9.1	20.9	70.0
	II Further Redeployment (Nov. 16-Dec. 21, 1998) (Not implemented)	9.1	26.9	65.0
	III Further Redeployment (Dec. 14-Jan. 31, 1998) (Not implemented)	17.2	23.8	59.0
Sharm al-Sheikh Sept. 4, 1999	I Further Redeployment (Sept. 10-13, 1999)	9.1	27.9	63.0
	II Further Redeployment (Nov. 15, 1999)	11.1	28.9	60.0
	III Further Redeployment (January 20, 2000)	17.2	23.8	59.0

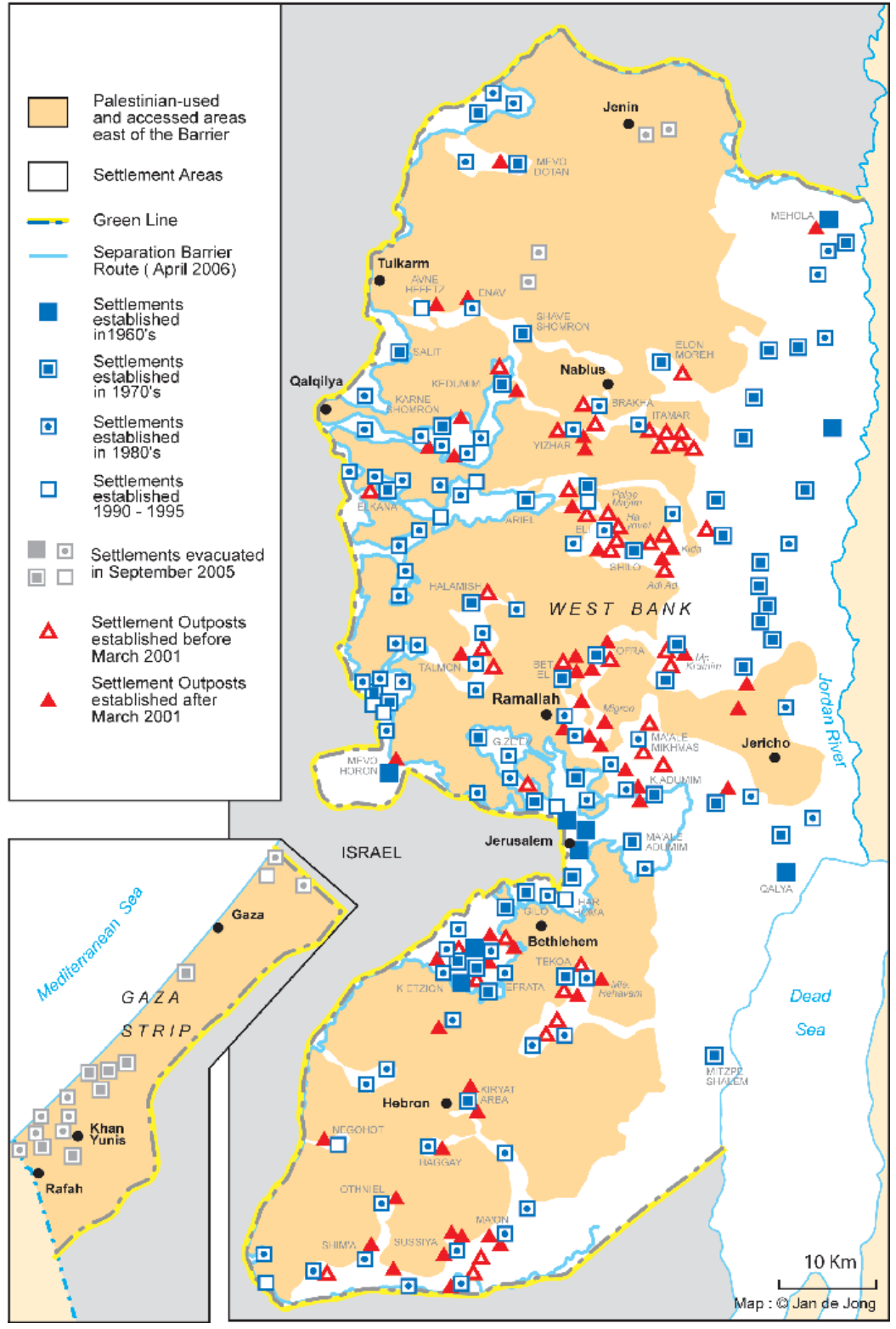
Table C. Review of recent land swap proposals from 2000-2008.
 (“Land Swaps - A Review of Recent Proposals”)

	<i>West Bank Annexation by Israel (%)</i>	<i>Israel Annexation to Palestine (%)</i>	<i>Ratio of Swapped Territory (Israel : Palestine)</i>
Barack Proposal (July 2000)	9	1	1 : 9
	Israel's proposal at Camp David included a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders, with Israel annexing the settlement blocs comprising nine per cent (500 sq.km) of the West Bank. For the first time, Israel agreed to offer compensatory land in Israel for its West Bank claims at an unequal ration of nine percent annexation to Israel to one percent compensation to Palestine.		
Clinton Parameters (December 2000)	4-6	1-3	1 : 4 - 1 : 2
	In December 2000, U.S. president Bill Clinton proposed that Israel withdraw to the 1967 lines, modified by the annexation of 4 to 6 percent of the territory of the West Bank. In return, Israel would compensate with an area of between 1 to 3 percent of Israeli sovereign territory.		
Livni Version (2008)	7.3	5	1 : 1.5*
	During the Annapolis talks in mid-2008, Foreign Minister Tzippi Livni proposed a return to the 1967 borders modified by Israel's annexation of 7.3 percent of the West Bank. In return, Israel would cede an area equivalent to 5 percent of the West Bank, a ratio of 1:1.5. She suggested that by including the safe passage from Gaza to the West Bank, an equal land swap could be achieved. *The Palestinian Negotiations Support Unit (NSU) calculated that the proposed Israeli annexation comprised 9.2 per cent of the West Bank. Israel's land calculations excludes already-annexed territory in and around East Jerusalem and the Latrun No Man's Land. Using this formula the NSU calculated a land swap ratio of 1:1.8 or 1:3 with the safe passage.		
Olmert Version (September 2008)	6.8	5.5	1 : 1.2*
	Prime Minister Olmert proposed to PLO chairman Mahmoud Abbas a return to the 1967 lines, under which Israel would annex 6.3 percent of the West Bank in return for Israeli land amounting to 5.8 percent of the West Bank plus a safe passage route. *The NSU calculated the proposed 6.8% annexation to equal 8.7 percent of the West Bank, in return for a swap of 5.4 percent, resulting in a 1:1.6 ratio.		
Abu Mazen Version (2008)	2	2	1 : 1
	The Palestinian agreement to base the border between Palestine and Israel on the June 1967 line, modified by a willingness to cede approximately 1.9 percent of the West Bank to Israel in return for an equal amount of Israeli territory, has been relatively consistent during this period.		

Image A. Illustration of Jewish and Arab territory before and after the armistice agreement. (Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs)



Image B. Illustration of established and evacuated Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from 1967-2008. (Jan de Jong)



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Summary of Capstone Project

In May 2011, President of the PA and member of Fatah, Mahmoud Abbas, announced that Palestinians would request that their state be admitted as a full member rather than observer to the United Nations (Abbas 1-3). This request would require the international recognition of the State of Palestine on the 1967 border. This move to seek Palestinian statehood at the United Nations came at a time when Palestinians, as a whole, seemed to be making a strategic shift in their mode of confrontation with Israel. In their campaign against Israeli occupation, Palestinians went from the occasional military attacks toward a more nonviolent and political confrontation, as they recognized the lack of impact that armed struggle has had on changing Israeli policies. This development is further influenced by the effective nonviolent protests that were a hallmark of the “Arab Spring” of 2011-2012, in which unarmed civilians openly confronted their government oppressors.

The United States threatened to use its veto power, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), to block any Palestinian resolution seeking statehood (Rogin 1). The Obama administration's foreign policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been heavily criticized on both sides of the political spectrum. The left, and some international European and Middle Eastern allies, have called him out on his double standard approach of supporting self-determination and resistance movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, but not in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The right, on the other hand, has accused him of not being supportive enough of Israel (Shapiro 2). The current

official United States position is that Palestinian statehood should not be determined by the United Nations; rather, it is a subject for direct bilateral negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians (Rogin 1).

To succeed in American presidential politics, candidates must express the importance of Israel as a strategic American ally and reaffirm their commitment to Israel's perceived security interests. A candidate's stalwart support for the State of Israel is important not only to Jewish-American voters who have emotional and/or familial ties to the state, but also to evangelical Christians who largely support the state out of theological obligation. Basically, to win votes and to secure a large source of campaign donations, he should use any opportunity that presents itself to wrap himself in an Israeli flag - metaphorically speaking - whether during a televised debate or on the campaign trail. For powerful lobby groups in Washington, the strong backing of Israel is nothing short of a litmus test (Kitfield 1).

On September 21, 2011, US President Barack Obama addressed the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) during the opening of the 66th session by covering a wide range of international issues. He focused on the so-called "Arab Spring," the controversial issue of the Palestinian statehood bid, nuclear weapons and disarmament, and lastly, wider socioeconomic issues such as education and human rights. For Obama, a first-term president with a low approval rating and little more than a year left before the 2012 presidential campaign, this speech at the UNGA, just like every other high-profile one, was a campaign speech (Hechtkopf 1).

I conducted an ideological critique on the 846 words that Obama used to frame and construct an opposition to the Palestinian Authority's plans to submit a formal resolution seeking statehood and full membership status to the United Nations Security Council. To conduct this ideological analysis, I consulted *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* by Sonja Foss. Sonja Foss's work explains and illustrates the theory of ideological criticism and provides various examples of its application. She defines ideology as a "pattern of beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world" (209). Since beliefs reflect a group's fundamental social, economic, political or cultural interests, conducting ideological criticism allows me to understand the mental framework that Obama deploys to make sense of and define the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This artifact - President Obama's Speech to the UNGA during the opening of the 66th Session - is particularly useful in analyzing how the United States has expressed and constructed opposition to the Palestinian statehood resolution for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the purpose of a UNGA speech - for a Head of State to represent his/her nation's foreign policy platform - provides the rhetor (Barack Obama) a forum to express his ideological positions on various international matters, each of which can be analyzed using the tools of rhetorical discourse analysis. Secondly, the timing of this speech comes two days before the PA submitted its application seeking "state membership," to the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, on September 23. Thirdly, although Obama did not refer to the resolution explicitly in the speech, he mentioned Palestine's need to find

peace with Israel before seeking a formal solution through UN decrees. Lastly, this speech provides an overview of the US position on the Palestinian resolution for statehood, echoing previous White House and State Department Press Releases, and past speeches made by Susan E. Rice and Barak Obama regarding the US position on the Palestinian resolution for statehood.

Performing an ideological analysis, I looked beyond the surface of his speech to discover the beliefs, values, and assumptions that it suggests. Subsequently, I discovered and made visible the ideology embedded in the Obama's speech and explicated the role of communication, which performs to make that ideology hegemonic. As a result of my ideological analysis, I sought to learn whose interests are being represented in that ideology. My purpose was to describe the relationships that exist within Obama's speech and between that speech and its context; thereby, calling them into question. Using Sonja Foss' rhetorical criticism, I provide a critical analysis of the existing relations to enable the envisioning of new kinds of relationships.

My analysis concluded that the current US leadership is politically handcuffed to oppose the PA resolution by the powerful pro-Israel lobby, which pursues only right-wing interests rather than those of Palestinians, Israelis, or Americans. Also, the American media has been extremely sympathetic to Israel's positions on contentious questions. In this context, Obama had to construct an opposition to the Palestinian statehood bid during his address to the UNGA. Recognizing how the political climate in the country has made a general American audience susceptible to be misled by a one-sided narrative, Obama was

able to deliver a speech that provided numerous examples of the hardships that Israelis face from Arab violence while overlooking Israel's violations of international law. Obama's goal was to assure US voters of his "unshakable" commitment to support America's "deep and enduring friendship" with Israel. As a consequence, the United States may face international isolation and have its role as an objective mediator in the peace process denounced.