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United Nations Human Rights Council and Israel:  
Comparative Analysis with Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia

by  
Hannah M Solima

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by Hannah M Solima

APPROVED:

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Dr. Karen Petersen, Thesis Director  
Dean, Kendall College of Arts & Sciences  
The University of Tulsa

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Dr. John J Vile, Thesis Committee Chair  
Dean, University Honors College  
Middle Tennessee State University

## Abstract

In 2018, the United States of America, arguably one of the most powerful and influential countries in the world, voluntarily left the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) due to its perceived bias of and unfair treatment towards the State of Israel. The previous version of the UNHRC was the Commission of Human Rights (CHR). The CHR was discontinued from problems associated with biases and human rights violators sitting as members. Thus, it is important to stay vigilant and keep the UNHRC accountable. If the UNHRC is targeting the State of Israel, this would be a serious issue, of which the world should be made aware. Through comparative analysis of Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, this research sets out to show any discrepancies in UNHRC treatment of Israel.

Keywords: *Israel, United Nations Human Rights Council, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Comparative Analysis, Human Rights Violations, Anti-Semitism*

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## UNHRC and Israel: Comparative Analysis with Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia

Following the Second World War, the United Nations was established as a revised version of the previously failed League of Nations. Through international collaboration and cooperation, the UN's purpose was to create global peace and prosperity. While the UN has no actual power to enforce General Assembly resolutions on autonomous countries, this multi-state organization has the strength of the nations that voluntarily adhere to its resolutions and the Security Council, which encompasses five permanent members: The United States, France, United Kingdom, Russian Federation, and China. Thus, the UN is quite influential in this regard. So, if one country was continuously being targeted by such an organization beyond what would be considered reasonable, then this would be problematic and the objectives of the UN itself would come under question.

Unfortunately, this is happening within the United Nations today. For example, one inter-governmental section of the United Nations, known as the UN Human Rights Council, has been repeatedly confronted by the United States, the largest funder of the organization (McArthur and Rasmussen, 2018), for singling out and persecuting one-member state in particular. In fact, the United States decided to withdraw from the UNHRC because of this perceived bias against this one state “and a willingness to allow notorious human rights abusers as members” (Morello, 2018). Now, if one country did receive all of this negative attention from the UNHRC, one would think it was deserved and that, compared to the rest of the world, this one country has worse human rights violations.

The United Nations Human Rights Council was founded in 2006, replacing the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), because the CHR “was criticized for its ineffectiveness in addressing human rights abuses and for the number of widely perceived human rights abusers that served as its members” (Blanchfield and Weber, 2020). So, it would be reasonable for the UNHRC of today to be assessed and checked for engaging in any biases and selective targeting as its predecessor had done, which would move it away from its proclaimed purpose. The goal of the UNHRC is to strengthen, promote, and protect human rights across the globe (UNHRC). Thus, since the UNHRC replaced the CHR (due to its issues of dealing with human rights violations and allowing countries with major human rights violations to sit as members), one would hope that the new adaptation of the human rights council would be more conscious of its sitting members and any mistreatment toward specific countries, as well as have an accountability mechanism.

Unfortunately, this appears to not be the case. The State of Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, has consistently been under the UNHRC’s magnifying glass; and some countries, particularly the United States, have pointed out this unfair treatment. This is not to say Israel has no human rights violations that would need to be addressed in the UNHRC, but it appears that this council has repeatedly singled out Israel, when, compared to other Middle Eastern countries, Israel could arguably be said to be further along in its human rights. For example, gay marriage is recognized in Israel, but homosexuality and the marriage thereof are illegal in Azerbaijan and Nigeria and may result in death by stoning in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and a few others

(Reuters, 2019). So, at least given this one example, the UNHRC's focus on and condemnation of Israel does not seem to be justifiable.

Additionally, alongside being the subject of many UNHRC resolutions, Israel has a permanent item on the UNHRC agenda, making this nation "the only country in the world whose policies automatically face scrutiny at every council session" (Hayom, 2020). One year after the UN Human Rights Council's formation, the Council voted on a resolution that would include "the 'human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories'" (Blanchfield and Weber, 2020), which may have resulted from the Battle of Gaza as Hamas, a terrorist organization, was taking over the Gaza Strip and Israel subsequently imposed heavier restrictions in the area in June 2007.

The United States, along with many UN member states and Council observers, strongly objected to this action by the UNHRC (Blanchfield and Weber, 2020). Given that human rights violations occur globally and not just in the Middle East, the United States and others argued that the UNHRC should not put all of its efforts and sole focus in one region – an action that seems to be biased and unjustifiably targeting the State of Israel. The United States tried to reverse this permanent item on the UNHRC agenda in the 2011 first-year review, but the motion failed (Blanchfield and Weber, 2020). Furthermore, since the United States left the UNHRC, one of the conditions, specified by the Trump Administration, for rejoining the Council is for the UNHRC to drop the Israel-centered agenda item (Blanchfield and Weber, 2020). Now, the fact that Israel has the only permanent item on the UNHRC agenda does not necessarily mean it is being targeted, but there would have to be ample proof of human rights violations in Israel, and

these violations would have to significantly stand out when compared to the human rights violations found around the world for the *permanent* item to be justified.

Most of the human rights violations brought against Israel concern the Palestinian people in disputed territories commonly referred to as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and Arabs living in Israel. Although Israeli Arabs are in the minority, they do have the same legal rights as every other Israeli citizen. The exception is that Arab Israelis (alongside ultra-orthodox Jews) are not obligated to fulfill the mandatory two-year military service expected of everyone else. Israeli Arabs also have representation in the Knesset (Murdock, 2013).

There are claims that the Arab representation is being diminished, but this is not due to the Israeli government's violation of human rights. The Israeli Arab population is not voting; it has been a challenge to get this minority to go out and vote for their representation in parties within the Parliament (Mitnick, 2019). No Israeli-Arab dominated parties have been formally invited to join a governing coalition, despite talks of such invitations during the many elections taking place in Israel over the last few years in order to oust Prime Minister Netanyahu. Regardless though, the reason for Israeli-Arab parties not receiving any invitations to join a governing coalition may not be due to the members' ethnicity within these parties, but the political positions the parties themselves hold.

Thus, when an international governmental body that comprises of most nations in the world has an inter-governmental agency that watches and addresses human rights violations, they need to be held accountable and keep a high standard of members on the council. Furthermore, any unfair treatment towards a specific country needs to be

addressed. This is why this research on the UNHRC, and Israel is important, because gathering the facts and comparing the conduct of the UNHRC to other Middle Eastern countries will showcase any foul play on the UNHRC's part. Only when it is clear that the UN Human Rights Council does neither indulge in its biases nor purposefully use its power to inflict unfair judgement will UNHRC resolutions be taken seriously and followed.

### Thesis Statement

The United Nations Human Rights Council has repeatedly allowed countries with many human rights violations to sit as members on this council, which is contradictory to the purpose of the UNHRC. Furthermore, given the questionable human rights records of past and present council state members, Israel has been and continues to be unfairly targeted by the UNHRC, when other countries, such as Egypt, Jordan and even Saudi Arabia have not experienced the same retribution for their human rights violations.

### Methodology

There will be three parts to this research. Part one will cover Israel and its record with the UNHRC, and the second part will delve into comparing the UNHRC's record with three other countries: Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. These three Middle East states were chosen because Egyptian and Jordanian citizens are considered to hold more freedoms in their respective states than in other Middle Eastern countries, so they would be better comparisons for the State of Israel. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, was selected, because its power and position in the world is a better rival for Israel and will

also provide the most vivid distinction of the differences in the UNHRC's conduct. Part three will contain the cross-examination of these Middle East and North Africa countries alongside Israel, where each country's status within the UNHRC via condemning resolutions will provide further evidence for or against the hypothesis.

All information will be sourced from academic books or journals, reputable organizations and secondary news articles. For example, the Human Rights Watch, the US Department of State Human Rights Report, Amnesty International, and the International Middle East Media Center will all be used in this research thesis. The main source, though, will be the UN Watch Database, which is an online resource compiled of all resolutions of the UNHRC, UN General Assembly, Commission on the Status of Women, WHO, and UNESCO that are country-specific in nature. This allows one to find the exact documents and information needed for this comparative analysis. This UN Watch database also keeps track of individual countries' time served on the UNHRC and how these countries have voted on resolutions in the past, which will make this database a valuable resource.

Furthermore, following the case studies examining Israel and the UNHRC, as well as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, there will be an additional comparison of the language used in some country-specific resolutions in order to analyze wording and overall tone of resolution when different countries are being addressed. Based on these findings and the analysis of Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia's UNHRC resolution numbers, a final analysis of the thesis statement and the data collected will be conducted, and the hypothesis will either be accepted or rejected at that point. To reduce bias, this research is to be conducted primarily with quantitative data. Any secondary sources used

will contain varying positions to provide a level of neutrality as well. The hypothesis of this research, which is that the UNHRC appears to be targeting the State of Israel unreasonably, would be rejected, if there is evidence found that would support the UNHRC's constant attention and resolutions against Israel or the UNHRC has equally condemned countries for widely-known human rights violations.

### Israel and Human Rights Violations

While there has been a continuous Jewish presence in the Middle East for over 2,000 years, the State of Israel, once a political entity in 1300-1200 BCE and 166-163 BCE, was reestablished in 1948, following World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust (CUFI.org). In its declaration of independence, Israel was immediately met with war from the surrounding Arab states, known as the First Arab-Israeli War. In 1956, there was a crisis in the Suez Canal as Egyptian President Gamal Nasser sought to nationalize the 120-mile area, which Israel fought against given the area's natural buffer between Egypt and Israel (Klein, 2016). Due to US and Soviet Union pressure, Great Britain, France and Israel eventually departed the area with the arrival of the United Nations Emergency Force occupying the Sinai Peninsula in 1957 (Klein, 2016).

Israel was constantly on edge and apprehensive about the potential power of the Arabs and these anxieties were intensified when Egypt and Syria formed the United Arab Republic in 1958—"it seemed as if the Nasserist juggernaut was unstoppable" (Susser 2017, 46). As tensions between Egypt<sup>1</sup> and Israel, particularly in the Sinai Peninsula, rose

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<sup>1</sup> Egypt's military had entered the Sinai Peninsula with Egyptian armored vehicles, which could have been perceived as merely a military display given Egypt and Syria had a mutual defense pact, but when Egypt dispatched many more troops and military equipment (many of which were supplied by the Soviet Union) to the Sinai as well as instructed the UNEF troops to pull out of the area—removing the only Egypt-Israel

in the 1960s, this led to onset of the Six-Day war in 1967. In one of the riskiest and greatest contemporary military strategies the world might have seen, Israel, before Egypt could strike first, Israel ordered all but twelve of its fighter jets (flying low and ready to attack) toward Egypt on June 5<sup>th</sup>, catching the Egyptian air force off-guard (Gordis, 2016). Standing with Egypt, Syria and Jordan immediately declared war on Israel, and Israel became surrounded by enemies. Despite this, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) took control of the Sinai Peninsula, secured the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank from the Jordanians as well as took possession over the Golan Heights from Syria (Gordis, 2016). This followed with the 1970 Black September ordeal, where, due to Israeli occupation in the West Bank, an influx of Palestinian refugees and Arab guerrilla groups rose up to attack Israel, which created problems within Jordan as well (Wolf, 2015)<sup>2</sup>. While Jordan managed to defeat<sup>3</sup> the *fedayeen*,<sup>4</sup> many of the Arab guerrillas, such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), were just forced to relocate in Lebanon, which would eventually lead to further wars; this time between Israel and Lebanon in the 1980s and early 2000s (Susser, 2017).

The last major war, excluding the constant conflict between the Gaza Strip and Israel, was the Yom Kippur War in 1973, where Egypt and Syria joined forces to attack Israel in order to regain land lost in the Six-Day war (e.g., Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights). For five days, the IDF were shocked and fighting a losing battle with no

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buffer, it was more challenging to know the true intentions behind Egypt's actions and whether these actions did in-fact mean war (Gordis, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> King Hussein of Jordan failed to control the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and his inability to maintain peace within Jordan resulted in civil war (Wolf, 2015). In September of 1970, Syrian forces alongside the *fedayeen* invaded Jordan (Rubinovitz, 2010), and “established their own government in Irbid, prompting King Hussein to [seriously] crack down on the PLO” (Wolf, 2015, 163).

<sup>3</sup> With reinforcements from Israel and US support, King Hussein gained confidence and had the ability to forcefully remove the Syrian and PLO threat (Wolf, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Another word for Arab guerrillas

international support, but the tides began to turn, and Israel gained the upper hand. Interestingly, at this point, the UN Security Council decided to intervene.<sup>5</sup> The Security Council passed Resolution 338, which called for a cease-fire; Israel agreed to the resolution, and two days later, “after the IDF had encircled the Egyptian Third Army” (Gordis 2016, 316), Egypt and Syria also agreed. This war was over.

While there is more to Israel’s history than this brief description of its wars, following the major military developments in the country and the Middle East region could illuminate distinct challenges and problems that are currently unfolding in Israel and the surrounding Arab countries. Most of the human rights violations against Israel concern the Palestinian refugees, and these issues have primarily arisen through war, such as the First Israeli-Arab war and the Six-Day war. Thus, it was necessary to put these wars in chronological order and summarize what happened and its importance before presenting Israel’s human rights violations.

*Palestinians (a).* Human rights violations against the Palestinian people are the source of the main allegations of human rights abuses against Israel; ergo, summarizing these violations in a comprehensive but concise manner will paint an accurate portrayal of the human rights situation in Israel and the actions (whether progressive or regressive) Israel has taken concerning the Palestinians. This, in turn, will clarify or provide context to any United Nations Human Rights Council resolutions made in response. While most of the information provided will be data collected in recent years, there will be examples used that highlight past violations mentioned as well due to its relevance to this research.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Bard (2004), it appeared that the UN Security Council deliberately failed “to act while the tide was in the Arab’s favor.”

The Gaza Strip is located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and borders both Egypt and Israel and while not having an official statehood, Gaza is the de facto home of many Palestinians<sup>6</sup> who are governed by Hamas.<sup>7</sup> The citizens of Gaza have been in turbulent times for many years, and while Hamas, many international scholars, the United Nations and its security council have appeared to be quick to blame Israel for Palestinian pain and suffering, a complete picture of the situation in the Gaza Strip would be more beneficial in understanding the Palestinians struggling in Gaza and human rights violations that do exist, to which Israel contributes. Although Israel gained the Gaza Strip during the Six-Day war, the state withdrew from Gaza, known as the ‘disengagement plan,’ in order to foster peace and give the Palestinian people the opportunity “to make an income and build an economy” (Lipman, 2020). Yet, despite the common idea the “if Israel would simply leave the ‘occupied territories’ then there would be peace between Israel and the Palestinians” (Lipman, 2020), some scholars have argued that the mere existence of Israel has been the source of the perpetual Palestinian refugee status and hardship and can only be solved by “the [complete] withdrawal of Israeli occupation from Palestinian land” (Marton, 2011, pp. 560).<sup>8</sup> Israel has, in the past and even recently, agreed to a two-state solution on six separate occasions (as one-state arguments will always fail to recognize the statehood of at least one nation of people),<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> There was a Palestinian migration to Gaza in 1948, because many did not want to be caught up in the Arab-Israeli war or they were told to leave from the Arab authority as they believed they would have a quick and decisive win over the Jewish people (Lesson Eight, “Encountering Palestine,” 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Hamas has been designated as a terrorist organization by Canada, the EU, Israel, Japan and the United States. Other countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand simply describe the military “wing” of Hamas as terroristic.

<sup>8</sup> This research does not seek to take a position one way or another but merely is stating the current situation and conflicting positions that surround the legitimacy of Israel and how these viewpoints weigh into discussing human rights abuses in regard to the Palestinian people.

<sup>9</sup> British proposal through the Peel Commission during the Arab Revolt (1938), the UN Partition Plan (1947), Knesset discussions on giving back the Gaza and West Bank to the Arab countries or the Arabs

but this has been routinely denied by the Palestinian government who refuse to accept any statehood of Israel, even if this meant potential peace and alleviating some of the suffering the Palestinian people have endured over the years (Dershowitz, 2012).

With the rise of Hamas in Gaza, Israel designated Gaza a ‘hostile territory’ in 2007 and placed heavy restrictions in the area, the situation between Gaza and Israel escalated into war<sup>10</sup> in 2008, when Israel attacked the occupied Gaza Strip because of indiscriminate rockets being launched from Gaza on southern Israel.<sup>11</sup> In *Human Rights Violations during Israel’s Attack on the Gaza Strip: 27 December 2008 to 19 January 2009* (2011) of Global Public Health journal, Marton argues that the overall health of the Palestinian people plummeted due to Israel’s occupation and its withdrawal,<sup>12</sup> as well as the “Israeli control of the borders and imports, extended electricity blackouts, limited medical knowledge, inadequate medical equipment, and insufficient medical supplies and medicines all contributed to the growing efficacy of Gaza’s health system” (2011, pp. 561). Marton also brings to light the violations that occurred in this 22-day Israeli assault, such as the jeopardization of medical supplies and food being distributed due to Israeli attacks. For example, some of the Israeli attacks were reported to have injured workers of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations Relief and

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living in the area for peace, but the Arab League Summit said, “No peace with Israel, no recognition with Israel, and no negotiations with Israel” (1967), Taba Negotiations with Israeli PM Barak and PLO chairman Arafat (2000), Israeli PM Olmert offered more land than in 2000, Palestinian President Abbas turned it down (2008), and the Vision for Peace proposed by President Trump (2018).

<sup>10</sup> The 2008-2009 Gaza war is often referred to as the Operation Cast Lead, but in the Muslim world, this war is also known as the Gaza Massacre.

<sup>11</sup> There was an agreed upon ceasefire for six months between Israel and Gaza in the summer of 2008, but this cease-fire was not renewed at its end. “Hamas had offered to renew the ceasefire if Israel reopened Gaza’s border crossings[, but] the strip had been sealed by Israel in an economic siege aimed at toppling Hamas [(which operates as a terrorist organization)]. The blockage has brought the territory near economic collapse” (The Independent at the Huffington Post, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> To reiterate: Marton goes on to mention that Israel existing at all has been detrimental to overall Palestinian health (2011).

Works Agency (UNRWA) who were transporting medical and food supplies to Gaza, and “as a result, several regions in the north and [center] of the Gaza Strip were cut-off from access to food and medicines” (Marton, 2011, pp. 564). In addition, other reports noted atypical attacks against civilians<sup>13</sup> in Gaza that caused many deaths and injured many more.

While UNHRC resolutions and the relationship between Israel and this international human rights council will be discussed further, one particular resolution<sup>14</sup> condemned Israel’s engagement in *Operation Cast Lead* and with the ‘human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories’ on the permanent agenda, this came as no surprise. The resolution “strongly [condemned] the ongoing Israeli military operation...[resulting] in massive violations of human rights of the Palestinian people...[called] for urgent international action to put an immediate end to the grave violations committed by the occupying Power, Israel, in the occupied Palestinian Territory.../[as well as called] for immediate international protection of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory” (UNHRC, 2009, pp. 461-462). There was no mention of Gaza (or Hamas) launching rockets on Israel, which targeted Israeli citizens, in this resolution.

The Gaza conflict has yet to be resolved. According to the Human Rights Watch, the Israeli government has and continues to abuse Palestinian human rights in the Gaza Strip through enforcing severe and discriminatory restrictions. Despite the fact that Egypt

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<sup>13</sup> E.g., killing unarmed citizens at close range or firing upon a city that is known to have densely populated civilian areas (Marton, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution S-9/1 on the grave violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly due to the recent Israeli military attack against the occupied Gaza Strip (adopted on 12 January 2009).

has also carried out similar restrictions on the Gaza Border, such as the movement of people and goods between Gaza and Israel, the State of Israel has received the majority of the backlash for these restrictions. The Human Rights Watch cites that Israel's actions “[limit] access to educational, economic and other opportunities, medical care, clean water and electricity for the nearly 2 million Palestinians who live there” (2020). Furthermore, there has been an Israeli closure at the Gaza Strip border for twelve years, where the only exceptions to this closure is in extreme humanitarian cases such as medical reasons or some kind of business permit<sup>15</sup> (World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Israel and Palestine, 2020). Unfortunately, even in medical circumstances, the Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip are required to fill out an application and be given a permit before entering Israel to attend their scheduled medical appointments. While Israel is an independent and free country that has the ability (and some may argue the right) to monitor or control its borders, there is a high rejection or delay rate for applications for those seeking medical attention<sup>16</sup> (World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Israel and Palestine, 2020).

There is also the situation with the West Bank settlements. Israel took control over the area following victory in the Six-Day war. It is argued that this is an illegal occupation, and under international humanitarian law, the transfer of Israeli citizens and the removal thereof Palestinians living in the West Bank is unlawful.<sup>17</sup> In Amnesty International’s report on Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories (2019), Israeli authorities, in the dead of night, have carried out hundreds of raids in the West Bank to

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<sup>15</sup> Business permits are difficult to obtain, and those who can obtain such a permit are usually wealthy and prominent figures in the business world.

<sup>16</sup> These applications mostly refer to “those injured in demonstrations along the fences separating Israel and Gaza” (World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Israel and Palestine, 2020), and the rejection or delay rate has been alleged to be as high as 82%.

<sup>17</sup> US President Donald Trump, on November 19, 2019, announced that the West Bank settlements would no longer be considered illegal by the US government.

arrest Palestinians, who are then detained in Israeli prisons, which violates international humanitarian law that “prohibits the transfer of detainees into the territory of the Occupying Power” (Amnesty International, 2019). Additionally, there are claims that Israel demolished Palestinian homes in the West Bank due to a lack of permits for the buildings, which, as it happens, are difficult for Palestinians to obtain; this has displaced almost one thousand people in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem (Amnesty International, 2019).

*Other Violations (b)*. There are other human rights abuses that Israel has been a part of that have been addressed in UNHRC resolutions. Some of these human rights violations in need of a mention are in the form of racial discrimination. There have been instances of Arab, black<sup>18</sup>, or even eastern European<sup>19</sup> discrimination in Israel, which have resulted in many protests in the state. Antoine Shalhat, writer of one of the *Middle East Monitor* articles covering racism in Israel, claims that “racism that appears to be inherent within the state of Israel [is not] going away, [it is] getting worse” (2020). While proof of *inherent* racism was not provided in this article, there are examples of discrimination that needed to be mentioned, such as the sectarianism that can exist between western Ashkenazi Jews and Sephardic eastern Jews. Jews hailing from Russia (or the former Soviet Union) may have a difficult time assimilating to the Israeli society, as some of these eastern European Jews have said to experienced being othered or told that they are not “real” Jews (Shalhat, 2020).

There is the “Right of Return” in Israel, which states that any person of Jewish descent has the right to come to Israel and obtain Israeli citizenship. Many Jews in

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<sup>18</sup> This is primarily referring to Ethiopian Jews immigrating to Israel.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., former citizens of the Soviet Union

Ethiopia have made this journey to their ancestral homeland<sup>20</sup> but given that the waitlists to be granted permission can last as long as ten plus years, sometimes family members are separated and are never reunited,<sup>21</sup> as well as some people, even in the Israeli government, “[reject] the notion that many Ethiopian Jews are in fact Jewish” (Schwartz, 2018), the state of Israel has not been welcoming to the Ethiopian Jews returning home. It is clear that there must be some form of discrimination involved. As of 2018, despite Israel claiming no more Jews reside in Ethiopia, there remain more than 8,000 Ethiopian Jews who are still waiting to come to Israel as their right of return or to rejoin their families<sup>22</sup> (Schwartz, 2018). Similar to the police brutality struggles found in the United States, there was an incident involving a young Ethiopian man, who also happened to be an Israeli soldier, being brutally beaten by two Israeli policemen; the horrors of which echoed through the Ethiopian-Israeli communities—they can serve their country, yet they “feel their country does not serve them” (Schwartz, 2018).

There is also Arab discrimination in Israel. For one example, Israeli prisons are not required to translate regulations into Arabic, despite many requests from the inmates and the Association of Civil Rights in Israel (Amnesty International, 2019). One of the most frequent claims made about Arab discrimination in Israel is that, like South Africa used to be, Israel is an apartheid state. The Israeli Declaration of Independence states that

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<sup>20</sup> Ethiopian Jews have faced great persecution in Ethiopia; they have been barred from owning land, forced to convert to Christianity, or ostracized from society. This is why there have been many secret operations (now made public) that Israel conducted to rescue the Jews in Ethiopia, in which Israel claims none (i.e., Jews) remain (Schwartz, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> In one case, a mother and her children were meant to board a plane for Israel after nine years on a waitlist, and when the day came, she was told that her two eldest daughters, who were married, had to be on a different flight later in the day. The mother would arrive with her younger children, but she has been waiting for thirteen years for her daughters to make it “home” to Israel (Schwartz, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> PM Netanyahu and his government approved a plan to bring all Jews from Ethiopia home by 2020, which is still in process today (Schwartz, 2018).

Israel will “ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex...[and] guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture” (Declaration of Independence, 1948). Kenneth Meshoe,<sup>23</sup> a South African black man who lived through apartheid in his home country, said of the notion that Israel was an apartheid state, “this ridiculous accusation trivializes the word apartheid, minimizing and belittling the magnitude of the racism and suffering endure by South Africans of color” (Bederman, 2014).

In *Why Does the Myth of Apartheid Persist in Israel?*, Bederman evaluates the injustices of living in apartheid in South Africa, of which she also compares to the Jim Crow era of the United States (2014). There were white-only hospitals, stores, sports arenas, restrooms, schools, beaches, restaurants, transportation and anywhere else that could be segregated, such as marriage, was (Bederman, 2014). This is not found in Israel; “for Meshoe, calling Israel an apartheid state exposes ignorance of the laws of the country...and cheapens the word [apartheid]” (Bederman, 2014). Arabs receive the same treatment in Israel as anyone else does. For example, “Palestinians receive world-class healthcare services in hospitals throughout the country” (Bederman, 2014), are represented in the Knesset, and are not subject to racially segregated areas in Israel. With this said, racial issues still exist in Israel and there will, of course, be prejudices found at the least on a personal level as well; but legally speaking, there are no rights awarded to a Jewish Israeli citizen that are not also given to an Israeli citizen that is Arab, black or any other race.

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<sup>23</sup> Meshoe was “South African Member of Parliament from 1994 to 2013, President of the African Christian Democratic Party since 1994, Reverend of the 3000 strong Hope and Glory Tabernacle, and a former teacher who was brought to Canada...to speak about apartheid [in South Africa]” (Bederman, 2014).

Additionally, the LGBTQ community continues to fight for equal rights within Israel when it comes to getting married. These individuals see Rabbinate control of marriage as a violation of their basic human rights to be able to marry whomever they desire. While same-sex marriages are recognized by Israel, these types of marriages are not allowed to be legally carried out within the state itself (Mazzig, 2019). Furthermore, there are discriminatory laws surrounding adoption and surrogacy for same-sex couples and those who identify with the LGBTQ community (Mazzig, 2019). Tel Aviv, one of the most progressive cities in Israel, has been the home to multiple LGBTQ pride parades, and many young<sup>24</sup> Israelis have been raising awareness in their country of the lack of equal rights that exist. Unlike the surrounding Arab countries, “Israel is one of the few places in the Middle East where being out and proud [will not] jeopardize your life” (Mazzig, 2019). There is obviously more work to be done in Israel concerning the LGBTQ community’s human rights, but compared to the rest of the region, Israel is leading the way to a freer and more tolerant society for those with different orientations.

Where women’s rights are concerned, “Israel has long offered her female citizens – regardless of ethnicity or religion – broad freedoms, including the right to vote, freedom of speech, equal access to education and the workplace, and no special restrictions on the way they dress” (The Fellowship, 2019). With this said, there are noticeable differences in treatment of women in Israel. For example, there are some societal circumstances where modesty in clothing is expected for male and female, although the “dress code” for females is a bit more conservative, near or in religious sites or entering a community primarily consisting of ultra-orthodox Jews. More seriously,

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<sup>24</sup> NOTE: This is a generalization.

Thelwell, who works with the Borgen Project, shares why there is still a need to fight for the future of Israeli women. For instance, women in academics are not to instruct ultra-orthodox men at universities, female lawyers are separated from their male colleagues to sit in the back during training programs, and even though Israeli women fulfill the same two-year mandatory military service as the men do, the genders are segregated during graduation ceremonies (2020). Although not the UNHRC, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESC) in 2019 passed a resolution that accused *only Israel* of violating women's rights—this resolution, claiming “that the Israeli occupation remains a major obstacle for Palestinian women and girls with regard to the fulfillment of their rights” (Liphshiz, 2019), was supported by nations (hardly known to the free world as “champions” of women’s rights) such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, China, and Russia<sup>25</sup> (Liphshiz, 2019).

This summary surrounding human rights violations, attributed to Israel, has neither laid out all claims or abuses carried out by Israel nor expects the violations discussed to have been covered in its full extent. Nevertheless, this would pull away from the research at hand, which is to assess the UNHRC’s treatment towards Israel and whether this special council and its subsequent resolutions are fair and unbiased in all of its condemnation of human rights violations. Instead, this summary gives a basic understanding of the situation of human rights violations as it concerns Israel in order to bring clarity to any UNHRC resolutions and the purpose and need thereof of such resolutions.

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<sup>25</sup> In addition to France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Venezuela and 29 other nations were also in support of this UNESC resolutions.

By using the UN Watch Database, it is easy to determine how many condemnatory resolutions by the United Nations Human Rights Council have been passed with Israel as its focal point since 2006. Israel has been the subject of 90 UNHRC resolutions, which have cited Israel for abusing human rights (UN Watch Database). Given item seven on the permanent agenda, there are no UNHRC sessions where wrongdoing on Israel's part is not discussed (Algemeiner, 2020). Even in the most recent session (i.e., the 43<sup>rd</sup>) in 2020, which was postponed due to the coronavirus epidemic, the UNHRC passed three resolutions against Israel (Algemeiner, 2020). One resolution condemned Israel for occupying the Golan Heights, which the United States officially recognized as Israeli territory in 2019, while the other two resolutions condemned Israel for abuses in the West Bank and as the UNHR referred to it, occupied East Jerusalem. In total this session, five resolutions were adopted that reprimanded and criticized Israel (Algemeiner, 2020).

Per the human rights violations mentioned in the above paragraphs, some of these resolutions, primarily addressing the Palestinian nation, were justified and perhaps necessary to better the lives of those abused. The issue perceived with UNHRC resolutions is that they are unfairly targeting Israel. While examining one session will not accurately (or rather comprehensively) assess disproportionate negative attention from the UN Human Rights Council to Israel, this session was emblematic of UNHRC activity. Thus, in the resumed 43<sup>rd</sup> UNHRC session, Israel was singled out 3 times while Syria, North Korea and Iran were called out in one resolution each (UN Watch, 2020). Furthermore, in this resumed session, "the vast majority of the world's worst abusers went ignored, with zero resolutions on China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela,

Zimbabwe, and so forth” (UN Watch, 2020). It could naturally mean that Israel has greater human rights abuses, but this may not be the case if other countries’ human rights violations, such as Saudi Arabia, were brought equally to light and condemned just the same. To illuminate the data on UNHRC resolutions for the full 43<sup>rd</sup> regular session (excluding special sessions), see Table 1.1.

**Table 1**  
**United Nations Human Rights Council, 43rd Session**

- |    |               |
|----|---------------|
| 01 | GEORGIA       |
| 01 | IRAN          |
| 05 | ISRAEL        |
| 01 | LIBYA         |
| 01 | MALI          |
| 01 | NICARAGUA     |
| 01 | NORTH KOREA   |
| 01 | SOUTH SUDAN   |
| 01 | SYRIA         |
| 01 | UNITED STATES |

SOURCE: UN WATCH DATABASE

In the 43<sup>rd</sup> regular session, according to the UN Watch Database, Israel is the country most condemned with five UNHRC resolutions with all other countries who were condemned in the regular session receiving one resolution each (UN Watch, 2020). There can only be two reasons for this; Israel either has worse human rights violations or the biases of UNHRC sitting members have impacted the legitimacy of the council. The UN Human Rights Council, for the 43<sup>rd</sup> session, had up to 53% of non-democracies as sitting

members, including but limited to, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Venezuela (UN Watch Database). In the past, China, Cuba, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya and more have been sitting members at some point on the UN Human Rights Council (UN Watch Database). Thus, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan will also be examined to determine through comparative analysis if Israel truly has the worse human rights violations and multitude of UNHRC resolutions are justified or Israel has been the continuous target of the UN Human Rights Council without justifiable evidence to the contrary.

### Egypt and Human Rights Violations

Although located in North Africa, Egypt is often associated with the Middle East region due to its proximity, history, culture and religion. While the Egyptian identity and political entity has been around for almost 30 centuries, Egypt was absorbed into the Ottoman Empire and then later taken over by the British when the Ottoman Empire fell (History.com Editors, 2009) (Migiro, 2018). Egypt gained its independence from Great Britain in a revolution in 1922, forming a new government and drafting a constitution a year later. Although Egypt would experience another revolution in 1952 to form an independent republic by 1953, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1945, Egypt became a member state in the United Nations, joining many other sovereign states in the international effort to bolster peace and promote prosperity (Migiro, 2018). Thus, for the purposes of this research, all human rights violations concerning Egypt will only be evaluated from the point of UN membership onward. The violations to be examined are not meant to be comprehensive but are presented to provide the general human rights situation found in Egypt.

There are three types of security forces at the disposal of the Egyptian government: the Egyptian National Police (ENP), the Central Security Forces (CSF), and the army, and these security forces have been used to squash civil disturbance, such as protesting, and have been greatly abused by the Egyptian authority against Egyptian civilians (White, 2011). Since 2017, Egypt's President, Abdel al-Sisi, issued a state of emergency in Egypt due to 'terrorism,'<sup>1</sup> and this has resulted in or allowed security forces and Egyptian authorities to abuse its power in the country (World Report, 2020). For example, security forces have "used torture and enforced disappearances systematically against dissidents"<sup>2</sup> (World Report, 2020), as well as demolished homes, evicting residents without fair compensations and "denied access to journalists and other independent observers" (Human Rights Watch, 2021) in the North Sinai, where the Egyptian military has had an ongoing conflict with ISIS-affiliated militants in the area. Thus, the security forces in Egypt have a lot of power that goes unchecked,<sup>3</sup> and this has led to many of the human rights violations that will be highlighted in this research.

Migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers are some of the groups abused by the Egyptian authorities. According to Amnesty International, members of these vulnerable demographics have been 'arbitrarily' arrested and detained,<sup>4</sup> and notably, Syrian refugees have spoken out against their constant threat of deportation from the Egyptian government back to war-torn Syria (2019). Refugees and immigrants typically live within

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<sup>1</sup> According to World Report (2020) on Egypt and the Human Rights Watch (2021), current Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has used the threat of terrorism as a ploy to give security forces unchecked powers and the Egyptian government more control over its people.

<sup>2</sup> This also includes arresting and "forcibly [disappearing] children as young as 12" years old (World Report, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Now, with the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, this unrestrained government control has only been exacerbated through extending the state of emergency in Egypt and as a way to restrict movement and suppress dissidence.

<sup>4</sup> Including children

poorer neighborhoods. With recent economic hardship and rising costs in Egypt, this demographic has also been found to be in massive debt, which has decreased their quality of life, making them more vulnerable to coercion and to resort to any means to support their families (Masri, 2019). With this said, the Egyptian government has called its treatment of refugees ‘exemplary,’ vaunting that they can “live freely among the Egyptian people...[and] access services such as healthcare without discrimination” (Masri, 2019).

In the *Journal of High Institute of Public Health*, Abdou, Wahdan, and El-Nimr published a survey study of the prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Egypt. In their research, they found that primarily Type I and II of FGM<sup>5</sup> occurs in Egyptian communities and just less than 90% of women, between the ages of 15 and 49, had undergone FGM<sup>6</sup> (Abdou et al, 2020). As Egypt adheres to more traditional values where men dominate most of the public society, it was especially noted in this study that men have “played an important role in the continuation of FGM practice<sup>7</sup> in Egyptian communities” (pp. 144) and that FGM practice is a “deep-rooted inequality between boys and girls and...gender discrimination against girls and women” (pp. 140).

Additionally, not only do women face discrimination “in law and practice” (Amnesty International, 2019), but violence against women is widespread in Egypt, and Egyptian authorities routinely have failed to address the issue and in some instances, have

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<sup>5</sup> “Type I involves partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and/or prepuce... Type II involves partial or total removal of the labia minora with the clitoral glands, and the labia majora might be exercised in this type as well... Type III involves narrowing of the vaginal opening with the development of a covering seal of labia minora or labia majora... Type IV involves all other harmful procedures applied to female genitalia for non-medical reasons” (Abdou et al, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> This was according to a 2015 Egypt Health Issues Survey (EHIS).

<sup>7</sup> In 2016, the practice of FGM was criminalized, but prosecutions for those engaging in this practice are seldom, and the FGM “remains widely practiced” in Egypt (World Report, 2020).

even made matters worse. For example, when a woman reports a case of sexual assault, there have been situations where the police have made the victim undergo a virginity test to prove the legitimacy of her claim (Amnesty International, 2019). Furthermore, in an open letter to the European Union and its Member States on Egypt, Human Rights Watch wrote that Egypt has “detained and prosecuted women over morality charges, including rape victims and witnesses” (2021), as well as actively silencing supporters<sup>8</sup> of the #MeToo movement, trending once again on social media in Egypt (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Those identifying with the LGBTQ community must remain in hiding whilst in Egypt, because the Egyptian authorities are known to arrest<sup>9</sup> and prosecute anyone a part of (or appearing to be a part of) the LGBTQ community (Amnesty International, 2019). In fact, the Human Rights Watch produced a YouTube video about Ahmed Alaa, a young man who spent two degrading years in prison<sup>10</sup> for raising a rainbow flag at a concert in Egypt (2020). Thus, it is not just the LGBTQ community that must endure human rights abuses for their sexual orientation or gender identity, but those who speak with or about issues concerning this minority community have seen their human rights violated as well. For example, in 2019, there was an Egyptian TV host, Mohamed al-Gheiti,<sup>11</sup> who was fined and sentenced to a year in prison for interviewing a gay man on his show (Owoseje,

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<sup>8</sup> through “an extensive campaign of arrests and prosecutions” (Human Rights Watch, 2021)

<sup>9</sup> To determine the “legitimacy” of the sexual orientation or gender identity, the Egyptian police have subjected arrested members of the LGBTQ community “to forced anal and sex determination tests, a practice that amounts to torture” (Amnesty International, 2019)

<sup>10</sup> 80 of those days were spent in solitary confinement, which is underground, with just a blanket, piece of bread, and two glasses of water (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> While he invited a gay man on the show to discuss his lifestyle, Al-Gheiti has used his public platform to regularly speak against homosexuality as well (Owoseje, 2019).

2019). The Egyptian government has used fear<sup>12</sup> to control the narrative—LGBTQ issues or stories are not to be shared or enter the public sphere.

Finally, there is a lack of freedom of religion in Egypt, and discrimination against Christian, Jewish and other religious minorities is common practice. Christians, in particular, “face discrimination and obstacles when it comes to building new churches” (World Report, 2020). For example, a law in 2016 has required that churches be approved by “state bodies, including security agencies” (Amnesty International, 2019), which has resulted in approximately only 3.6%<sup>13</sup> of church applications to be fully approved. Additionally, right before a Coptic Christian activist<sup>14</sup> was to participate in the most recent UN Forum on Minority Issues session in Geneva, Switzerland, the Egyptian authority had charged him with terrorism-related acts (i.e., speaking out about religious discrimination) and had him detained (Amnesty International, 2019).

Given this summary of information on the human rights violations in Egypt, it is plain to see that Egypt has not ensured the safety and liberty of the people living within its borders. The corruption of the Egyptian government<sup>15</sup> has made it increasingly difficult to accurately assess the situation and address the issues found in Egypt, and the Arab Uprising in 2011, which “included demands for increased freedoms and social justice” (Hynek, 2016), has only made matters worse as Egyptian authority continues to crackdown on dissidents, journalists, NGOs, and any social movement fighting for

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<sup>12</sup> E.g., imprisonment

<sup>13</sup> This number was calculated by using the data from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, which stated that less than 200 churches out of 2,540 churches that applied for approval received full legal registration from the Egyptian government (Amnesty International, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Ramy Kamel

<sup>15</sup> President al-Sisi was elected in 2014, and while he was supposed to reach his presidential term limit in 2022 (two terms of four years), he has orchestrated with the other bodies of the Egyptian government, silencing opposition, to extend the limit, which would “allow him to run for two more six-year terms...[keeping] him in power until 2034” (Landler, 2019).

human rights (Hynek, 2016). For example, Egypt is third in the list of countries that has put journalists behind bars,<sup>16</sup> but this was justified by charging them with “spreading false news” (World Report, 2020). Thus, there is much work to be done in Egypt in terms of ending its human rights abuses. This should mean that the United Nations Human Rights Council must be keeping a close eye on Egypt, continuously condemning the country’s human rights violations, and passing substantial resolutions concerning Egypt so that positive change could take place. Before examining Egypt’s record with the UNHRC, Jordan and Saudi Arabia’s human rights violations will be discussed. After this is provided, a comprehensive evaluation of the UNHRC’s record with Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia can be conducted alongside its record with Israel.

### Jordan and Human Rights Violations

From what once was Transjordan under the British mandate in the 1920s, an independent state emerged in 1946, which is now known as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, where the government consists of a parliamentary constitutional monarchy (CIA Factbook). In 1948, in the First Arab-Israeli War, Jordan gained control over the West Bank and East Jerusalem,<sup>1</sup> areas which Israel won in her victory in the Six-Day War nine years later (Lonely Planet, 2019). Following the assassination of King Abdullah in 1951, his grandson, Hussein, became Jordan’s King in 1953. Within two years of Hussein’s

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<sup>16</sup> According to the World Report, Egypt has imprisoned approximately 30 journalists (2020).

<sup>1</sup> According to the Lonely Planet’s *Jordan in Detail*, Jordan’s annexation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem was King Abdullah “reneging on assurances regarding Palestinian independence,” but nevertheless, Britain and the United States recognized this new territory for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (2019). The next king of Jordan, Hussein, would offer “a form of citizenship to all Palestinian Arab refugees in 1960, but refused to relinquish Palestinian territory” (Lonely Planet, 2019).

reign, Jordan became a member state in the United Nations in December 1955, which was ten years after Egypt's membership.

Interestingly, Jordan, when compared to its Arab neighbors, has probably had the most peaceful relations with Israel,<sup>2</sup> as well as the western world due to economic agreements in 1954 between Great Britain and the United States<sup>3</sup> that bolstered cooperation and friendly interactions (Bard, 2008). Despite these amicable associations with democratic states though, Jordan is still only designated as 'partly free' by Freedom House<sup>4</sup> (Freedom House, 2020). Moreover, the Jordanian Kingdom has had its challenges with immigration and dealing with refugees and asylum seekers. Among other human rights violations, there are many issues concerning women's rights, the rights of the LGBTQ community, and the freedom of information as well.

Refugees and immigrants around the world face many hardships, and while some challenges are to be expected, there are other challenges and sufferings that could be potentially prevented all together if refugees' and immigrants' human rights were not being violated. In Jordan, for example, the Ministry of Labor increased, from 11 to 39, "the number of professions barred to non-Jordanian nationals seeking employment"<sup>5</sup> (Amnesty International, 2019). This move by the Ministry of Labor greatly impacted

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<sup>2</sup> In 1973, Jordan did not join Egypt and Syria in its attack on Israel, and by 1994, Jordan and Israel had established an official peace treaty (Bard, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> This financial connection with Great Britain and the United States would eventually be severed by other Arab states, who found this dependency on the western world a disgrace and against 'Arab' values and decided to provide the funding for Jordan themselves (Bard, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Freedom House is a US-based non-profit that conducts research and evaluates countries' levels of democracy, political freedoms, access to civil liberties, etc. as a way to assess each country's freedom status. Freedom House has an annual 'Freedom in the World' report that gives an updated version of individual freedoms found in countries around the world (Freedom House).

<sup>5</sup> In the beginning of 2021, the Ministers of Labor and State for Investment Affairs are moving forward to increase the number of Jordanians working in the country again, but this time, they have agreed to grant more work permits to non-Jordanians as well (Jordan News Agency-Petra, 2021).

refugees and immigrants, also including long-term Palestinian refugees, from finding and keeping work in Jordan (Amnesty International, 2019). If refugees and immigrants in Jordan are unable to find work and have few options to make money, they will either go into debt (pushing them further into poverty), which will lower their quality of life and make them more dependent of the Jordanian government as well as international organizations to survive, or they will resort to other, most likely illegal, means for financial stability.

The poverty level of refugees has also contributed to lower school enrollment and increased drop-out rates, especially among Syrian refugee children, because there is a “lack of affordable and safe transportation[, and] the low value of continuing education for Syrians given their limited professional opportunities in Jordan” (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Because of this poor quality of education in schools for Syrian children and the poverty rate within Syrian refugee communities,<sup>6</sup> the majority of the children will drop out and start working to help support the family<sup>7</sup> (Human Rights Watch, 2020). For example, in the YouTube video, “Syrian Refugee Kids Face Educational Crisis in Jordan,” (uploaded by the Human Rights Watch), there was a study in a small Jordanian city where Syrian school children were interviewed and four years later, they were interviewed again to see if they were still in school (2020). Most of the Syrian children were no longer studying, which supports the data presented by the Human Rights Watch that school enrollment numbers start dwindling at the age of 12 and by the age of 17, only

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<sup>6</sup> Around 80% of Syrian families live in poverty (Human Rights Watch, 2020)

<sup>7</sup> Boys go to work, such as in tiling, the meat industry, etc., but the girls stay home to help in the home (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

25% would remain in school<sup>8</sup> (Human Rights Watch, 2020). As detailed in the Human Rights report on youth dropping out of school in Jordan, these children “are at an increased risk of child labor, child marriage, sexual violence, being trapped in poverty, and being recruited by extremist armed groups” (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Poor education (or lack thereof) and poverty,<sup>9</sup> as was particularly mentioned above for refugee children, have also been a contributing factor found in child marriages in Jordan. Due to the financial strain that many families are under, they often resort to marrying off their daughters at a young age in order to “decrease the number of dependents needing support” (Human Rights Watch, 2020). In 2019, a proposal to amend the law to raise the minimum marriage age from 15 to 16 was initially rejected by lawmakers, but the Senate eventually did pass the ‘Personal Status Code’ that raised the minimum marriage age to 16 (World Report, 2020). Unfortunately, child marriages are just one example of human rights abuses that women and girls experience in Jordan.

Women are required to follow laws and restrictions that the men in Jordan do not have to follow. According to the World Report and the US Embassy in Amman, Muslim women are forbidden from marrying non-Muslims, and any marriages of this nature are not recognized<sup>10</sup> in Jordan (2020). Additionally, men can marry up to four wives, according to the Muslim tradition, but women can marry only one man, and divorce laws also differ if the divorce was husband-initiated or wife-initiated (US Embassy in Amman,

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<sup>8</sup> It also should be noted that attending school can be a challenge for refugee children based on the “service card” policy, where the interior ministry in Jordan must grant refugee children the right to attend school; not only is this detrimental to the many families that are denied these “service cards,” but those who do are only allowed to attend the school in the district the card was issued; thus, if the family must move for work or financial reasons, the process of obtaining the “service card” would have to be pursued again, which has contributed to drop out rates amongst refugee children (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Although quite prevalent in refugee and migrant families, this is pertaining to all people living in Jordan.

<sup>10</sup> Civil marriages are prohibited to be performed as well.

2020). On the other hand, women who are unwed and found to be with child will face arbitrary detention, and when their child is born, he or she will be forcibly removed from the mother and taken, without the mother's consent, to the Ministry of Social Development (Amnesty International, 2019).

Furthermore, Jordan has a national law that states that Jordanian women cannot pass down their nationality to their children, only men can pass Jordanian citizenship, which is gender discrimination (World Report, 2020). In the YouTube video, "Jordan: Children of non-Jordanian Fathers Deprived of Basic Rights," the Human Rights Watch interviews some of these individuals who have a Jordanian mother and were born in Jordan but are not considered Jordanian citizens (2018). They shared about their struggle to get basic rights and services,<sup>11</sup> and the hurt and the psychological effect that comes from being denied citizenship to the country that they call home. Sadly, one man said that while he "[sings] the Jordan national anthem and [respects] the Jordanian flag...[he is] not Jordanian" (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

The LGBTQ community tend to fare better in Jordan than they do in most of the rest of the Middle Eastern region given that homosexuality and other sexual orientations are legal in the country, but those in this marginalized community are often harassed and disproportionately stopped by police and detained with 'disrupting public morality' charges (Lonely Planet). Also, while under Jordanian law the LGBTQ community can live peaceful and "openly," Sharia law, under religious courts, is allowed to apply to Muslims in the area, which could be detrimental to a Muslim person identifying with the LGBTQ community as Sharia law does not permit such activities or lifestyles (US

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<sup>11</sup> "The government restricts their right to work, access public schools and health care, open bank accounts and get drivers' licenses" (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Embassy in Amman, 2017). Furthermore, although legality is important and a step towards progress, there is little societal acceptance for homosexuality and other gender identifications in Jordan, and this has resulted in much of the LGBTQ community operating behind the scenes, primarily in the capital city of Amman (Lonely Planet).

Finally, there is a lack of freedom of expression, assembly and information in Jordan. The Jordanian government has been aggressive in its efforts to detain political and anti-corruption activities with charges ranging from ‘insulting’ the king to ‘undermining’ the political regime<sup>12</sup> (Amnesty International, 2019). Furthermore, in 2018<sup>13</sup>, Jordan took extreme measures to combat dissidence by proposing amendments to the 2015 Electronic Crimes Law “that would overly restrict freedom of expression by stipulating criminal penalties for posting ‘rumors’ or ‘fake news’ with ‘bad intentions’ or engaging in ‘hate speech’ online” (World Report, 2020). In this way, Jordan would ensure that any information against the political establishment remains stifled as well as make activists, and other concerned citizens who are trying to reveal human rights abuses and government corruption, to be perceived as “the criminals” who are inciting violence, spewing hate speech or spreading ‘disinformation’ – which allows and justifies the Jordan government in silencing such views.<sup>14</sup> Amid widespread criticism, the proposed amendments have been withdrawn. Unfortunately, in 2019, the new Cybersecurity Law was passed, which “is the most comprehensive piece of Jordanian cyber legislation to date” (Kenny, et al., 2020), and this new Cybersecurity Law could possibly be

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<sup>12</sup> This includes any online slander as well.

<sup>13</sup> The amendments were proposed in 2017 but reached the floor in late 2018.

<sup>14</sup>Social media photos and videos of those participating in protests or being critical of the government were used to arrest at least 7 activists in 2019 (Amnesty International, 2019).

contributing to Jordan's internet freedom score barely meeting the 50% threshold and being characterized as only 'partly-free' (Freedom House, 2019).

There has been positive changes in Jordan and progress has been made in the country. According to the Human Rights Watch, Jordanian parliament has passed a series of human rights reforms. The aim of these reforms is to free people with disabilities from discrimination in the work field and place "new limits on pretrial detention" (Human Rights Watch, 2017). In addition, the reforms included a repeal of a penal code article that "allowed people who commit sexual assault to avoid punishment if they marry their victims" (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Although almost a decade ago, Jordan did also amend its Public Gatherings Law so that Jordanians<sup>15</sup> did not have to seek government permission to hold public meetings, etc., but reportedly, the government has cancelled public events without a notice or explanation (World Report, 2020). Thus, there is more work to be done in Jordan, and there are many human rights violations that need to be addressed.

### Saudi Arabia and Human Rights Violations

Similarly to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Saudi Arabia also has a ruling monarch, but the Saudi citizens are ruled by an absolute monarchy and are under an Islamic theocracy,<sup>1</sup> which is quite different from the government system found in the Jordanian Kingdom (CIA Factbook). Established in 1932 with the Al Saud dynasty, Saudi Arabia has had many leaders from this family line—the most recent of which is

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<sup>15</sup> This does not apply to organizations, of which are required to have government approval of any public meetings, demonstrations, etc. (World Report, 2020).

<sup>1</sup> Saudi Arabia is known as the birthplace of Islam and the home of the holiest city in Islam, Mecca, where each year, millions come to visit for fulfil the Islamic pilgrimage as outlined in the Five Pillars of Islam.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who has been acting as the de facto ruler since 2017. Joining the United Nations when it was established on October 24, 1945, Saudi Arabia proved early on that ruling by an absolute monarchy would not prevent it from engaging on the world stage with the westernized world.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia is known as “one of the main players in the Arab world” (BBC News, 2019) and has used this status to be quite influential in the Middle Eastern region. In addition to being geographically large, Saudi Arabia can attribute its significance on the world stage primarily to its most important export: oil.<sup>2</sup> The oil-based economy of Saudi Arabia has not only made the country extremely wealthy but has created strong economic relations with the western world that probably would not have existed otherwise (BBC News, 2019). This is paramount, because it appears that the human rights violations in Saudi Arabia have been widely unaddressed or rather purposeful neglected due to economic reasons and the need, to a great portion of the western world, for its oil exports. With this said, the human rights abuses found in Saudi Arabia, namely concerning immigrants, women, minorities and overall freedoms, will be examined further below.

Immigrants suffer human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia through working in such harsh conditions that this could be deemed forced labor, as well as the visa sponsorship system in Saudi Arabia could be seen to resemble trafficking of persons, because this visa “ties migrant workers’ residency permits to ‘sponsoring’ employers, whose written consent is required for workers to change employers or leave the country under normal

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<sup>2</sup> Saudi Arabia has about 16% of the world’s oil reserves, which “accounts for roughly 87%” (CIA Factbook) of country’s budget revenues, as well as has the leading role in Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

circumstances” (World Report, 2020). This means that migrants are given little freedom in what work they do, for whom they work,<sup>3</sup> and whether they can leave the country.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, there has been nationwide campaign to arrest and/or deport migrant workers<sup>5</sup> who were allegedly found to be in violation of “residential, border security and [labor] regulations and laws” (Amnesty International, 2019). Particularly, Ethiopian foreign workers have been targeted, where reports suggest that many of these workers who were detained in violation of some labor laws “were tortured and otherwise ill-treated in detention facilities across the country” (Amnesty International, 2019).

Moreover, female migrant workers must continue to endure many abuses at the hands of their employers who unfortunately face little to no scrutiny from the Saudi government for abhorrent exploitation of their power, such as physical, psychological and sexual abuse (World Report, 2020). For example, a news article in the *Daily Star* highlighted one female migrant worker<sup>6</sup> who had allegedly been tortured by her employer, was jailed for three months and now suffers from a “psychologically unstable state,” according to her family upon her return home (Star Online Report, 2021). In *Separating Image from Substance in Saudi Arabia*, Bencomo and Wilcke note that

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<sup>3</sup> Migrant workers also cannot leave their employee without consent or they could face imprisonment (World Report, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Migrants’ passports are often times confiscated to keep them from leaving the country or to be forever tied to the “sponsored” employer, and once the employer has the passport, there is seldom anything the workers can do to stop the employer from exploiting them through withholding wages and working them against their will (World Report, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> So far, according to Amnesty International’s report in 2019, there about been over 4 million migrant workers arrested and more than 1 million migrant workers deported in the last two years (i.e., 2017-2018). “In 2019 alone, over 2 million foreign workers were arrested and 500,000 were deported” (Amnesty International, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> She apparently was a domestic worker sent to work in Saudi Arabia through a recruiting agency over two years ago (Star Online Report, 2021).

“female domestic workers, primarily from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and the Philippines...[also] suffer disproportionately from injustices in Saudi courts (2008).

In general, women face many hardships in Saudi Arabia. In fact, Saudi Arabia has been referred to as “gender apartheid” due to the strict segregation of the sexes (Recent Cases, 2008). There are unfair laws that target or restrict only women, and this has paved the way toward the societal (and in some cases, actual) prison sentences for women in Saudi Arabia. Despite a positive change in 2019 that revised the Travel Documents Law to allow women over the age of 21 to travel independently and freely without the legal permission from a male guardian amongst other improvements,<sup>7</sup> women still require male permission “to marry<sup>8</sup> or live on their own...[and] leave prison if they have been detained” (BBC News, 2019), and they also cannot, just like Jordanians, pass their citizenship to their children (Amnesty International, 2019). Women and girls also do not have equal rights when it comes to marriage, divorce,<sup>9</sup> and inheritance<sup>10</sup> (Amnesty International, 2019) and must fight harder for custody of their children in the Saudi system that favors fathers over mothers (World Report, 2020).

There are other systematic discriminations that women face in Saudi Arabia. “Men can still file cases against daughters, wives, or female relatives under their guardianship for ‘disobedience’” (World Report, 2021), which can lead to a woman’s imprisonment. Additionally, there are little resources for women fleeing domestic abuses

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., women can be considered ‘head of the household’ which means that they can register births, notify the Saudi government of a divorce, death, or marriage in the family, and apply for a family record even (Amnesty International, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> This also includes consenting their children to marry.

<sup>9</sup> Husbands merely need to say, “I divorce you!” (i.e. talaq) three times for the divorce to be legal, no justification needed. Women, on the other hand, must find and pay a divorce lawyer, have a legitimate (and provable) reason for a divorce in a process known as ‘Khula’ (Salama, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Women normally receive only half the inheritances that males do (Freedom House, 2020).

as few shelters exist and prosecutions are rarely carried out against the abusers (Freedom House, 2020). Moreover, sexual assault prosecutions are difficult to pursue for multiple reasons,<sup>11</sup> but the main one is that when a woman reports being raped or sexually assaulted, this claim must be corroborated by four male witnesses, which is quite impractical in most circumstances (Haddad, 2017). In fact, it is not unusual for women who report rape or sexual assault “to find themselves as the subject of [a] criminal investigation and often, actually, sentenced” (Haddad, 2017). This unfortunately is the result of a discriminatory law that makes it nearly impossible for women to report rape or sexual assault.

There is also the issue of violence against women in the name of honor, whether this is for the female’s honor or simply the family’s honor in general. There are four main types of this ‘honor violence,’<sup>12</sup> but the most notorious, for good reason, is ‘honor killing,’ where the victim is murdered<sup>13</sup> due to the shame or dishonor that they have brought to the family (Frazier, 2018). While honor violence can be found in some other cultures and religions, the majority of honor killings take place in heavily Muslim communities (e.g., Saudi Arabia). The practice of honor killings or honor violence is abhorrent and punishes, often publicly, the victim for the abuser’s actions as would be the case for a rape victim.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> There is societal pressure not to report rape or sexual assault, because sexual activity outside of the marriage bed is strictly illegal in Saudi Arabia, and women face harsh punishment if found guilty of any of these unlawfully activities (Haddad, 2017). Thus, if a rape or sexual assault cannot be proven, the female victim will be placed in the wrong and most likely experience more trauma from pressing charges.

<sup>12</sup> FGM, forced marriage, domestic violence, and killing

<sup>13</sup> In some cases, the victim will also commit suicide through family pressure (Frazier, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted, though, that honor violence is not exclusively against women. Honor violence can be carried out for multiple reasons, such as divorce, homosexuality or “refusal to partake in an arranged marriage” (Frazier, 2018).

Another serious violation of human rights that Saudi Arabia openly engages in is the discrimination against religious minorities, where Christians, Jews and even Shia Muslims<sup>15</sup> are particularly oppressed (Amnesty International, 2019). All non-Sunni Muslims must follow all of the Wahhabism<sup>16</sup> traditions and requirements, and the Saudi religious police (i.e., Mutaween) are known to be extremely intolerant toward other religious beliefs (Freedom House, 2020). In fact, religious liberty in Saudi Arabia is basically non-existent; Sunni Muslims who convert to another religion (i.e. apostasy) will receive the death penalty unless they convert back to Islam within seven days. This should not be surprising given that Saudi Arabia functions as an Islamic theocracy, but this does not make these human rights abuses any less important or pressing to address than other countries' violations.

Additionally, supporting or identifying with the LGBTQ community is strictly prohibited in Saudi Arabia. Those caught engaging in homosexual or other illegal sexual activity can receive capital punishment and/or flogging and prison time (Brynes, 2019). Furthermore, those speaking for equality and freedom of sexual orientation are severely punished as well. For example, last summer, a Yemeni blogger, living in Saudi Arabia at the time, was sentenced to 10 months in jail, fined almost \$3,000 USD, and now faces deportation to Yemen, the war-torn country from which he originally fled, for a social media post that exhibited his support for equal rights for the LGTBQ community in Saudi Arabia (Human Rights Watch, 2020). This shows how intense prosecution across this community is in Saudi Arabia, and how careful those living in the country must be to keep their support for the LGBTQ community or their LGBTQ identity secret.

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<sup>15</sup> The majority of Muslims in Saudi Arabia are Sunni Muslims.

<sup>16</sup> “a highly conservative and literalist interpretation of Sunni Islam” (Freedom House, 2020).

It should be clear now that freedom of speech or information is not allowed in Saudi Arabia, because dissidence (whether religious, political, or by any other means) is not permitted. Anyone who tries to voice opposition to the Saudi Kingdom, effectively acting as an authoritative government, risks imprisonment, maltreatment and death (Amnesty International, 2019). In a non-democratic country, the government's power goes relatively unchecked, and people living in Saudi Arabia will continue to suffer human rights abuses until the international community is committed and dedicated to criticizing Saudi Arabia's human rights violations and pressuring the country to change for the benefit of its peoples' freedom.

For this reason, the United Nations Human Rights Council would play a critical role in pushing for transformative policies that protect all people in Saudi Arabia. The fight for justice in Saudi Arabia needs to start with the UNHRC, because this will encourage the world to pay attention to the human rights violations in Saudi Arabia and show support for individuals and organizations speaking out for equality as well.

#### UN Human Rights Council and its Record

The thesis statement for this research is that the UNHRC operates in a biased manner by *disproportionately* targeting Israel and acts contradictory to its proclaimed purpose by allowing known human rights violators to sit as members. It has been also acknowledged at the beginning of the research that the thesis statement would be rejected if 1) Israel has committed more human rights abuses than Egypt, Jordan or Saudi Arabia and is fully deserving of the watchful and condemnatory "eyes" of the UN Human Rights

Council or 2) Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia are treated equally based on the number and severity of their human rights violations.

The purpose of the United Nations Human Rights Council is to “[promote and protect] all human rights around the globe” (UNHRC), and this is accomplished through having 47 UN member-states<sup>1</sup> join the council as sitting members who are then responsible for remaining vigilant to the issues and situations of human rights violations internationally and reprimanding the country or countries in question who are contributing or allowing such abuses to take place. The UN Human Rights Council can also (and usually does) provide recommendations and recourse in order to initiate active change in human rights violations globally. The objective of the UNHRC—to end human rights abuses around the world—is both an ambitious and honorable goal, but one that must be approached without bias in order to be effective.

The previous United Nations inter-governmental body that dealt with human rights violations (i.e. Commission on Human Rights) had to be reorganized into the Human Rights Council in 2006 due to the issues mentioned above (Blanchfield and Weber, 2020). Thus, it is important to assess the UNHRC and keep this council accountable for its actions just as the council is designed to do for the world. Are the past issues of the CHR still prevalent? Does the UNHRC have biases and double standards, such as allowing generally unqualified<sup>2</sup> member states to be elected and hold seats on the

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<sup>1</sup> The selection of these members consists of direct and secret ballots in the General Assembly of the United Nations and is based on equitable geographical distribution (UNHRC). For example, African states have 13 of the 47 seats available on the UN Human Rights Council; Asia-Pacific states have 13 seats as well; Latin America/Caribbean states have 8 seats; Western European and other states have 7 seats; and Eastern European states have 6 seats (UNHRC). Furthermore, each member of the council serves a 3-year term and can only sit on the council for two consecutive terms – a member can seek re-election following a term off the council (UNHRC).

<sup>2</sup> i.e., widely known human rights abusers

UN Human Rights Council, which are impacting the treatment of one certain country: The State of Israel? These are the questions that this research has set out to answer.

In evaluating the human rights violations of Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, it is clear, as far human rights violations are concerned, that the State of Israel 1) does not stand out in having more abuses than its other Middle East counterparts. In fact, one could argue that because there is more personal freedom in Israel, there may be a better quality of life for those living there; and 2) the human rights violations found in Israel, although inexcusable, are not issues exclusive to this one country. For example, immigrants are a vulnerable demographic in any country. In Israel, the state has failed to acknowledge its maltreatment of black Jews from Ethiopia emigrating to Israel under the ‘Right of Return’ law. Additionally, the plight of the Palestinian people is a recurring violation brought up against Israel, such as restrictions of the peoples’ movement to Israel and unwarranted violence against the people at the Gaza border. In comparison, immigrants, particularly Syrians, in Egypt have experienced discrimination, being subjected to arbitrary arrests and detentions, and as for the Palestinian people, Egypt has carried out nearly the same restrictions on the Gaza border as Israel has set in place.

In Jordan, immigrants face many challenges to enter the workforce, mainly stemming from nationalistic government policies on employment,<sup>3</sup> and to gain an education.<sup>4</sup> Due to the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, the following year Jordan experienced a high influx of immigrants to its country. In 2012, it was reported that Jordanian authorities had barred over one thousand Palestinians from entering Jordan, and they were forced to live in “makeshift refugee camps” for weeks despite that

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<sup>3</sup> Jordanians are given preference over non-Jordanians (Amnesty International, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> E.g., the “service card” policy (see footnote 8 under *Jordan and Human Rights Violations*)

Syrian refugees being permitted to enter Jordan at that time (Toameh, 2012). According to Anera, a humanitarian organization,<sup>5</sup> “most Palestinian refugees [today] have full citizenship in Jordan, but a large percentage live below the national poverty line and lack access to quality education and health care” (2020).

The immigrants working in Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, have experienced abusive treatment, harsh living or working conditions, coercion, such as finding employment through ‘sponsorship’ and/or forced labor (World Report, 2020). Female immigrant workers particularly have reported such abuses,<sup>6</sup> and little has been or is being done to help stop human rights violations immigrants in Saudi Arabia are enduring. Moreover, last year, a Saudi dissident and political activist shared that the Saudi government was tracking down Palestinians and arresting them for “suspicion of affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood” (Keyser, 2019), but the information used to determine these connections was vague and unsubstantiated as many of the Palestinians arrested were allegedly released later (Keyser, 2019).

The human rights violations found in Israel, are, in part, comparable to those also existing in Egypt and Jordan. It is important to point out that Saudi Arabia though has far more abuses occurring in its country than in any of the other three Middle East countries mentioned in this research. Thus, with this assessment in mind, one should be able to predict the United Nations Human Rights Council’s response to the human rights violations in Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. It would be reasonable to assume

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<sup>5</sup> Anera is based in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Jordan, and the purpose of Anera is to provide assistance to and ensure the well-being of refugees in ‘Palestine,’ Lebanon and Jordan (Anera).

<sup>6</sup> Refer to pages 40-41

that, given its gross human rights violations, Saudi Arabia would have more condemnatory UNHRC resolutions than Israel.

Egypt and Jordan have far more issues with freedom of speech, women's rights, and freedom of sexual orientation than Israel. On the other hand, Israel has more violations concerning the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank than either Egypt or Jordan. The conclusion drawn from this would be that Israel, Egypt and Jordan should be expected to have a similar number of resolutions. This is not to suggest that one type of violation could or should cancel out another, but this is meant to convey the reasonable idea that when three countries have comparable human rights violations that the international response, specifically by the UNHRC, to these violations would be close to the same.

Furthermore, noting that Israel has received many condemnatory resolutions and has never held a seat on the UN Human Rights Council, it might be reasonable to deduce that neither Egypt nor Jordan would have been able to sit as members on the council as well. This would also mean that Saudi Arabia would have not been or ever be considered for such a responsibility as keeping the world accountable for human rights violations when the country itself is one of the worst human rights abusers globally and particularly in the Middle East. Thus, what has been the UNHRC's response to human rights violations found in Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia?

On the following page, Table 2 contains the data, taken from the UN Watch Database, for Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The first heading is "UN Human Rights Council's Condemnatory Resolutions," which pertains to how many resolutions each country has received from the UNHRC (2006-present) condemning its human rights

violations (e.g., Table 1 provided this information but exclusively for the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the UNHRC). The second heading is “Sessions as UN Human Rights Council Members,” which shows the number of sessions (as a part of the three-year term period) each country has sat as members on the UNHRC.

<b>Table 2</b> Comparative Analysis			
UN Human Rights Council's Condemnatory Resolutions			
90	ISRAEL	00	JORDAN
00	EGYPT	00	SAUDI ARABIA
Sessions as UN Human Rights Council Member			
00	ISRAEL	02	JORDAN
06	EGYPT	12	SAUDI ARABIA
SOURCE: UN WATCH DATABASE			

From this table, one can see that Israel has received 90 condemnatory resolutions from the UN Human Rights Council, while never holding a seat on the council itself. Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia have never been the recipient of a UNHRC condemnatory resolution, so despite having human rights violations, the UNHRC has yet to see a need to bring international attention to these countries’ human rights abuses or has purposefully ignored said abuses. Another possibly explanation could be found in the members sitting on the council. Israel has never sat as a member on the UNHRC, but Egypt has joined two sessions, Egypt participated in six sessions, and Saudi Arabia, the

most out of the four Middle East countries in this comparative analysis, has been a part of *twelve* sessions on the UN Human Rights Council.

Countries may be less inclined to draft and pass a resolution against their own countries, so this may be a contributable reason for why there are no UNHRC condemnatory resolutions against Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, these three countries, among some others around the world, do not support the existence of Israel.<sup>7</sup> Thus, this may have influenced the heavy focus on Israel seen in the UNHRC. It is also important to remember that the State of Israel has a permanent item on the UNHRC agenda about the Palestinian territories, which no other country must endure such scrutiny at every UN Human Rights Council session. This could help explain the “spotlight” given to the State of Israel opposed to other countries. In order to paint a more vivid picture, Syria has received 35 such UNHRC resolutions while North Korea has been only condemned 13 times and Iran 10 times (compared to 90 resolutions targeting Israel). This is quite a stark difference in treatment.

In Table 3, the data on the UN General Assembly (UNGA), from 2015 to the present, is provided. By looking at this table, one can see how many condemnatory resolutions the UNGA has passed against Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, as well as the UNGA voting record of all four countries against the State of Israel.<sup>8</sup> This will show whether the UN Human Rights Council is an outlier with its treatment of Israel or whether the UNHRC merely plays its part alongside the greater UN General Assembly’s treatment of the country.

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<sup>7</sup> It could rather be said that these countries tolerate Israel out of economic, political, and social necessity.

<sup>8</sup> Naturally, this means Israel would have 00%.

**Table 3**  
UN General Assembly (GA)

**UNGA Condemnatory Resolutions**

<b>112</b>	<b>ISRAEL</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>JORDAN</b>
<b>00</b>	<b>EGYPT</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>SAUDI ARABIA</b>

**UNGA Voting Record against Israel (%)**

<b>N/A</b>	<b>ISRAEL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>JORDAN</b>
<b>100%</b>	<b>EGYPT</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>SAUDI ARABIA</b>

SOURCE: UN WATCH DATABASE

Israel was the recipient of 112 condemnatory resolutions through UN General Assembly. Similar to the data compiled for the UNHRC condemnatory resolutions, neither Egypt, Jordan, nor Saudi Arabia have received a UN General Assembly resolution that specifically criticized their countries' human rights violations. Furthermore, Egypt and Jordan, despite having semi-normalized relations with the State of Israel, have voted against the state 100% of the time in the UN General Assembly. With the new developments in the Middle East with other countries in the region also normalizing relations with Israel, Saudi Arabia appears to be heading down the same path, but Saudi Arabia has also voted against Israel 100% of the time.

The most startling piece of data from both Table 2 and Table 3 is how Saudi Arabia has been able to judge Israel, when Saudi Arabia treats women as second-class citizens alongside immigrants, there is no religious freedom or freedom of speech, no one can petition the government or make their grievances known. The LGBTQ community

must remain “underground” or fear severe punishment. There are changes occurring in Saudi Arabia, but these progressive developments are relatively recent and have, by no means, put the abuses found in Saudi Arabia on the same level as or better than the State of Israel. A possible explanation could be that Saudi Arabia is not a democracy and has never claimed to be one. Does this mean, therefore, that Saudi Arabia should be held to a different standard than to the standard expected of democracies? Should the UNHRC not only turn a blind eye to the human rights violations in this Middle East country but go one step further to actually allow this country on the UN Human Rights Council, which is designed to end global human rights violations, of which Saudi Arabia has many?

If the purpose of the UN Human Rights Council is to protect the human rights of all people around the world, then this council cannot ignore the abuses happening in one country due to the different political system of the country. Ergo, the argument that Saudi Arabia is treated differently than Israel because the country is not a democracy can be deemed a fallacy by examining the condemnatory resolutions against North Korea, Cuba or Venezuela. Furthermore, non-democracies<sup>9</sup> should be strictly observed for human rights violations, because in those countries, people need the UNHRC to speak out against the abuses that they are enduring and hold these countries accountable for their actions so that change could occur.

For example, it would make more sense for the UN Human Rights Council to focus on stopping female genitalia mutilation in Egypt or to fight for equal child custody and divorce laws in Saudi Arabia that discriminate against women rather than criticizing Israel for its more conservative approach to female “dress codes” in society and at

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<sup>9</sup> Or merely “self-described” democracies but the government still acts an authoritarian regime.

religious sites or the specific circumstances where women in academia are not to instruct male students a part of the ultra-orthodox community at university.

Given all of this information, what can be derived about the United Nations Human Rights Council and its treatment of Israel? Reexamining the thesis statement and the circumstances under which the thesis statement would be rejected, it is clear that Israel has not committed more human rights violations than Egypt, Jordan or Saudi Arabia, and therefore, it is not reasonable to expect that UNHRC had the justification to pass 90 condemnatory resolutions against Israel, which is more than the next top three countries' number of condemnatory resolutions<sup>10</sup> *combined*. Moreover, the evidence provided invalidates the second circumstance under which the thesis statement would be rejected. Israel is not treated the same as Egypt, Jordan or Saudi Arabia. As previously mentioned, Egypt and Jordan are comparable to Israel, and both of these countries have held seats on the UNHRC and have never had a UNHRC resolution condemn their human rights violations. Ergo, the thesis statement should not be rejected.

The United Nations Human Rights Council routinely criticizes Israel excessively and unreasonably. This claim holds up under scrutiny when comparing Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia's human rights violations with the response of the UN Human Rights Council in order to accurately show if there were any hypocrisy and biases impacting the equal treatment of countries being condemned through this council. The evidence suggests that the UNHRC takes the human rights violations in Israel far more seriously than in those in either Egypt, Jordan or Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the UNHRC is relentless and disproportionately harsh in its condemnation of the State of Israel.

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<sup>10</sup> Syria – 35, North Korea – 13, and Iran – 10

Possible reasons for why the UNHRC demonstrates such bias against Israel could be that countries that believe Israel is on “stolen” land or are religiously against the idea of a “Jewish” state have been and are allowed to sit on the UN Human Rights Council as official members with voting privileges. This will obviously result in more condemnation of Israel. Additionally, the Middle East and other countries tend to focus their sole attention to the plight of the Palestinian people, which obviously will bring any actions taken by Israel into the discussion, given the Gaza Conflict. As a simple observation, Middle Eastern countries may push to center human rights violation discussions on the Palestinian people and Israel, because this would deflect the attention from their own human rights violations. Although the situation is likely more complicated, this could be another (albeit small) reason for why the world keeps such a close eye on Israel.

This poses an important question: *if the world is constantly watching Israel—and only the State of Israel—then who is responsible for staying vigilant and keeping the rest of the 192 countries in the United Nations accountable for human rights violations?* The answer would be that when the magnifying glass is kept on Israel, a focus which has been determined to be unwarranted and blatantly partisan through this research, means that there is little to no accountability for other countries. This is a problem, because this would prevent the UNHRC from fulfilling its purpose.

The tone of UN resolutions in general is drastically different when speaking out against Israel versus any other country as well. According to the UN Watch database, words such as ‘condemning/strongly condemns,’ ‘deploring,’ and ‘expressing grave concern’ are used when drafting a UN Human Rights Council resolution about human rights violations in Israel. This would not be problematic if other resolutions about other

countries' human rights violations did not more routinely use words such as 'welcoming (the action of),' 'acknowledging (the participation of),' and 'commends (the hosting of)' instead. The tone demonizes the State of Israel for human rights issues in the country, and this certainly never acknowledges the progress Israel has made or the efforts going into creating change as well.

In the final analysis, "the numbers alone reveal the UN's irrational obsession with one nation. Even though those who deem Israel deserving of criticism cannot dispute that this amounts to an extreme case of selective prosecution...and by disproportionately focusing on Israel to such an extreme degree, the UN neglects the plight of the millions of human rights victims around the world" (UN Watch). There needs to be a shift in the United Nations and the UN Human Rights Council where equality of treatment exists, and the first step is acknowledging the hypocrisy of UNHRC sitting members and the biases against Israel, and then act accordingly, by removing members that have gross human rights violations and the permanent item on the UNHRC agenda whose only purpose is to bring unfair and disproportionate attention to the State of Israel. Once this is accomplished, the UNHRC should function as originally designed and address the human rights violations of *all* countries.

## Conclusion

There could be many factors that influence the decisions and voting of the UN Human Rights Council, and some of these factors could explain why Saudi Arabia has not been criticized for its human rights violations, such as its oil industry. With such a large oil reserve, Saudi Arabia supplies much of the world's, particularly the United States'

and other industrialized countries', oil products (House of Cards, 2015). Saudi Arabia also has a strategic geopolitical importance in the Middle East, so this could have resulted in Saudi Arabia's stronger than expected, given its mass human rights violations, diplomatic ties to the Western world (House of Cards, 2015). Furthermore, an additional explanation for the lack of UNHRC resolutions condemning Saudi Arabia could simply be that Saudi Arabia has sat, for multiple sessions, as a member on the council. With the example of Saudi Arabia, it is clear that the UNHRC can be swayed or at least become more lenient towards one specific country for a multitude of biased reasons, which does reflect or support the UNHRC's intended and stated purpose. Ergo, to find that the UNHRC has discriminated against the State of Israel and treated this one specific country more negatively than other countries should not come as a shock.

To have biases is not necessarily the issue as it is impractical to assume that no person, country or governmental entity does not have its own opinions or agendas. Having biases becomes a problem when they are not acknowledged and then corrected (or actively minimized). For instance, the UNHRC continues to proclaim that it has been fair to all countries and does not discriminate against Israel. This has been shown to be inaccurate given the data provided in this research. Thus, the UNHRC should admit its faults and biases, and move forward with a new accountability (i.e., strictly enforcing known human rights abusers to be unable to sit as members on the council). The UNHRC needs to function with transparency in order to truly meet its goal of stopping human rights violations around the globe. The solution is basic in principle, but given the issues found in the previous Commission of Human Rights and now the UN Human Rights

Council, transparency and objective evaluation of human right violations appears to be difficult to implement in practice.

It can be argued that the impact and power that the UNHRC actually has today on a country is so minimal that being targeted by the UNHRC would have virtually no negative effect on a country. Despite its waning influence and power,<sup>1</sup> there is real harm that the UNHRC causes by discriminating against the State of Israel, and the UNHRC needs to be held accountable for its actions. There has been a rise in anti-Semitic hate crimes in the United States and across the globe. For example, according to the FBI,<sup>2</sup> in 2019 hate crimes against the Jewish people rose by 14% from the 835 attacks recorded in 2018 in the United States (Sales, et al., 2020). Alternatively, one could simply state that “hate crimes against Jews comprised 62% of all hate crimes based on religion, up from 58% in both of the previous two years” (Sales, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, in a 2018 survey of Jews perceptions in the European Union, it was found that 89% of Jews fear being the subject of an anti-Semitic attack in their lifetime and most, if the victim of a hate crime, will not report it to the authorities because they believe it would be pointless (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018). One of the major findings from this survey is that anti-Semitism is being normalized in European countries so much so that Jews that are the subject of a hate crime might simply ‘move on’ from the event or take it to be trivial due to its frequency (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018). Statements, along the lines of ‘Israelis behave like Nazis towards Palestinians,’ ‘Jews have too much power in [insert European

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<sup>1</sup> This might be due to the apparent lack of equal treatment in the UNHRC.

<sup>2</sup> According to the ADL, the FBI numbers most likely do not represent the true number of hate crimes committed against the Jewish people (Sales, et al., 2020).

country],’ and ‘Jews are not capable of integrating into society,’ are commonly heard<sup>3</sup> amongst the Jewish community in Europe (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018, pp. 24).

Anti-Israel (rooted in anti-Semitism ideology) movements, such as the BDS<sup>4</sup> movement, have become increasingly popular and arguably more widely accepted in recent years. Alarmingly, memberships in the BDS movement have grown rapidly on college campuses in the United States and other countries as well. Often masked as simply being ‘pro-Palestinian,’ the BDS movement not only condemns and criticizes the State of Israel but has also called for the complete “dismantling of the Zionist project” altogether (Mendelsohn, 2021). The BDS movement fully supports placing sanctions on Israel and boycotting any and all Israeli companies in the name of “peace.”

The BDS movement has become emboldened with the actions of the UNHRC. In 2020, the UNHRC published a list of more than 100 companies doing business with Israeli companies and within Jewish communities in the West Bank as a way to “blacklist” these companies, so that such business dealings might cease. The reasoning given at the time was to bring attention to the companies “deemed by the UNHRC to be complicit in encouraging, building, and maintaining ‘Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan’” (Cohen, 2020). Later this year even, the UNHRC is expected to vote on strengthening the “arms embargo against Israel” to limit countries from transferring arms to Israel (Lazaroff, 2021). Thus, if the UNHRC has and continues to participate and lead the way

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<sup>3</sup> The total percentage of frequency is dependent on the country in question, but the range is from 11%-51% (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

in this type Israel discrimination, then this legitimizes the anti-Semitic BDS movement and delegitimizes the very existence of Israel.

This is not to suggest that the UNHRC resolutions condemning the State of Israel were drafted and passed solely out of hate of the country or with the purpose of exclusively discriminating against Israel, but these condemnatory UNHRC resolutions can fuel the flames of hatred, upon which the BDS movement is built and could even validate anti-Semitic views held by individuals. Thus, the rise in anti-Semitism and hate crimes against the Jewish people may have a correlation with individuals feeling justified in their hate and manifest it through violent action and/or abusive and racist speech. Ergo, this means that what the UNHRC says matters. The resolutions that the UNHRC passes matter. The UN Human Rights Council is supposed to lead and keep the world accountable for its human rights violations, which means that the UNHRC should be the example of how countries (and individuals) should not target and inaccurately criticize Israel. Furthermore, the discriminatory permanent agenda item, singling out the State of Israel, must be removed, because it is undeserved, and it undoubtedly sends the message targeting Israel is accepted and expected. This is not the message the UNHRC should be sending to the world. The recommendation, through conducting this research, is that the UNHRC drastically and publicly corrects its biases, or a new entity within the United Nations needs to be established that can handle dealing with global human rights violations with transparency and accuracy.

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