

Student Perspectives



Rocio Mendez-Roco
Class of 2017

I stand with NU Coalition for Peace as a Latina who firmly believes in the importance of fighting for human rights and who acknowledges that the equality we seek should not be limited to Israel-Palestine. I believe that narrowing the lens through which we view peace to one side of the border both inherently limits the rights of another minority population and also contradicts the very foundation of NU Divest, by not acknowledging the rights of Israelis that would be violated should BDS accomplish its goals. A political action such as endorsing the BDS movement, which implies the goal of ending Israel as a sovereign Jewish state, is not a solution at all as it would further marginalize a global minority that is extremely diverse. Like NU Divest, I respect that acknowledging issues surrounding human rights are of great importance, especially within my own country and Latin America, as these conflicts directly affect people I share a culture with, but I cannot stand with a group that does not transparently acknowledge the right to existence of a state made up of individuals from many backgrounds, that would ultimately be ostracized further if divestment and the BDS movement behind it were to succeed. As a woman of color, I stand in solidarity with individuals on both sides of the conflict and ask that you consider peace and dialogue before divestment if you want to be inclusive in supporting human rights for all.



Yair Sakols
Class of 2016

I've always found it hard to explain my relationship with Israel. My connection to the land and the country runs deep, and has grown only deeper since spending a gap year in Jerusalem, a summer in Tel Aviv, and watching my two triplet sisters move to Israel. Israel offers me glimmers of solace and comfort in the face of rising Anti-Semitism in Europe and at home in America. It is a democratic country in the middle of a vast desert, where Jews and Arabs alike can yell at each other on the floor of the Knesset, much like I yell at my sisters when we are at odds. I still call America my home and plan to do so for the foreseeable future, but that does not diminish the strength of a connection that runs through my parents, grandparents, and fellow Jews around the world. I do not have to agree with all its actions to love Israel so strongly, for just as you might find disagreements and conflict in my strongest relationships, you will also find a deep rooted trust and love that remains true throughout time. There are two peoples with two (or more) sets of



Sara Torres
Class of 2018

As a Jew and a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I find that the intersection of my faith and sexual orientation lends itself nicely to supporting Israel as a state. Israel continually has one of the most LGBT-friendly militaries and is ranked as one of the top gay travel destinations. As a lesbian, it is vitally important to me that Israel continue to exist because Israel is the only country in the Middle East where members of the LGBTQ+ community can live without fear of persecution. It is a known fact that countries surrounding Israel such as Jordan, Egypt, and Palestinian territories culturally do not accept homosexuality and even prosecute and kill members of the LGBT community. Due to this violation of human rights, I cannot support a movement that seeks to end the state of Israel.



Leanna Smith
Class of 2016

I recently spent five months living and traveling in Europe where, much to the dismay of the people who continuously solicited me for directions (unsuccessfully), I was mistaken as Spanish. This experience marked the first time any speculations about my ethnic background have been somewhat accurate. My mom's side of the family is originally from Spain and was forced to relocate to Morocco during the Inquisition. Needless to say, we have a long experience of feeling unwelcome and unsafe in our homes as Jews. Since coming to Northwestern, I have been prodded with questions like "what are you" and have heard the term "racially ambiguous" thrown around. I don't pretend to be a victim of racism -- I have no idea what that's like, and I know that these questions stem from a place of curiosity and interest. However, I have also experienced the unequivocal sense of belonging that is unique to Israel, that I have yet to experience anywhere else. While I am always happy to share my family's story, in Israel it is implicit -- it is understood and the responsibility to retell it and keep it alive is shared. My mom's family left Morocco in the '60s, but my grandfather is buried in Jerusalem. We can't go back -- and don't wish to return to life in Morocco or Spain, but we can go to Israel.



Eli Bleemer
Class of 2016

a war that neither side wants. For the sake of my family, both current and future, I long for a two state solution that fosters peace and understanding in the Middle East.



Nikki Adler
Class of 2015

During high school, I participated in a program called Write On For Israel. The program was not drawing a one-state map, but rather providing us with the background and resources to intellectually evaluate and discuss a complicated issue. With that program, I stood in bomb shelters in Sderot, a town on the Israeli border that was being hit by rockets daily. I was scared for an hour, standing with people who were scared for months at a time. I also stood at the physical blockade that Israel had just built surrounding the West Bank, which represented a trade embargo that Israel placed on the Palestinian territories. We challenged the need for the blockade and evaluated its effects. If you dig up dirt on each side, you will find it. The Israel Defense Force is defending a group of people who have been in a perpetual state of self-defense for two thousand years. I have hugged some of my best friends in the world as they began their service in the Israel Defense Force. While it is amazing to see the passion in their eyes for a cause they believe in, I wish they didn't need to fight for their right to a home. I also don't believe that their neighbors should continue to live in this unfortunate situation. I believe that both parties deserve a home, because both have been deprived of a peaceful home. As we study at a world class institution, our peers are in constant fear of their lives and the futures of their people. I believe that both peoples deserve a home.



Iszy Licht
Class of 2015

I have gained a greater appreciation for the intricacies of the holy land of Israel. I have explored the wondrous beauty of its cities, deserts, and hills while also recognizing the harsh realities of Israel and the Middle East. I appreciate the allure that overcomes each Jewish American who makes Aliyah but I also clearly identify my serious challenges with Israel. I sometimes struggle to find meaning in Israel but I still identify myself as a Zionist. I strongly support the democratic and holy ideals of Israel but I also recognize that Israel cannot survive solely by idealistic aspirations. Overall, Israel is holy place for me, where Judaism is enlightened and I feel comfortable, safe, and spiritual.



Evan Fox
Class of 2017

fall (a little under 7 months total) in Jerusalem and Amman. One conversation stands out in particular from my time in the Middle East, which took place on an August Shabbat evening in the ultra-orthodox West Jerusalem neighborhood of Har Nof. I was speaking with a man around my parents' age. His son, unlike many of Israel's most religious Jews, had chosen not to opt out of his army service, instead joining the elite Givati Infantry Brigade. During this past Summer's Operation Protective Edge, his son was spending much of his time going in and out of Gaza, so, unsurprisingly, the man was incredibly concerned about his safety. What I best remember about the conversation, however, was an exchange we shared after he chanted a long list of prayers, which the man then translated into English for me. He prayed for his son, and for Israel's security, but also for the people of Gaza and the West Bank. He prayed for peace. I asked him what he thought might lead to the peace for which he prayed, and his answer, though I'll have to paraphrase, made me strongly believe that such an outcome was achievable. He said that although he wasn't entirely sure, he was sure about two things: that killing one another was not achieving anything and that seven million Israelis and seven million Arabs were not going to just disappear or relocate. He said the only answer would be one that might frustrate Israelis and Palestinians alike in the short term, but would ultimately lead to a better life for all of them. And he added that he was willing to endure that uncomfortable period, so long as it meant peace and security for him, his family, his nation, and families like his living in the Palestinian territories. I believe this man and share this sentiment, and I believe in the possibility of a sustainable, permanent, Israeli-Palestinian peace.



Alon Schneidman
Class of 2017

Growing up in Israel, I was one of the many children who heard the phrase, "once you get older, there'll be peace and you won't need to serve in the military." Sadly, this little white lie has been the saying for generations now, and sure enough, when I turned 18, I was enlisted along with all of my friends. There is nothing war-loving about Israeli society, although outside forces often mistakenly depict it this way. Parents would not send their children to serve in the IDF if the security threats were not very real.

I am an Israeli left-winger, a liberal Zionist and a veteran. I believe in a two-state solution, and I think the current status quo is unbearable for both Palestinians and Israelis from a human rights perspective and from an ethical one. At the same time, undermining the security of Israel will not help bring peace to either people. True peace and bilateral justice will only come through dialogue of committed leaders on both sides.



Mitchell Caminer
Class of 2016

While studying abroad this Fall, I befriended an Israeli student, Niv. He's older than me, like all Israeli students that serve their mandatory three years of military service. He

My name is Evan and I am a Northwestern sophomore. I stand against the occupation and the settlements, and stand for a two state solution for Israel and Palestine. Let me bring you back to a time before Israel. The year is 1936 in Dessau, Germany, where a young, wide-eyed first grader by the name of Leah Reinkraut walks into her class; unaware of the situation of her country. Her six-year-old classmates, encouraged by the teacher, begin to mock her and call her a dirty Jew. The year is now 1946, World War II is over, and Leah Reinkraut returns to home to find 17 members of her family killed by atrocities of the Nazi regime. Leah Reinkraut is my grandmother.

The year is now 2014 in Jericho, Area A, West Bank. I find myself in the ruins of the Ancient City of Jericho, situated adjacent to the 'Ain Es-Sultan Refugee Camp, established in the wake of the 1948 War. I sit down with a Palestinian who works there: his name is Mahmoud. He tells me his side of this conflict, and how it affects him as a resident of this refugee camp. We soon come to realize we have something in common: we are both descendants of refugees. His grandparents lived through the 1948 War as my grandmother lived through World War II in Europe. Both narratives are equally as poignant, and both narratives equally are as valid. While we did not agree on every issue concerning the politics of the conflict, we shook hands, hugged, and parted ways.

The year is now 2015. Chalk on Sheridan Road reads "Zionism equals racism," Jewish students are called racists, and are attacked and antagonized for their political beliefs on this campus. How is it possible that I can have a real conversation with someone whom I have never met in an allegedly hostile area of the world, but at Northwestern where we value intellectual analysis and pluralistic inclusion, I am attacked for my beliefs? This is why I stand firmly against BDS. At this university, where discussion and conversation are the norm in academic settings, our side of the conflict is unjustly silenced due to a lack of shared recognition.

studies economics and wants to start a business, and he exuded the entrepreneurial spirit. He liked the Parisian cafes and never turned down a good meal. He is a caring and trustworthy friend.

Early in September, when it still felt like summer in the sunlight, Niv and I sipped "cafés" in the courtyard. We were talking while he smoked a Newport and a student next to us put out his cigarette and turned to Niv and asked in English: "Where are you from? I recognize your accent." The answer is never so easy, never so simple.

And as I watched my Israeli friend and Palestinian peer fumble over English niceties just weeks after the ceasefire in Gaza, I realized how much work we as a global community have to do. If Israelis and Palestinians still struggle to "bavarder" over espresso and cigarettes in Paris, how can the bigwigs hammer out territory swaps and water disputes in Jerusalem? Peace, like so many other things, remains a process.

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