

OPPONENT TESTIMONY TO HOUSE BILL 291

Before the House Development Committee

Chairman Hoops, Vicechair Lorenz, Ranking Member Brownlee, and the rest of the respectable members of the House Development Committee: I sincerely thank you for the chance to present my opponent testimony and proposed changes to House Bill 188. I want to preface that I was before this committee back in June to speak on HB 291, which sought to create a trade alliance between Ohio and several other countries, including Israel. I hope to convey my dismay and complete disappointment in seeing this bill reemerge after presenting legitimate security and safety concerns about Israel when HB 291 was on the table.

THE CORE OF THE BILL

When I spoke on HB 291, I believed it to be a bill with potential. That potential is killed in the face of HB 188.

When looking at this bill and 291, I found that at its core, this bill seeks to make Ohio a strong state which thrives on international collaboration and partnerships to create a diverse job market, expand current technology research, and help local Ohio businesses reach out to larger client bases globally. I saw potential when the bill had numerous countries in good standing involved, but such hope has been destroyed in this bill. I want to be clear: this bill is beyond any redeemable amendments.

This bill clearly does not serve the best interests of Ohio. This bill not only puts Ohioans at risk, but you threaten the security of the entire United States more so than it already is.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND MODERN RELEVANCE

In 1939, during the Holocaust, Alfred Sloan Jr., then the acting chairman of General Motors, stated: "According to my belief . . . an international business operating throughout the world should conduct its operations in strictly business terms, without regard to the political beliefs of its management, or the political beliefs of the country in which it is operating."¹ This was how he justified continuing to do business in Nazi Germany, thus directly supporting the Nazi government and furthering the genocide against Jews that happened in the 1930s and 40s.

This is a morally reprehensible justification on neglecting taking adverse action on a nation committing a genocide. I know the other testimonies of my comrades and colleagues will detail the genocide Israel is inflicting upon Palestine, so I will

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<https://www.historynewsnetwork.org/article/the-us-response-to-the-holocaust-was-part-of-a-lon>

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not explain it in detail, but I will state it for the record in no uncertain terms: Israel is committing a genocide in Palestine. Israel has committed genocide in the past against the Palestinian people. Israel has violated the ceasefire agreement President Trump worked to put in place. Thus, a question I would like you all to consider, if we were all currently gathered here today but in 1940, and our country considered Germany its greatest ally in Europe, but this exact bill read “Germany” instead of “Israel,” would you pass it? Would you strengthen a political alliance with a genocidal, blood-thirsty ethno-state seeking to eliminate “undesirables” and establish a “supreme race?” Or would you see an issue in the timing of codifying an alliance with a nation committing some of the most horrid crimes you have ever heard?

We have rational, reasonable cause to believe Israel is more likely to resume their slaughter of Palestinians than we do to believe they will work to achieve reasonable, lasting peace. Israel has proven to be a nation that has and is actively betraying our own president’s efforts to create lasting peace. What does this say about how such an “ally” sees our nation?

ISRAEL IS A SECURITY CONCERN, NOT AN ALLY

One thing that is crucial to understand is the threat to state and national security this bill poses. I would like to discuss Israel’s unreliable history that makes this partnership unstable and a betrayal of your constituents’ trust in you as our elected officials should you choose to pass it.

This bill specifically focuses on “Specific industries, emerging technology opportunities and, innovation clusters that warrant support from Ohio and Israel.” Would this bind Ohioans to supporting Israel’s cyberwarfare capabilities? Would this tie our state to war crimes, atrocities, and acts of betrayal not only towards peace for Palestine, but towards our own government?

This is a highly concerning and plausible fear considering Israel’s unreliable history of espionage, betrayal of US support, and refusal to allow NSO Group to be adequately investigated for abuse of the Pegasus spyware system.

First, Israel’s espionage of the United States has been the most concerning amongst any so-called “ally” of the United States. In 2014, a report on Israel found that “[Israel]’s efforts to steal U.S. secrets under the cover of trade missions and joint defense technology contracts have ‘crossed red lines.’”² This is concerning as part of this bill intends to create more contracts in the hopes of advancing electronic and cyber capabilities. How can we trust them with such

² <https://www.newsweek.com/israel-wont-stop-spying-us-249757>

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sensitive data and research when they are going behind our federal government's back to steal it anyway? This is like seeing a thief in your home and choosing to leave your doors unlocked instead of barricading the door to keep them out.

Secondly, the Trump administration is well-known for citing China as a concern for the United States, at times seeming to indicate China is this country's top enemy. Yet, Israel has had multiple incidents of giving secret US technology to China. In one instance from 1994, "[Israel] sold China the plans for the [Lavi Fighter Bomber, a deadly air weapon] and the associated secret U.S. technology. This has enabled the Chinese to build their own version of this new generation of fighter aircraft."³ 1994 was over 30 years ago, so perhaps this is not a concern for the future...is what I wish I could say to chalk this up to being a one-off. But in 2013, Israel did it again, sending China "a miniature refrigeration system manufactured ... used for missiles and in electro-optic equipment." Reports by Aretz Sheva, an Israeli newspaper, cites further future concerns in which it can foresee Israel to continue giving away our country's secrets and information to the United States.⁴

Lastly, please consider Israel's involvement in protecting NSO Group's spyware, known as Pegasus. Pegasus is cyberware that is supposedly used for counterterrorism, but has a history of being abused and targeting civilians and journalists.⁵ Meta Platforms took legal action against Pegasus, filing a high-stakes lawsuit in the United States to seek damages related to the NSO Group's use of the software to hack WhatsApp users. Yet Israel's government intervened and attempted to hinder justice by seizing documents about Pegasus spyware in an effort to prevent the company from being able to comply with demands made by WhatsApp in a US court to hand over information about the invasive technology. "Documents suggest the seizures were part of an unusual legal manoeuvre created by Israel to block the disclosure of information about Pegasus, which the government believed would cause "serious diplomatic and security damage" to the country."⁶ Pegasus was forced to pay substantial damages to Meta, but they were also found to target iOS and Android operating systems, all without valid reason and as a severe abuse of their capabilities.⁷

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<https://www.wrmea.org/1996-january/u.s.-military-technology-sold-by-israel-to-china-upsets-asian-power-balance.html>

⁴ <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2014/06/06/how-israel-has-betrayed-america/>

⁵ <https://us.norton.com/blog/emerging-threats/pegasus-spyware#>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/news/article/2024/jul/25/israel-tried-to-frustrate-us-lawsuit-over-pegasus-spyware-leak-suggests>

⁷ <https://about.fb.com/news/2025/05/winning-the-fight-against-spyware-merchant-nso/>

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I respectfully request every one of you consider the repercussions of giving Israel *increased* access to our sensitive research and data at a time where, realistically, if any other country did any of the aforementioned things, we would be sanctioning them at best. Think of what they have done when we draw a red line, and to now permit them open access to the hard work, research, and technological innovations of the innocent, trusting, and hard-working citizens of Ohio may be a reckless decision that wantonly ignores Israel's clear disregard for American integrity.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND NEXT STEPS

I understand the proponents of this bill seek to enhance the economic endeavors of Ohio business and the jobforce of our state through international partnerships. I am in firm support of this principle. However, I need to be unequivocal in my condemnation of Israel, and someone must speak out about the legitimate concern for the safety and integrity of the people of the State of Ohio. The way we execute this is of crucial importance for what precedents we set and how we value our people.

I respectfully demand you all vote to strike down this bill. Not only is the action of partnering with Israel for any reason morally reprehensible in the face of Israel's ongoing international law violations⁸ and genocide of the Palestinian people, but the last thing we as a state should be doing is encouraging relations with a state committing an unconscionable evil. Furthermore, as explained, Israel is a nation known for taking information and technology from our country and giving it to non-allied nations such as China. They do not respect our legal system nor our integrity.

Please consider these suggestions. It is wonderful for us to have our own trade commission to continue to stabilize and grow our economy. But it is in no way acceptable to continue to entertain strengthening alliances and permanently codify relations with a country known for its continuous war-mongering, betrayal of our country, and illegal practices with cyber technology.

Thank you,
Abrial Mahmoud
AMP Columbus

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<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/12/israels-assault-foundations-international-law-must-have-consequences-un>