

UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A CASE STUDY OF ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

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Abstract— United States Middle Eastern Policy has so much significance that it is developed in the full brightness of media attention and subjected to be vast discussion. For the last sixty years the U.S.A. has been playing fighting roles in the Middle East. As a champion of liberal ideals it waged war to install democracy and as a supporter of dictators to protect American interest. But in the Middle Eastern policy, the Israel-Palestine conflict is more important. Woodrow Wilson firstly supported Zionism publicly and his role was crucial in awarding of British Mandate for Palestine. He extended support to Zionism in spite of King-Crane Commission's report of overwhelmingly opposition of Arabs to establish a Jewish home. President Truman supported the U.N. Partition plan and immediately recognized the Israel after its establishment. More over after 9/11 the convergence of Zionism and United States has reached its highest point and "terrorism" became their shared rhetoric. In this paper we will discuss why US foreign policy is so much significant in Middle East and why the Israel has much influence on American policy. How far America succeeded to solve the Palestine issue and if not then why?

Index Terms — introduction, factors influence the Foreign Policy, developments in foreign policy, US as a peace broker, US veto in favor of Israel, Conclusion

I. INTRODUCTION

It is generally viewed that United States was not much interested in Middle East or Palestine before the World War II. It is only after World War II that the significance and importance of the area for American security was developed.¹ After 1945 US became involved in the affairs of Middle East because of cold war. Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower tried to maintain access to petroleum resources, military bases, and lines of communication in Middle East and to keep away the Soviet Union to these assets. After the creation of Israel its foreign policy's main concern became to protect Israel at any cost. Use of veto

power In UNO is major example of it. Bush doctrine, launched after 9/11, made major changes in its foreign policy and new interest has emerged.

A. Factors Influence the Foreign Policy

Generally US foreign policy towards Middle East has been driven by geostrategic, economic and domestic concerns. Middle East has always had extraordinary geostrategic importance. It sits at the junction of three continents and contained the land bridges, passageways and narrows. It has vast natural wealth and diversity, geographical centrality and easy to access. Apart from this the area was also the cradle of religion, science and art. The three monotheistic religions, science, philosophy, literature and art of the ancient world originated here.²

Economically Middle East supplies 32 per cent of the World's oil and has 58 per cent of the globe's proven reserves. Oil is the central element of the economy in the region. Because of the importance of oil to the World economy the external powers have engaged in the Middle East. When oil was discovered in Iran and then In Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf the great powers concentrated on the area on the eve of World War II.³

As the United States economy rapidly expanded during and after the Second World War and its economy is very much depend on oil, compelled the US government to view the Middle East oil fields as a crucial issue for national security. That's why the United States has been much busy to remove troublesome rulers or support and install those who are familiar and closer to Washington. In 1953, Iranian army with the help of US launched a coup which removed Musaddeq who was responsible for nationalization of oil industry and placed the pro-American shah. In Iraq when Abdul Karim Qasim was near to nationalize the Iraqi oil company the American embassy in Baghdad established ties with Army officers consequently a second coup in February

² Khalidi, R., *Resurrecting Empire Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East*. London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd.20004, P.76.

³ MacQueen, B., *An introduction to Middle East Politics*. London: Sage,2013, p.215.

¹ Abu-Lughod, I., *the Transformation of Palestine*. Evanstone: Northwestern University Press,1971,p.387.

1963, took place ousting Karim Qasim. During oil embargo in 1973, President Nixon sent Henry Kissinger to the Middle East to directly intervene in the conflict. He convinced OPEC to lift oil embargo and finally succeeded in 1974.⁴

Domestically Israel has enjoyed strong support from America. Israel has the ability to get the American public support in favor of itself. No doubt President is responsible for shaping America's policy, however individuals, companies and lobby groups also play important role in shaping the Foreign policy. Leading organization in American lobbies is the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Though the American Jewry constitutes only 2 or 3 percent of electorate, they have one of the highest voter turnouts. In US, Anti-Defamation league is regarded as a civil liberation organization but its main work is to prevent critical discussion about the policies of Israel and in Israel it is described as "one of the main pillars of Israeli propaganda in the United States."⁵

B. Developments in Foreign Policy

Woodrow Wilson was the first American president who publicly supported Zionism by granting to Britain of the League of Nation mandate for Palestine. Although he set up a fact-finding commission to examine the wishes of the inhabitants of the area, he did not consider the recommendation of commission. King-Crane commission discovered that Arab population of Palestine overwhelmingly opposed to the establishment of a Jewish national home. In spite of it Wilson extended American support to Zionism and awarded to Britain mandate for Palestine. Following the path of his predecessor Henry Truman overrode the advice of his foreign policy advisors and supported the UN partition plan that was favorable to Zionism. He justified his support in these words: "I'm sorry gentleman but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents."

American policy has changed time to time according to the image of US in Middle East with respect to Palestinian issue. President Roosevelt and his successor Truman both promised ibn Saud that United States would take steps as regards with Palestine only after consulting its Arab ally, but US always ignored this promise. Later making its image clear in the Middle East, US stood firm against the tripartite and in favor of Egypt during Suez crisis in 1956 and forced Israel to withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza strip in 1957. During mid-1960s when leading Arab states aligned with the Soviet Union due to their inability to remain nonaligned between the two great blocks and to gain weapons, thereafter United States began

to provide full military and economic aid to Jewish State and Israel became first of American aid recipients.

Although United States supported Iran, Turkey and several Arab countries at different level, its support for Israel eventually extended after 1960s. The aid also includes advanced weapons systems which were not delivered even to NATO allies. During last phase of 1968-70 Egyptian Israeli war of attrition, United States delivered to Israel several top of the line F-4 Phantom fighter bombers per month. These Phantoms were crashed by Egypt, therefore to avoid much hostility between super powers Secretary of United States William Rogers succeeded to gain cease fire for three years but he secured failure to achieve negotiation between them because Israel refused to enter into serious negotiation.

Henry Kissinger soon after 1970 had taken control of American Middle East policy and until 1973 he pursued the benign-neglect approach. Again Egyptian Syrian attack on Israeli forces in the occupied Sinai Peninsula and Golden Heights forced him to pay attention to this problem. The primarily aim to involve in this crisis was to win Egypt and keep away Soviet Union, not to maintain peace. Kissinger paid very less attention to Jordan and the Palestinians. President Carter followed the same approach of ignoring Palestinians. However in 1977 Carter made an innovative statement about the need for Palestine state and strove to make contact with PLO through his UN ambassador Andrew Young. Carter very soon came back to these innovative stands because of penetrating pressure of Israeli lobby.

During Reagan administration Israel get warming support from American side. At that time Israel adopting aggressive settlement policies and gradually swallowing up the land in the West Asia what they named "Judea and Samaria". Reagan government gave a green indication to these activities of Israel and also during the Israel's invasion of Lebanon and expulsion of PLO from Beirut in 1982 he supported Israel. The result was the lethal attack on American Marines, diplomatic facilities and academics in Beirut. At Madrid Secretary of state James Baker attempted to together all parties to the Arab-Israel conflict but the perception was prevailed that United States was working under the Israeli pressure. Therefore negotiation ended fruitlessly in Washington for ten sessions. Clinton administration passed its eight years of office without concentrating on this complex issue. Only just four months before November 2000 election Clinton convened a meeting at Camp David in July 2000 invited Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Arafat with inadequate preparations.

George W. Bush endorsed the Mitchell Report on Middle East conflict. George Mitchell was assigned to head a fact finding mission to investigate the roots of conflict by Clinton. Bush sent his top diplomat Secretary of State Colin Powell to Middle East to meet fresh leadership. But after the eruption of second intifada US policy made a shift and Yasir Arafat the most frequent visitors to White House

⁴ Stoker(ed), M. C., *US Foreign Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.232.

⁵ Chomsky, N., *Fateful Triangle the United States, Israel & Palestine*. New Delhi: India Research press, 2004, p.14.

became unwelcome in Washington because of Israeli perception about him- a terrorist. Bush also went further suggesting Palestinians to elect new leader and when Mahmoud Abbas named as a new Prime Minister a major submit of Palestinian, Israeli, US and Jordanian leader took place in the Jordanian port of city of Aqaba. Bush's effort was only pressurized Palestinians for Israeli benefit therefore this roadmap became the target of Palestinian criticism.

Obama entered the office asserting that Israel-Palestine conflict would be in top priority of him. In his speech in Cairo in June 2009 announced that "the situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable. And America will not turn our back on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity and a state of their own." On the issue of Israeli colonization he endorsed that America would follow same policy which Washington has subscribed since 1967. He demanded that Israel should stop the expansion of settlements as a precondition for resuming negotiation but Netanyahu refused to do so and America was not in a position to apply pressure to enforce its demand. Netanyahu promised a ten month freeze on settlement expansion but settlement remained continue. Prominent Israeli pundit Akiva Elder rightly said, "Only an idiot would say Israel has frozen settlement activity."⁶ When Obama appointed John Kerry as his secretary of State for his second tenure, Kerry tried to restart negotiation but soon after his efforts latest Gaza war erupted.⁷

C. US as a Peace Broker

The United States made lot of efforts to make negotiation between Israel and Palestine. But these efforts were only limited to the agreement and cease fires not the forward steps to solve the issue. Before the decline of Soviet Union, United States main concern was to keep way the USSR in the area. At that time US preferred 'a region in conflict Under US hegemony to a region at peace under USSR'. At the time of 1973 war, American focus was only its strategic advantages vis-à-vis the USSR. Its main aim was to include Egypt in its own side and keep USSR away from this conflict. Kissinger succeeded in form of disengagements accords that ultimately led to Camp David agreement and Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979. During 1980, secretaries of state George Shultz and James Baker and Ambassador Philip Habib went to region to initiate serious discussion between Israel and Palestine.

After the Persian Gulf War, President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Michael Gorbachev convened a peace conference in Madrid in 1991 to address the conflict. In 1993 after two years of Madrid Conference, at the 11th round of peace talks, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres announced that Israel and PLO reached a land-for-peace deal in Oslo. Under this so called Oslo accords PLO

formally recognized the state of Israel while Israel only recognized the PLO as sole representing body of Palestinians than recognize the rights of Palestinians. After the Oslo, the lives of most Palestinians became worse and Israel imposed the restriction of movement. A vast network of by pass roads were built to connect the Israeli settlement and to disconnect the Palestinian areas.

Clinton assigned the senator George Mitchell to head to a mission to examine the roots of the problem. He submitted his report to Bush that was endorsed by him. Sharon announced a plan to withdraw all Israeli settlers but this was judged by Palestinians as a unilateral effort by Israel. Obama in his first term with Hillary Clinton and in his second term with John Kerry tried to restart negotiation but following the same path of his predecessors his intention was not the genuine. He used veto power in favor of Israel. United States used 'self-imposed' restraints on peacemaking, therefore despite US efforts to resolve the conflict peace remained elusive.

D. US Veto in Favor of Israel and Against Palestine and Palestinians

United States has used its veto power so many times to provide a diplomatic protection for Israel in the United Nations since 1970. US used its first Veto in support of Britain but after two years of it, second veto was used to protect Israel. From this veto USA is continue using its veto power to safeguarding Israel from international criticism, censure and sanctions. Bush (Sr.) used this veto in the name of combating terrorism. Unfortunately this explanation and reason proved false when US used veto in on July 26, 1973. Nothing was related with terrorism in the draft resolution. The resolution affirmed the rights of Palestinians and Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories. When Henry Kissinger was secretary of state, US used the veto power four times. One was condemning the Israeli attack on Lebanese civilians; other two were affirmation of rights of Palestinians. The interesting thing happened in one veto. Two days before using veto US Ambassador William W. Scranton rejected Israel claim on Jerusalem, yet US vetoed this resolution.

During Carter regime, on April 30, 1980 US vetoed draft resolution that endorsed self-determination for the Palestinian people.⁸ Reagan administration made a record of using veto. The pro-Israel Reagan team 18 times used its veto power to protect Israel. Most of them were attempts to condemn Israeli's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Bush (Sr.) administration used the veto four times to shield Israel. Interestingly, at the time of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August, 1990 to gain the support of other members and to retain unity in Security Council, America did not use its veto power in late 1990, 1991, 1992 in passing resolution. These resolutions were condemning the Israel's atrocities against the Palestinians. During Bush administration

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http://www.palestinechronicle.com/old/view_article_details.php?id=15749

⁷ Khalidi R. (2004), p.118-151.

⁸ New York Feb, 30 1986

American Ambassador at the UNO James Cunningham vetoed to kill Security Council's resolution on March 2001 because it would be helpful to create an international observer force to protect Palestinian civilians. At that time Cunningham said, "The United States oppose this resolution because it is unbalanced and unworkable and hence unwise."⁹

The US most recently used its veto in the Security Council during Obama administration on Feb.18, 2011 to kill a resolution condemning illegal Israeli settlements in Palestine. Certainly, so far since the establishment of UN, the US has cast its veto in Security Council 79 times and out of seventy nine, forty-two times were cast to kill the resolutions condemning Israel or affirming the rights of Palestine. In spite of this every time Israel denied the rights of Palestinians. After winning the election recently Netanyahu ruled out the creation of Palestinian State that is considered the pillar of US policy in the Middle East. At that time Senior Officials responded that it could change the US-Israel relations. But we are very much familiar with the American policy towards Israel that in the name of Israel's security, US would stand with Israel in UN in future. US Ambassador to Israel, Dan Shapiro said that administration is not firm to veto any resolution recognize a Palestinian State but veto would be used to kill any anti-Israeli resolutions.¹⁰

II. CONCLUSION

It became evident that United States every time played dual policy towards Middle East. To get the support of the Middle Eastern countries because of its geostrategic significance, US made some promise to them but every promise was ignored. To satisfy the Israeli lobby in US it developed its policy to protect and safeguard the Israel from all criticism and international economic sanctions. For this purpose, US used its veto power and more than half of the vetoes, used by US, used in favor of Israel. United States propagated that it believes in two nation theory but when time comes US do against this. Whenever in United nation a resolution was drafted for the recognition of Palestine it was vetoed by US. It means US is not interested in Palestinian concerns rather it is strong ally of Israel at international level.

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⁹ Iqbal, S. M., *Palestine Re-Emerging*. Srinagar: SNA & Bros., 2002, p.192.

¹⁰ <http://jpupdates.com/2015/04/29/ambassador-shapiro-u-s-remains-noncommittal-on-veto-against-un-recognition-of-palestine>