



UNITED STATES' UNWAVERING SUPPORT TO ISRAEL: BIASED FOREIGN POLICY IN ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT UNDER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S ADMINISTRATION (2016-2019)

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ABSTRACT

Human Rights has been a prominent topics in contemporary international relations. The United States has long been a leader in the development and enforcement of international Human Rights regime. But there are controversies on how The U.S. conduct its policies related to Human Rights. The international society has acknowledge U.S.' double standard practices. This kind of attitudes can be found in regard of U.S. policy in Israel-Palestine conflict. For many years, despite its support towards human rights, the U.S. has been biased favoring Israel which reflected in its foreign policy related to this matter. The U.S. has supports whatever Israel do, backing its leader's actions, and even protecting Israel from the accusation of Human Rights violations in international arena. This biased attitudes are far deeper under President Donald Trump's administration. This research aims to analyze why this attitude happen and try to explain factors behind biased foreign policy conducted by the U.S. regarding Israel-Palestine conflict. This research will use Neoclassical Realism's perspective in analyzing the factors behind U.S. unwavering supports towards Israel. The result of this research indicates that the U.S.' foreign policy is influenced by systemic as well as domestic factors, which help to explain its biased attitudes in Israel-Palestine conflict that favor Israel.

Keywords: United States, Israel-Palestine conflict, biased, foreign policy

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Human Rights can be traced back since the end of World War II. Relative to its size and power, and also as one of the war victors, United States is considered as a pioneer in international human rights community, and act as a role model of the contemporary idea of rights. Since then, the United States holds itself to be accountable for protecting and providing most of the human rights ideas that have emerged as the international standard (Harfeld, 2001). Universal human rights provided the framework for the creation of new states in the name of self-determination. The European Holocaust was one of the major triggers propelling the development of the language and political practices that constitute the contemporary human rights regime. During the mid-1940s the Allies conceived Israel's foundation as a type of humanitarian reparation for the crimes committed against Jews. This reparation assumed the form of a settler nation-state in Palestine under the notion of self-determination. The establishment of Jewish state was espoused by President Truman, who started to exert pressure on the British government to allow Jewish immigration to Palestine. The reparation of a human rights violation through settler colonialism was bound to generate a new cycle of violence towards Palestinians. The reparation of Israel served to rationalize and justify the rights-abusive expansionist process of Israeli national statecraft in

the Middle East. Palestinians have been living under Israeli military occupation for a long time and have been subject of various human rights violations (Perugini & Gordon, 2015).

Since Israel declared its independence in 1948, the U.S. has been supportive towards Israel's policies. Washington made it possible for Israel to deny Palestinians rights of self-determination, violate various U.N. resolutions, refuse to comply the principles of international laws, keep its military occupation forces, and expand Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories (Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 1997). The U.S. is tend to be passive over Israel's expansionist actions to Palestine, and frequently give privileges for Israel. The U.S. also generally protect and support Israel in international levels (Hammond, 2010). No one would question the close ties between the two countries. Israel and the United States are bound closely by historic and cultural ties as well as by mutual interests. Israel has long been, and remains, America's most reliable partner in the Middle East (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, 2018). Since Middle East is already a complex region, Israel-Palestine conflict just adding fuel to the fire. The U.S. has been involved in that conflict mainly as a broker, mediator, and facilitator of the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. U.S.' involvement in Israeli-Palestinian peace process can be traced back since 1947 until today (Schmaglowski, 2007). Past U.S. administrations have attempted to bring this conflict to end by various endeavor, from direct talks between the two adversaries, engaged with regional actors, as well as international conference, none of that attempts successful to end this prolonged conflict. Although unsuccessful, U.S. role in mediating both adversaries were significant (Cattan, 2000).

For decades, the United States and Israel have maintained strong bilateral relations based on a number of factors, including robust domestic U.S. support for Israel and its security; shared strategic goals in the Middle East; a mutual commitment to democratic values; and historical ties dating from U.S. support for the creation of Israel in 1948. U.S. foreign aid has been a major component in cementing and reinforcing these ties, whether its economic assistance or military aid (Terry, 2005). Majority of U.S. aid to Israel is in the form of military assistance. U.S. military aid has helped transform Israel's armed forces into one of the most technologically sophisticated militaries in the world and has been designed to maintain Israel's military superiority over neighboring countries. U.S. military aid also has helped Israel build its domestic defense industry, which ranks as one of the top global suppliers of arms (Sharp, 2018). U.S. military aid to Israel comes in the form of grants, which Israel do not need to payback. Israel is the largest recipient of U.S. military aid. The current U.S. military aid to Israel which laid out in 10-years government to government MoU is \$38 billion in which consist of \$33 billion in FMF grants, plus \$5 billion in defense appropriations for missile defense programs (Office of The Press Secretary, 2016). Israel is also the only foreign operator of F-35, the most sophisticated fighter jet own by U.S. Department of Defense. The U.S. and Israel are also working on a massive joint missile defense program. Beside military equipment, the U.S. and Israel also conducting intelligence cooperation which beneficial in dealing with future threats (Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2008).

U.S. also give Israel massive economic aid. Both countries also involved in joint cooperation in other sector. The U.S. have been providing Israel with Migration and Refugee Assistance which varies from \$12 million to \$80million each year (U.S. Department of State, 2018). U.S. also provided loan guarantees for Israel to maintain Israel's economic stability even in unpredictable conditions such as wars, natural disasters, or economic crises (U.S. Department of The Treasury, 2018). Congress has funded the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad program as part of the overall Development Assistance appropriation to USAID for academic institutions and hospitals in Israel (USAID, n.d.). U.S. also provided Israel with huge amount of funding in joint cooperation in business, energy sector, as well as

cybersecurity (Sharp, 2018). The U.S. has also backs and protects Israel in international arena. Washington has provided consistent diplomatic and political support to Israel. Until today, the U.S. has vetoed over 40 UN Resolutions condemning Israel's behavior towards Palestinian. The Israeli indifference and lack of any regard of world opinion was the direct result of its reliance on a super power and a conviction that United States would always come to rescue and bail Israel out even from the most difficult situations (Osgood, 1970).

U.S. foreign policy in Israel-Palestine conflict have always been biased which tend to favor Israel. This biased attitudes is worsen under President Donald Trump's administration. His policies regarding Israel-Palestine conflict has definitely support Israeli causes. His policies includes recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moved embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Shalom & Michael, 2018), defunded NGO's funding such as UNRWA and USAID which undermined their operations in Palestinian territory (Deutsche Welle, 2018), withdrew from UN bodies that accused hostile towards Israel (Borger, 2018), also the latest move was to recognized Israel's sovereignty over Golan Height (Romo, 2019). These attitude has certainly served Israel's interest. Trump's administration won't even engage with the Palestinian or include Palestinian narratives when making regional decisions. Previous administrations at least have recognized Palestinian as an important entity that also influential in the peace process with Israel. Further, Trump is undermining any future peace deal opportunities by supporting Israel (Ward, 2019).

To find the answer on why the U.S. foreign policy in Israel-Palestine conflict under President Donald Trump's administration is favoring Israel, the writer is using the neoclassical realism theory. In addition to the theory, the qualitative method and explanative research by using literature review will also be used to answer the main question of this research.

DISCUSSION

Neoclassical realism builds upon the complex relationship between the state and society found in classical realism without sacrificing the central insight of neorealism about the constraints of the international system. It explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables (Lobell, et al., 2009). Neoclassical realism argues that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by the country's place in the international system and specifically its relative material power capabilities. Yet it contends that the impact of power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening unit-level variables such as decision-makers' perceptions, domestic actors, and state structure. Thus, neoclassical realism assumes that a country's foreign policy is driven by international structure or systemic pressure that needs to be translated by domestic actors in order to enact policy (Rose, 1998).

Systemically, the factors that influence foreign policy are the international system, especially the relative material capability. Before acting, the state not only sees its capabilities, but also must consider the power of other countries. Neoclassical realism predicts that in the long run the relative material power resources possessed by a country will shape foreign political ambitions. If a country's relative capability increases, their ambition to influence its external environment also increases, and *vice versa* (Rose, 1998). On the other hand, domestically, the factors that influence foreign policy are the foreign political elite or leader's perception, interest groups, and the domestic structure of the state. There is no immediate transmission belt linking material capabilities to foreign policy behavior. Foreign policy choices are made by actual political leaders and elites, and so it is their perceptions of relative power that matter not simply relative quantities of physical resources of force in being (Lobell, et al., 2009). But, in order to enact a certain policy, these political leaders are influenced by domestic constrains such as state structure where they operate and domestic

actors mainly interest groups. A foreign policy will be successful only when that policy has reached a consensus among domestic governments as well as accepted by various interest groups. Foreign policy elites (FPE) or state's leader stands at the intersection of international and domestic politics. The FPE has responsibility for grand strategic planning, including the identification of changes in the global or regional balance of power. Yet, in order to implement foreign and security policies, the FPE must forge and maintain a coalition with various domestic actors (Ripsman, 2009).

In line with neoclassical realism, the author will analyze both the systemic or structural factors and domestic environment that influence the U.S. foreign policy that favor Israel under President Donald Trump's administration. The most influential systemic factors that drive U.S. foreign policy in favor with Israel in Israel-Palestine conflict are currently Iran's ambition to possess nuclear weapons and the threats from various radical terrorist groups in the Middle East that might jeopardize U.S. and its allies position in that region. It is clear that the relationship between Iran and U.S. allies in Middle East is as cold as its relationship with the U.S., mainly with Israel. Iranian leader always has strong anti-America and anti-Zionist stance. Iran acknowledges that the United States and the Zionist regime are the enemies of the Islamic nation, therefore Iran might attack U.S. and Israel one day (Tepper, 2012). This is a serious threat not only for Israel and the U.S., but a threat to the regional stability as a whole. If Iran developing nuclear weapons, there's a chance that the Iranian Leader's statements is more than just a bluff. America's moderate Arab allies, such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and others are already alarmed at Iran's aggressive regional policy and would feel increasingly threatened by a nuclear-armed Iran. This is why U.S. and its Middle Eastern allies pursue a harsh strategy towards Iran by reimposing sanctions, to make sure that Iran will never get their hands on nuclear weapons (Abbott, 2018).

Iran is one of the world's leading state sponsors of terrorism through its financial and operational support. Iran could potentially share its nuclear technology and know-how with extremist groups hostile to the United States and its allies (Anti-Defamation League, n.d.). Weakening Iranian regime and restraining its capabilities to produce and develop nuclear weapons seems to be the top priority of the U.S. and its allies in Middle East right now. Other issue such as Israel-Palestine conflict became less crucial for top policy makers in the U.S. and its Middle Eastern allies to solve. Their safety and security became the main concern to achieve than to solve Israel-Palestine problems. Since Iranian nuclear threat has also become the main concern for other Arab nations, there have been dilemmas facing the Arab World today. On one side they are concerned about Palestinian, but on the other, the cooperation with Israel particularly in intelligence and security fields seems promising to help Gulf States deal with Iranian nuclear threat. A moral considerations to solve Palestinian issue is jeopardized when a common interest to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons get in the way (Abrams, 2017).

The second systemic factor influential in U.S. foreign policy related to Israel-Palestine conflict is radical terrorist groups. Radical Islamist terrorism in its many forms remains the most immediate global threat to the safety and security not only U.S., but also its allies. Middle East is a complex region with various actors conflicting with one another over a certain issue or even over vastly different reasons (Zaman, 2015). A long time conflict between Israel and Palestine might not be the only reason that cause the rising of non-state actors in the Middle East, most notably Islamic terrorist groups. But it certainly became the most significant factor used by these groups to recruit supporters efficiently. Brutalities committed by Israel cause desperation and enrage the Muslim youth to join these radical organizations (Halevi & Soffer, 2014). The Israeli-Palestine conflict has created division in the region as Arabic countries openly express their support for Palestine. In contrast, Western countries have sided with Israel, a scenario that has placed them on the fire line of terror

organizations. What concerning the most is that their operations are not limited in Middle East region only, but they are now able to reach international scope with the help of advancement in technologies and weaponry (Binzafran, 2016).

The U.S. and its allies clearly work hard to eradicate all extremist groups that get in its way. As the most advanced military power in the region, Israel has proven capable in countering the influence of these terrorist groups (Dicter & Byman, 2006). Its sophisticated military equipment and developed intelligence assessment have made Israel a reliable partner in counterterrorism effort. Not only U.S., other Arab nations have slowly worked with Israeli to achieve their own security and safety (Eisenstadt & Pollock, 2012). Similar with Iranian nuclear threat, when it comes to the violent actions of terrorist groups compared to resolution for Israel-Palestine conflict, the latter became secondary in the face of greater threat for the region. In this matter, the U.S. has clearly sided with those who benefit them the most, Israel. Therefore U.S. policy concerning the region is to ensure Israel's safety that further impacts U.S. interest in that region. It is likely that the U.S. and its allies will keep pursuing hawkish stance on the region in order to achieve their goal in combating terrorism, but at the expense of Palestinians (Etzion, 2017).

On the other hand, domestic factors that influence U.S. foreign policy in Israel-Palestine conflict are U.S. state structure, interest groups, as well as foreign policy elites. First, state structure and domestic political institutions often crystallize state-society relations. Formal institutions, organizational processes, and bureaucratic management often established by constitutional provisions with clearly specified rules and regulations set the broad parameters within which domestic competition over policy occurs. Structural restriction such as a division of powers, checks and balances, and public support serve to constrain democratic leaders to enact a certain policy. This is evident in the case of United States. The checks and balances in the U.S. Constitution that divided power into three equal branches (executive, legislative, and judicial) have the intent of checking the authority of the presidency and ensuring that domestic power is widely shared among various actors (Ripsman, 2016). Beside the government officials, the President or foreign policy elites need to bargain with various domestic actors in order to gain their support towards a certain policy. Domestic actors might influence foreign policy making by shaping public opinion through media and think tanks in the directions they favored. It is hard for government to ignore the impact of domestic actors have on foreign policy. Since U.S. complex political system makes it easy for all kinds of people and groups to wield at least some power, people should not expect policies to get made in only one way. These complex interactions between state structure and domestic actors become influential in shaping U.S. foreign policy (Wilson, et al., 2011).

The second domestic factor is interest group. In respect with Israel-Palestine conflict, the most influential interest groups are of course Israel Lobby groups. The Israel lobby's power flows from its unmatched ability to influence the government, both legislative and executive branch. The lobby strives to ensure that public discourse about Israel portrays it in a positive light, by repeating myths about Israel and its founding and by publicizing Israel's side in the policy debates of the day. Pro-Israel forces predominate in U.S. media and think tanks, which play an important role in shaping public perception as well as actual policy. The goal is to prevent critical commentary about Israel and to ensure continuous public support towards Israel (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006). The lobby also includes prominent Christian evangelicals. These "Christian Zionists" believe Israel's rebirth is part of Biblical prophecy, support its expansionist agenda and think pressuring Israel is contrary to God's will. Therefore this communities will highly supportive towards Israeli causes (Bacevich, 2008). The lobby also gain massive support from various pro-Israeli businessmen that willing to donate large sums of money to advance Israel's interest. By preventing U.S. leaders from

pressuring Israel to make peace, the Lobby has also made it impossible to end Israeli-Palestinian conflict. With this extraordinary influence, it is highly unlikely that the Palestinian issue will be discussed among policy makers in the U.S. Most of the foreign political elites see the Israel-Palestine conflict through the Israeli's perspective. So it will be hard to determine even-handed policy that benefits both sides, so far the U.S. policy regarding that conflict has been one sided in favor to Israel (Walt, 2017).

The last domestic factors is foreign policy elites (FPE) in Trump's administration. These high-ranked government officials are responsible in implementing foreign policy. But in order to do that, these FPE need to bargain with domestic actors to ensure their support of a certain policy (Lobell, 2009). Israel lobby groups here play significant role in shaping these leader's perception particularly those that related to Israel. Beside the lobby's efforts, each leader's own believe and political stance also contribute in the implementation of pro-Israel foreign policy. Most of President Trump's circle are likely to think alike, or at least they came from similar background. They are consist of Vice President Michael Richard Pence or commonly known as Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, National Security Advisor John Bolton, Trump's son-in-law Senior Adviser Jared Kushner, and other government officials that have relations with Israel. Most of them are conservative hawkish, pro-Israel, Jewish or Evangelical Christians, and there are some that came from business realm with limited experience in foreign policy making (Entous, 2018). With these individuals in his circle, it is highly unlikely that Trump's policy regarding Israel-Palestine conflict will result in an even-handed and fair policy. Instead, U.S. policy under Trump's administration has served Israel's interest and biased favoring Israel only.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, the researcher has analyzed various sources related to U.S. foreign policy in Israel-Palestine conflict. It can be concluded that the conduct of U.S. foreign policy under President Donald Trump's administration related to this matter is biased that favors Israel. This biased attitudes are caused by international structure or systemic factors such as Iranian nuclear threat and radical terrorist groups; as well as unit-level or domestic environment which include U.S. state structure and domestic actors. Both factors work simultaneously in order to influence policy makers to enact a foreign policy that is biased regarding this conflict. The U.S. has been involved in decades-long Israel-Palestine conflict. The U.S. has acted as a mediator and a broker for the two adversaries. It supposed to be a neutral party in this prolonged conflict, but in the contrary, the U.S. has conducted biased policies that tend to favors Israel for decades. The role of the U.S. as an even handed broker has been jeopardized. Since early establishment of Israel as a state, the U.S. has failed to deliver a lasting peace plan for both sides. Until today it is unclear if the U.S. will be able to propose a fair and effective peace agreement to end this conflict. With the current trend, the chances are high that the U.S. will continued its biased foreign policy that favor Israel and peace between the two parties seems almost impossible to achieve.

Because of the limitation of time and space, there are gaps in this research about U.S. foreign policy in general or regarding Israel-Palestine conflict in particular that would benefit from future research. Future researchers can assess the effectiveness of Trump's peace plan or to what extent the plan generates a peaceful relationship between Israelis and Palestinians. The future research can also analyzing the impact or outcome the peace plan might cause, either for Israel and Palestine, or for the region. This research examines U.S. biased foreign policy towards Israel-Palestine conflict. Thus, provided future researchers to conduct a policy evaluation on how should the U.S. enact its policy to act as an even-handed mediator and to ensure a fair outcome for both nations. The research need to analyze what factors need to be improved for the U.S. to come up with a better peace agreement to end this prolonged

conflict. Lastly, Future research might focus on similar topics with this research by using other methods and different theoretical framework to analyze the matter.

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