

THE MOVE OF THE US EMBASSY FROM TEL AVIV TO JERUSALEM: IT'S IMPACT ON ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS

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Abstract: The Israel Palestine conflict has long been contested in the international arena. After World War II, Israel was recognized as a state and this was not well received by the Palestinians. Today, Israel is still in violation of international law as it continues to possess West Bank and displacing Palestinians for the Jewish occupation. The US has played an integral role as a key ally evidenced by its recent decision to move their embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This paper seeks to assess the motivating factors of the relocation and consequences on Israel-Palestinian relations. The move is set to impact diplomatic relations and influence policies in the Middle East.

Keywords: Jerusalem, Israel, Palestine, Conflict, policies, Middle East.

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the root cause of the Israeli-Palestine conflict helps contextualize the role of external players in the conflict. The Jewish state in Palestine which was a territory under the Ottoman Empire was established by the Zionist movement in the late 1800s. The Ottoman Empire was dissolved and divided as territorial spoils of war by the Great Britain and France after World War 1 with Britain occupying Palestine as mandated by the League of Nations (Hammond, 2010).

During the war the British made two commitments: to grant Arab nations their independence if they cooperated to help defeat the Ottoman Turks and to support the Zionism goal of establishing a home for the Jewish People hence allowing Jewish immigrants into Palestine. This eventually brought friction between the Arabs and the Zionists (Hammond, 2010). Both the British and the Zionists who believe in the use of force rejected the Arab states proposition of recognizing Palestine as a democratic government with the Jewish as the minority where power could be shared peacefully by the different groups living there.

The Arabs did not trust the Jews or the British because many of the Arabs leaders thought the British would favor the Jews. They refused to form any government that included Jewish participation. Violent clashes due to frustration of non-representation erupted as the Jewish continued to migrate to Palestine displacing the Arabs from their land. The Zionist terrorist organization targeted both the Arabs and the British. The British were unsuccessful in reconciling its conflicting policies and commitments after World War II therefore requested the United Nations (UN) to take up the matter. The UN Special Commission on Palestine which was subsequently formed rejected the right to self-determination of the population and recommended the division of Palestine into two (Beinin & Hajjar, 2010). More than half of the territory was granted to the minority Jews. The Arabs naturally rejected the plan as previously they had 85 per cent land ownership. The Zionist leadership declared its existence unilaterally in 1948, establishing Israel. A war erupted displacing more than 700,000 Arabs. This ethnic cleansing is the root cause of the modern Palestinian refugee crises. Israel has refused to grant repatriation against the international law (Hammond, 2010).

During the six day war in 1967, Israel attacked Egypt and occupied the Palestinian territories of West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This acquisition of territory by Israel using force was dismissed under the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 242 (Neff, 1994). In the 1993 Oslo agreement, Israel struck a deal with the leader of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)-Yasser Arafat and agreed to allow the Palestinians to set up a government and rule themselves in the Gaza strip and the city of Jericho in the West Bank in exchange of the recognition of Israel's right to exist by the PLO (Kelman, 2007).

The new Palestinian government headed by Arafat became known as the Palestinian Authority and was controlled by its majority party Fatah. Not all Palestinians especially people on the Gaza strip were contented with Arafat's approach leading to the formation of an extremist group Hamas whose leaders refused to negotiate with Israel or recognize its right to exist. In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary election but Fatah refused to be a minority party. Violent power struggle ensued with Hamas gaining control of the area (Youngs & Smith, 2007). The then Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas cut loose Gaza strip from the Palestinian Authority and set up an emergency for Fatah controlled government in the West Bank.

Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, allowing limited aid to manage a humanitarian crisis. However, it launched military attacks in 2007 in Gaza. Since then Israel has really built up its security capabilities and constructed many settlements in the newly occupied territories. Today, Israel is still in violation of International law as it continues to possess West Bank and displacing Palestinians for the Jewish occupation.

Today there are two fairly different Palestine: West Bank led by President Mahmoud and his Fatah party who coexist peacefully with Jewish neighbors despite the wall being built by Israel a 400mile barrier along its border and the second one is the Gaza strip controlled by Hamas is essentially poor and mostly cut off from the rest of the world by Israel's blockade restricting entry of food, fuel and basic goods and a wall that divides it from Israel and Egypt leading its people to solely dependent on UN aid. Hamas has been the target of repeated Israel actions following its attacks against Israeli in Jerusalem and its borders.

United States (US) support for Israel is rooted to its recognition as a state in 1948 during The Truman Administration. US fully supports Israel hence why the conflict has persisted for so long. This is in military capacity and financially with over \$3 billion in aid annually and diplomatically through its use of the Veto in UNSC defending Israel in its violations of international law in the 1967 war (Hammond, 2013). The Obama Administration openly endorsed the Israel's assault on Gaza claiming it was self-defense. President Obama declared his support of recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. To him the territorial conflict between Israel and Palestine could be solved through US-moderated talks. The two state solution recognized by international consensus is acceptable by the Palestine but rejected by US and Israel through policies.

The media in US plays a huge role in manufacturing consent to its policy by propagating pro-Israel views. This support is because Israel is considered a valuable strategic partner in the region in the US foreign policy. The US and Israel interests are believed to align as with the case of overthrowing Saddam Hussein's (Iraq) regime. Israel is believed to be geopolitically placed for purposes of the foreign policy towards Middle East.

Therefore, the importance of Jerusalem cannot miss in any geopolitical analysis of the Middle East given its utmost importance for Jews, Christians as well as Muslims. The first historical mention of Jerusalem is in the Bible in the era of patriarchs where King David declares Jerusalem as the capital of Israel known from that point on as Zion. His son King Solomon builds the first temple (2 Chronicles 6:6) which is later destroyed by the Babylonians and the Jews are exiled. Jerusalem hosts the most sacred places for Judaism and Christianity and the third most sacred place for Islam making Israel the crossroads of three religions. The holy places are concentrated in a small area called Temple Mount within the old city of Jerusalem. The city was divided soon after the UN Partition Plan of 1947 as International territory by the Jews and Muslims and later turned into Israel in 1967 (Condulescu, 2009).

President Donald Trump made a decision in 2017 to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Koyama, 2017) which spurred a debate. Some criticized the move as they see it will impede the peace settlement for Middle East by denying Palestinian claims to the city as well it could promote extremism. Those who support the idea view as a fulfillment of a divine prophesy; the return of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland and the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty in Jerusalem is seen as a stage ultimately leading to the full messianic era.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

• Securitization Theory

The proponents of securitization theory are Barry Buzan, Ole Weaver and Mc Sweeney in Copenhagen school. According to them, security is about survival. Copenhagen School theorists argue that in international relations something becomes a security issue when it is presented as posing an existential threat to the referent object and the threat needs to be dealt with immediately and with extraordinary measures. Security is thus a self-referential practice: an issue becomes a security issue only by being labeled as one. However, it is important to note that for the Copenhagen School, “security should be seen as a negative, as a failure to deal with issues of normal politics” (Barry Buzan, Ole Weaver & Jaap deWilde, 1998).

At the beginning of the 21st century, following the end of Cold War, a broad literature has emerged on the ‘concept of security’ and the field of security studies. In the ‘new security agenda’ of broadening the concept of security, the traditional security is unable to meet the challenges of the post-Cold War era. The traditional understanding of security and supremacy of realism has become inadequate in securing the sovereignty of the state. Thus following the end of the Cold War, the debates and conceptual definitions of security has moved beyond military issues to other fields such as economics, environmental and societal issues. Given that previously the state was considered the only referent object, other referent objects like conflicts have emerged in the global system (Buzan, 1991).

The debate over the location of the U.S. Embassy in Israel is what it implies about the status of Jerusalem. When one state locates its embassy to another state in a particular territory, this generally indicates that the former state recognizes that territory as being within the latter state’s sovereignty. This recognition of sovereignty in turn brings with it a basket of rights and obligations under international law that the latter state may exercise in controlling that territory. For this reason, prior presidential administrations have been concerned that relocating the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem would cause confusion regarding if not trigger an actual change in U.S. policy, which does not recognize Israel or any other state as having sovereignty over Jerusalem.

Israel contends that its sovereignty extends over all of Jerusalem, which it identifies as its capital. Both the Palestinian Authority and many Arab states, meanwhile, maintain that all of Jerusalem should be subject to permanent status negotiations and that East Jerusalem should be the capital of any future Palestinian state. While positions within the international community vary, most foreign states have like the United States declined to take a position on who has sovereignty over Jerusalem and instead favor either negotiations to resolve this issue or international administration. Indeed, when Israel declared Jerusalem its “united and eternal capital” in 1980, it incurred a strong reaction from the U.N. Security Council, which successfully encouraged those countries with embassies in West Jerusalem to relocate them out of the city. Trump moving the US embassy to Jerusalem has undergone securitization

• Geopolitical Theory

Geopolitical theory or ‘*Geopolitik*’ was invented by Swedish political scientist, Rudolf Kjellen (1864-1922) in 1899. Kjellen was part of a paradigm, which had been founded in German political geography by Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) and Karl Ritter (1779-1859). Kjellen observed that the relationship between power and its geographical foundation is fundamental. He defined geopolitics as: “The theory of the state as a geographic organism or phenomenon in space, i.e., land territory, and, or country”. Thus geopolitics is the science of studying the state as a geographical organism or as a phenomenon of space. This political organism is kept in a perpetual struggle for existence and space for survival and prosperity.

On the other hand, Halford Mackinder (1904) was concerned with the politics of Eurasian powers and the colonial systems. He noted the emerging strategic importance of pivotal area in Eurasia (‘Heartland’) by focusing on the position, power, dominance, and influences in the changing military and political world. He argued that the Heartland is the strongest fortress, commanding resources of a huge transcontinental area. Thus any power that could organize it effectively was bound to emerge as a great colossus in world politics above any other state.

For this study, ‘geopolitics’ is a generic term that covers the conceptual and terminological tradition in the study of IR from the political and strategic significance of geography (Israel- Palestine conflict). It combines politics and geography to explain the behavior of states in the international system. It covers the relationship between the conduct of foreign policy, political power and physical environment. Geopolitics can therefore be defined as the study of the impact of geographical distributions and divisions on the conduct of world politics by territorial states competing to dominate the world economy or to create a world empire (Agnew, 1998).

Geopolitics provides a way of exploring and explaining the role of geographical factors (such as territorial location and-or access to resources) in shaping national and international politics (Dodds, 2005:1). It is the contention between great powers and aspiring great powers for control over territory, resources, and vital geographical positions, such as ports and harbors, canals, rivers, oases, and other sources of wealth and influence. This contestation has been the driving force in world politics and world conflicts (Klare, 2001). Although the above definitions are state-centric and exclusive, the geopolitical tensions and power struggles among states over resources and infrastructure creates securitization of referent objects (Katumanga, 2012). Historically, Israel Palestine conflict constitutes geopolitical instruments (Balamir and Carlson, 2010). Jerusalem can be said to be a geopolitical space where both Palestine and Israel have interest and thus created conflict when the US relocated the embassy. Both Israel and Palestine treasure Jerusalem to be a holy place according to their faith.

• **Complex Interdependence Theory**

The model of Complex Interdependence was advanced by Robert O Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in the late 1970s. It was a key challenge to fundamental assumptions of traditional and structural realism which attentively focused on military and economic capabilities to explain state behaviour. Complex Interdependence on the contrary stressed the emergence of transnational actor's vis-à-vis the state. The main attention was the development of international regimes and institutions that compensated traditional military skills and the importance of welfare and trade in foreign policy matters in comparison to status and security concerns.

Complex Interdependence essentially turned out to be a central component of the neoliberal perspective and ever since been widely used in the investigations of international politics making an effort to comprehend the willingness of countries to enter into cooperative pacts with one another under settings of anarchy and reliance. In the contemporary globalized world, the term 'interdependence' is frequently used. It is a state in the global politics where all the actors including states and non-state actors, are dependent upon one another.

According to Keohane, "Dependence means a state of being determined or significantly affected by external forces. Interdependence, most simply defined, means mutual dependence. Interdependence in world politics refers to situations characterized by reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries."(Keohane& Nye, 1977: 8) Under this mutual dependence, the bond among the actors involved, including countries and international actors, is characterized by both mutual aid and antagonism. In interdependence there are costly mutual effects of the contracts among the actors.

According to Genest, the theory of Complex interdependence stresses that trans-national actors become mutually reliant and susceptible to each other's actions and sensitive to each other's needs as a result of growing ties. Complex interdependence can therefore be referred to as: An economic trans-nationalist concept that believes that states are not the only important actors but issues of social welfare and security also take the centre stage on the global agenda and cooperation and conflict should both be dominant characteristics of international politics" (Genest, 1996:140) In the structure of interdependence, it is in the interests of states to cooperate as the outcomes include steadiness in the international systems and fortunes. Trans-nationalists/neo liberals disagree with the reasoning that states are exclusively driven by the national interests defined in the terms of power. (Genest, 1996:133)

The neoliberals argue that international politics cannot just be divided into high politics (national security and military powers) and low politics (economic, social and environmental). According to them, the "high politics" still remain relevant and important and also, the "low politics" also have a high priority on the international agenda. This is unlike realism.

Relations between the U.S and the Israeli have significantly been changing since the end of the Cold War and this ceased for a while after the 9/11 attack on the U.S and brought about distance and tension between the two countries. Over time, it was noted that what matters are the interests that bring together or divide nations. In this case, U.S and Israeli interests, to some degree have come together.

The U.S 9/11 attacks drew the U.S and Israeli together and this was because, from the attacks, it was clear that the Israeli and the U.S had a common interest, they were both against the Islamic world. The U.S reaction grew into a more intricate form, especially when it became more obvious that the U.S forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan were not soothing either of the two countries. In order to prevent terrorist attacks on their land, they needed high intelligence collaboration with the

Israelis as well as other Islamic countries that were aggressive to Israel. As a result of this, the U.S remains Israel's largest benefactor as it provides the country with recognizable support; basically military and economic assistance. The assistance has transformed Israel's armed forces into one of the most complex in the world, giving it a substantial edge over neighbouring states.

The 104th Congress of the United States passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act on 23rd October 1995. This was for the purpose of initiating and funding the relocation of the United States Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem by the 31st of May 1999. Every six months after this, for more than two decades, U.S. presidents had to decide all over again whether to move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This changed during President Clinton's administration, where they decided not to move the embassy as a way of trying not to create a twist in the delicate Middle East peace talks.

Part of the improved ties with Israel revolved around Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the country's capital and the decision to move the United States' embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Deputy Press Secretary Hogan Gidley was quoted saying "It's the only democracy in the region, and it's important that we keep our partners and allies close and happy, and that's what he did there". This led to renewed cordiality in the Israeli-American relationship.

All this though, is very political and is strategic for the United States as they are trying to create a balance of power and at the same time create alliances in which both states can mutually benefit from each other. Although the Israelis have forged a vibrant, multi-ethnic democracy and flourishing economy, with a capable military and intelligence services, they depend heavily on the US and if the US for whatever reason decide to cut ties with them, they will suffer incredibly. And this is the basis of dependence.

3. ASSESSING THE MOTIVATING FACTORS

- **Religious Motives**

According to Farrell (2018), the embassy move to Jerusalem is as a result of the pressure from pro-Israel politicians in Washington coupled with the campaign promise by Donald Trump which was a signature promise in his 2016 election campaign. Farrell (2018) opines, the embassy move is strategic in the US homeland due to the fact that it is popular with many conservative and evangelical Christians who voted for Trump and Vice President Mike Pence. This is despite half of the city containing sites holy to all three major monotheistic religions, including the Western Wall, the holiest place in the world where Jews can openly pray, and Haram al-Sharif, Arabic for "the Noble Sanctuary," a sacred site for Muslims that Israelis refer to as the Temple Mount.

This argument is supported by Knigge (2017) who argues that the decision was informed by the need to appeal to Trump's evangelical Christian base. Furthermore, the decision to move the embassy was a low hanging fruit for the Trump 2016 campaign promises. Indeed, unlike many of Trump's other efforts to make good on his campaign promises, such as repealing former-President Barack Obama's health care reform or implementing a travel ban, recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital was a low-hanging fruit as it really can be done by presidential action alone. The evangelicals believe the transfer of the embassy and the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital will help bring about the rapture. The rapture is an event in which they believe all Christians will join with God. These interpretations based on the books of Revelation and Daniel, suggest the return of Jesus will take place once the Jewish temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt and Israel is made an exclusively Jewish state.

- **Political Motives**

According to Jonah (2017), the reason why Trump moved the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem was as an attempt to somehow win over Jewish voters as a charm-offensive for Trump's first year at the helm where he was covertly running a vaguely anti-Semitic campaign and winning endorsements from literal neo-Nazis. Geopolitically, the Trump presidency might be in the move to soften the decision by either referring to specifically to West Jerusalem, which would change the flavor of the statement considerably.

Jonah (2017) quotes Aaron David Miller who has been party to Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations under both Democratic and Republican presidents. Aaron David Miller opines that the main reason was to set a stage for a Palestinian deal. Such deals would involve concessions with Israel. Miller postulates that to make those gestures unilaterally, without asking Israel for anything in return or doing so as part of any broader agreement would be

impossible. It might thus be an agenda for an open and honest dialogue with both sides in which both parties really trust the president. This can also be deduced from Kushner's statement where he argued that "a lot of countries in the Middle East want the same thing: economic progress, peace for their people. Many countries in the region see Israel as a much more likely ally than it was 20 years ago because of Iran, because of ISIS."

In other words, Kushner's claim that Israel must make peace with the Palestinians in order to form allies in the Arab world is more of an acknowledgment that his fellow princelings in Saudi Arabia and the UAE are ready to make at least a de facto alliance with Israel to check the power of Iran, but it would be easier for them to do so if they could somehow get the pesky Palestinian issue dealt with first. Contrary to what Kushner says, these people do not "care a lot" about the Palestinians, they see them as an irritant to be overcome.

In 2018, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia presented Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas with a peace plan that was extremely slanted toward Israel, with Palestinians getting limited sovereignty over noncontiguous parts of the West Bank, and most of Israel's settlements remaining. Influenced by Netanyahu (a Kushner family friend) and Kushner's Saudi and Emirati pals, the Trump administration has dealt with the Palestinians mostly as its Middle Eastern allies have, by shunting them aside. Since handing the Mideast portfolio over to his son-in-law earlier this year, Trump has done nothing to convince the Palestinians that he is trustworthy; now, his next move could basically scuttle any chance of his administration being seen as an honest broker in peace talks.

4. CONSEQUENCES OF THE MOVE

- **Demotivated Palestinians**

In his reaction to the move Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas term the decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem as disastrous and a "slap in the face" (Holmes 2018). Perhaps to symbolize what Palestinians feel regarding this decision. On the day of the launch of the embassy, Gaza suffered its deadliest day in years as Israeli soldiers opened fire on Palestinian protesters (BBC News). Palestinians immediately became deflated by the decision, the general feeling has become another Intifada will not help the current situation. The longer-term effects however would be increasing unrest by Palestinians and subsequent increase in protests and violence. Israel is viewed by the US as a valuable strategic partner being right in the middle of the Arab World (Hammond 2013).

Saeb Erekat, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Secretary General stated that the decision would destroy the possibility of a two-state solution (Toameh, 2018) adding that it would violate international law.

- **Undermines Peace Process**

Whilst Israel has made a conscious decision to move national operations to West Jerusalem in an effort to have it recognized as its capital, it doesn't change the fact that Jerusalem remains a disputed territory (UNGA Resolution 50/222). This dynamic may not alter the international legal status of Jerusalem City, it is a clear move that demonstrates that the US government has essentially taken sides in the dispute. The move broadly symbolizes the US government's acknowledgement that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. This has great ramifications to the world due the position of the US in the international World Order. The US is seen as an international leader especially in the maintenance of World Peace. Therefore, this recognition curtails and undermines the peace process between Israel and Palestine. The US can no longer be seen to be an honest broker in the Israel-Palestine Peace Agreement.

- **Violation of International Law**

The move violates various international laws including United Nations General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The legal Framework under which Jerusalem remains a disputed territory is founded on a legal system based on the principle that acquisition of territories by annexation and force are prohibited under the UN Charter. This step therefore can be seen to be a dangerous development in terms of World politics. It undermines international law and generally decisions made by the UNSC. The UNSC held an extraordinary session where Mathew Rycraft, the British Permanent Representative to the UN said that the decision did not incline to the Security was not helpful. The US has been a leading supporter of the formation and strengthening of various peace keeping missions all around the world. Moreover, it goes against decades of US foreign Policy.

It weakens the territorial integrity of internationally disputed lands. Whilst West Jerusalem has been under the Israeli control from 1950 and all countries that recognize Israel recognize Israel's control of West Jerusalem. Under UNSC Resolutions 476 & 478, there has been contention that Israel has no right to East Jerusalem.

The decision breaches various United Nations Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions for instance

- The General Assembly resolution 50/222 of 1995 that declared any decision of Israel to exercise its Jurisdiction and administration over Jerusalem was illegal. It further stated that the transfer of any diplomatic missions was deplorable and in violation of Security Council resolution 478 (1980)
- It Violates the General Assembly Resolution 2253 of 1967 that called for Israel to desist from any actions that that would change the Status of the City of Jerusalem
- The move is voided by the Security Council Resolution 298 of 1971 that stated that any measures taken by Israel to change any features of Jerusalem including the confiscation of land or the transfer of population would be void and should not change the status of the City
- The 1947 partition plan under the UNGA resolution 181 (II) that established the separate states of Israel and Palestine and recognized Jerusalem as a territory having a Special International Regime.
- **US Diplomatic Relations with Middle East and other states**

It has created regional fatigue in the Arab world who have Sympathy towards the Palestinian cause (Ahktar 2010). Weakness America's partnership with the Middle East. Arab countries such as Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and UAE had hoped that there would be a peace process that would be led by the US. Weakens President Abbas and strengthens Hummus that has called for a third intifada. President Abbas was Palestine's chief negotiator in the Oslo accords. He stated that Israel has "killed" the Oslo accords (Halbfinger, 2018) which had reserved Jerusalem as unresolved disputed land to be negotiated in future negotiations.

Paris Reuters reported that Russia's concern over the US's decision to move the embassy through Ambassador to Palestine, Haidar Aghanin (Ramallah, 2018). He stated again that the decision violated international law, asserting that it was no longer acceptable for a single country to sponsor the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Twelve states were reported to decline President Trump's invite for the opening these include Germany, Russia, Ireland, Portugal, Poland, Australia, Mexico and Sweden.

5. CONCLUSION

It is evident that the move of the embassy has and will significantly impact the relations between Israel, Palestine and the greater Middle East. President Trump has fulfilled a prophecy that has been long anticipated. The decision goes against greater diplomatic relations logic and rationale behind peace keeping and building.

The balance of this conflict has significantly tilted to favor Israel. Palestinians can either give in or even fight more aggressively to re-gain its position as a significant contender to gain the much coveted Jerusalem. This may therefore lead to a spur of fresh violence between Israel and Palestine and curtail years of peace building. The reaction of the international community to the United States violation of international relations will also set the pace so such future violations. It is thus a delicate time in history.

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