

Israel, Muslims, and the “Israel Lobby” in America: Local Dynamics and Global Ramifications

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Overview

While conflicting ideologies and geopolitical interests were the main sources of regional and global conflicts between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War, the intensified conflict between the Western and Muslim Worlds in the post-Cold War era seems to be symptoms of another cold war between the two erstwhile allies (Muslims and the West) who were together against communism up to the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. The so-called unipolar world seems to be disappearing fast as China and Russia are no longer playing passive role in the arena of rising global conflagration. With the end of the Cold War, among other problems, the unresolved Palestine issue has emerged as the linchpin of the Muslim-West conflict. Essentially, Israel is an unassimilated lump in the body politic of the Muslim World since its emergence. So much so, Muslim-majority countries from Algeria to Afghanistan and Iran to Indonesia – including those having no common border with Israel – do not shy away from expressing their solidarity with the Palestinian cause. As Ayatollah Khomeini publicly asserted his support for the overthrow of Israel, so did many Egyptian, Tunisian, Libyan and other Muslims display their solidarity with Palestine at mass rallies soon after the beginning of the “Arab Spring”. One may mention that Algeria decided to donate its World Cup soccer prize money – \$9 million – to the people of Gaza, after the escalation of Israel-Palestine crisis in July 2014.¹ This article is an attempt to understand why Israel is so important in the collective psyche of Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia;

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and what are the short- and long-term ramifications of the collective Muslim hate against the Zionist State. We need to understand what the Israel Lobby in the United States is all about; and as to how it promotes Zionist interests, not only to the detriment of Arab interests, but at times, it also goes against America's own political, economic and even security interests at home and abroad.

Israel, More than a Zionist State

The *raison d'être* for Israel goes beyond the creation of a Jewish homeland. Theodor Herzl's (the "Father of Zionism") justified the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine in his famous 1896 pamphlet, *Der Judenstaat* [*The Jewish State*] in the following manner: "We should there form a portion of a *rampart* of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism." European colonial powers, especially Britain was enamored by the idea of Israel, especially during World War I. Besides the "Balfour Declaration" made by British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour in 1917 favoring the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine; in the wake of the War in 1918, the British did everything possible to settle a large number of armed European Jews in Palestine (which was under British occupation, 1919-1948) paving the way for the creation of Israel in 1948. Despite many leading Americans' opposition to the creation of Israel, President Truman (a Christian Zionist), favored its creation.²

From the candid assertions by Herzl and Balfour, and President Truman's decision to favor the creation of Israel by expropriating more than a million Arabs from Palestine, one has no reason to believe that Israel came into being only as a Jewish homeland, as the last refuge or safe haven of persecuted European Jews who had gone through series of horrific genocides in Russia, Poland, Germany and elsewhere in Europe for several centuries up to the end of World War II. Since there had already been more Jews in the United States than in Israel in the 1940s, European Jews who survived the Holocaust could be re-settled in America and Europe, especially in Britain, Germany, Austria, Poland and Russia. One does not understand why more than a million Arabs had to be expropriated from their ancestral land in Palestine where they had been living for more than 2,000 years. Palestine was not a barren, uninhabited land, as claimed by Israel and its promoters. What the British did in occupied Palestine was robbing Paul to reward Peter in the most cynical clever way. The British rulers allowed unhindered Jewish migration to Palestine without the permission of the Palestinian people. In

May 1948, the British abruptly left Palestine and the heavily armed Jewish settlers (including Jewish British soldiers) declared the “independence” of Israel.

Since the overpowering Zionist Lobby in the West can brand one as “anti-Semitic” even for one’s objective criticism of Israel’s highhandedness in Gaza, West Bank and across the region, and for questioning the way the entity of Israel came into being in the first place, one may cite an Israeli author and activist Miko Peled, son of a former Israeli general who fought for Israel in its decisive wars against Arabs in 1948 and 1967, in this regard. Peled, the author of best selling *The General’s Son*, questions several myths about the creation of Israel, “the myth of 1948”; “the myth of the existential threat of 1967”; and “the myth of Jewish democracy [in Israel]”. He writes:

Growing up we were taught to believe that the Arabs had left Eretz Israel [in 1948] partly on their own and partially at the directive of their so-called leaders, and that therefore taking their land and homes was morally OK. It never occurred to us that even if they did leave willingly, we had no right to prohibit their return.... Now, although Palestine was not a state yet, it would have become one had it not been so thoroughly destroyed.... What the Palestinians did not have, the one thing in which they did not invest was a military.... In 1948 the Jewish militia became the Israeli army ... [which] destroyed close to 500 towns and villages and exiled close to 800,000 Palestinians who to this day are not permitted to return.... It had been a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing by the Jewish militia involving massacres, terrorism, and the wholesale looting of an entire nation [emphasis added].³

So, it is evident that Western powers created Israel by using the United Nations (most European colonies in Africa and Asia were not members of the UN in 1947-48), and by condoning the mass expropriation of about a million Palestinians by Jewish settlers from Europe. It seems the main motive behind the creation of Israel was the Western desire to have a “rampart of Europe against Asia” in the oil-rich Middle East in close proximity to the strategically important Suez Canal. The Anglo-French and Israeli invasion of Egypt in the wake of Nasser’s nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 may be cited in support of the above assertion. Western and Israeli double standards vis-à-vis the Arabs and the Israeli defense requirements are abysmally striking. On the one hand, Israel is hell-bent to destroy Iran’s alleged nuclear program, yet on the other hand, Israel not only has huge stockpile of nuclear weapons but in 1975 it also offered nuclear arsenal to South Africa under Apartheid to intimidate its black neighbors.⁴ America’s *carte blanche* to Israel is at the roots of the latter’s

dangerously arrogant policy toward the Muslim World.⁵ America favored Israeli occupation of Arab lands in 1967 and subsequent invasions of Arab nations and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Last but not least, America has been supportive of Israel's brazen and unabashed violations of around 90 UN Security Council resolutions condemning its violations of human rights and asking for its unconditional withdrawal from Arab territories it occupied in the 1967 War, which Israel started by invading Egypt, Syria and Jordan, contrary to the Western and Israeli propaganda on the contrary. America also condoned the Israeli (aerial and naval) attack on a US Navy Ship during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War in international waters, as a "mistake". The attack sank the USS Liberty, and killed 34 US soldiers.

One wonders as to why the West does not take cognizance of Arab rebels' displaying the Palestinian flag in anti-autocracy rallies during the "Arab Spring" in the streets of Cairo, Damascus and San'a. While the Palestine issue has been a flashpoint, the West has been consistently supporting Israel since its hurried creation in 1948 following a UN Resolution in 1947 in favor of partitioning Palestine between Arabs and Jews. It is noteworthy that the decision to partition Palestine (Resolution 181) was taken at the UN General Assembly on November 29, 1947 by 33 votes against 13 with 10 abstentions and one absence while more than two-thirds of the World (under colonial rule) remained unrepresented in the United Nations.⁶ The reason of Western / American support for Israel is not far to seek. Days after Resolution 181, on December 11, 1947 British Labor MP Thomas Reid stated in the Parliament the real motive of American support for Israel:

What is the motive? Let us be frank about it. One of the chief motives is that the Jews have a controlling voice in the election for the President in the States of New York, Illinois, Ohio and elsewhere in America. I suggest that the chief reason for this evil proposal of U.N.O. is that the political parties in America, or their party machines, are partly at the electoral mercy of the Jews. That is public knowledge [emphasis added].⁷

Despite Israel's victory against Arabs and its occupation of Arab territories in the 1967 War, countries like the USSR, China, India and the bulk of the Third World and Muslim-majority countries did not condone the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. Until 1991, majority of the UN members considered Zionism synonymous with racism. On November 10, 1975 the UN General Assembly could muster enough support among members to adopt Resolution 3379 with 72 votes against 35, which determined that Zionism was "a form of racism and racial discrimination". Interestingly, Muslim-majority Iran and Turkey, which had

diplomatic relations with Israel in 1975, voted for Resolution 3379, and so did China, India (did not formally recognize Israel until 1992), and the USSR. Resolution 3379 also considered Zionism as a threat to world peace and security. Meanwhile, in December 1953 Resolution 3151 of the General Assembly formally condemned the “unholy alliance between South African racism and Zionism”.⁸

Israel’s growing influence in world affairs has been the main catalyst in the fast deterioration of the Muslim-West understanding. By 1991, the Israeli Lobby has become so powerful globally that the UN General Assembly – for the first time in its history – on December 16 revoked Resolution 3379 by Resolution 46/86 by 111 votes against 25. In 1991 countries that had favored Resolution 3379 in 1975, either abstained/absented from voting or voted in favor of its revocation. USSR and India, which had voted for Resolution 3379, went against it in 1991.⁹ Afterwards all attempts to find out a solution to the Arab-Israeli problem through the good offices of some European and American leaders, including Bill Clinton, failed. They failed, as they wanted to find out a solution without compelling Israel to leave all “occupied territories”, including Jerusalem, in accordance with UN Resolution 242 of 1967.

After Bill Clinton – who had a better image than most American Presidents had in the Muslim World – Obama sounded quite reassuring to the Muslim World through his “path breaking” Cairo Speech on June 4th 2009 and his insistence in May 2011 that the Palestinian State would be based on the pre-1967 War borders. In Cairo, he asked Israel to recognize the Palestinians’ right to have a state of their own, and reiterated boldly: “The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements [in the occupied West Bank]”. In Washington, on May 19, 2011, on the eve of Israeli hawkish Prime Minister Netanyahu’s arrival, he called for Israel’s return to the pre-1967 borders.¹⁰ He asked Israel to accept the pre-June 1967 boundaries as the basis for negotiations for a lasting peace with the Palestinians. He wanted “full and phased withdrawal of Israeli military forces” from the West Bank in coordination with Palestinian security forces for “a viable Palestine, a secure Israel”. “The dream of a Jewish and democratic state cannot be fulfilled with permanent occupation,” he stressed. Instead of asking Israel to demolish the illegal Jewish Settlements in the West Bank, he advised Israelis and Arabs to do “land swaps to accommodate Israel’s large settlement blocs”.¹¹

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Yehud Olmert claimed that he had offered quite a pragmatic solution to the Arab-Israeli problem to the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, on September 16, 2008, in Jerusalem. According to Olmert, the plan “granted the Palestinians

a state with a land area equal to 99.5 percent of the West Bank and Gaza”. He is said to have promised that Israel would only annex 6.3 per cent of Palestinian territory, and would compensate the Palestinian State “with Israeli lands equivalent to 5.8 percent, as well as a corridor that would connect the two regions” of Gaza and West Bank. The plan is said to have also earmarked Jerusalem as a “shared capital” of the Jewish and Palestinian states.¹² However, the apparently “generous” promise of conceding “99.5 per cent” of the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinian State with a corridor to connect the West Bank and Gaza through Israel was nothing but a dead letter. Later, quite conveniently, Olmert said he had not heard anything from Abbas again, while the former “have been waiting ever since”. Elliott Abrams, George W. Bush’s deputy national security adviser who tried to negotiate an Israeli-Palestinian settlement, writes that “rather than ignoring the proposal, the Palestinians asked for clarifications about it and then claimed it was they who never heard back” from Israel. Abrams also believes that Olmert’s so-called “offer” was never made public or shown to anyone to attest to its accuracy.¹³

Since it is least likely that Israel would pay heed to Obama’s advice; and that Arabs would accept Jewish Settlements in the West Bank and part with Jerusalem, the Arab-Israeli conflict is most likely to remain unresolved for decades. The day after his speech, Obama met with the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu at the White House. Netanyahu publicly rejected the idea of Israel’s going back to the 1967 border as impractical and hence unacceptable to Israel. Obama’s speech was full of sound and fury and not so palatable to Palestinians for suggesting Palestinians to swap Jewish Settlements in prime real estate in the West Bank with patches of desert. It, however, stirred up pro-Israeli Americans. Conservative American analysts and politicians – from Glenn Beck to Sarah Palin – ridiculed the idea of Israel’s withdrawing from the territories it occupied in 1967 and likened it with the “absurd” idea of America’s returning Texas and other territories it occupied in wars with Mexico. Israel and its American supporters have also rejected the idea of any peace talk between Israel and the Palestinian Authorities having links with Hamas, which does not recognize Israel’s right to exist as an entity and publicly condemned the killing of bin Laden.¹⁴

Days before evoking some controversy by his Cairo Speech, Obama mended fence with the Israel Lobby and Israel through his American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Speaking to the AIPAC, America’s largest pro-Israel lobby, Obama said that America’s support for Israel remained “ironclad” and that his emphasis on 1967 borders was “misrepresented” and his words were neither controversial nor new. He said he wanted Israel

and the Palestinians to negotiate a border that would be “different from the one that existed on June 4, 1967”. He also asserted that Israel was not under any obligation to sign peace with Hamas unless it recognized Israel as an entity and that he wanted the Palestinians and Israelis to “swap lands” (allowing Israel to retain the “Jewish Settlements” in the West Bank). What the pro-Israeli Obama administration did to the Palestinian cause contradicted his Cairo Speech of June 2009, where he promised to turn America into a benign soft-power: “Indeed, we can recall the words of Thomas Jefferson, who said: ‘I hope that our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us that the less we use our power the greater it will be’”.¹⁵ As King Abdullah II of Jordan has explained, while the State Department and the Pentagon have been soft on the Palestinians, Obama under the influence of his pro-Israeli Middle East adviser Dennis Ross has been soft on Israel.¹⁶

Consequently despite all the brouhahas about Obama’s Cairo Speech, the Muslim World has not much to expect of the US administration, which cannot go against American public opinion to force Israel to accept the 1967 lines as its borderlines with Palestine. Days after Obama’s advice to Israel to accept the 1967-Border as the basis of Arab-Israeli border, on May 24, 2011 Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu addressed a joint session of the US Congress. He told the audience that his country was not going to accept a divided Jerusalem and that the issue of a Palestinian State was least important, while the security for a Jewish state was of prime concern to Israel and America. He “reportedly got 59 rounds of applause — including 29 standing ovations” — for (in effect) telling Obama to shove off his suggestion to start the peace process on the basis of 1967 borders.¹⁷

What is noteworthy is Obama’s volte-face at the end of the day. On September 21, 2011 his so-called soft corner for Palestine simply evaporated on the floors of the UN General Assembly. The Israeli Lobby in America – possibly more powerful than the “Military-Industrial-Complex” – forcefully retaliated against Obama’s “harsh policy” against Israel. Consequently, the US President, supposed to be the “most powerful head of state” in the world, was forced to eat his words. In his UN General Assembly speech in September 2011 Obama unabashedly pooh-poohed Palestinian National Authority’s President Mahmoud Abbas’s proposal of granting formal UN membership to Palestine. Obama, as one analyst tells us, in “an empty and arrogant sermon” to the UN, which evoked no applause for “a single line in his speech” suggested that a Palestinian state would emerge only after “negotiations between the parties”, the Israelis and the Palestinians.¹⁸ He simply ignored the fact that decades of negotiations between the two parties had been fruitless and futile. In the same

speech, Obama concocted history and simply refrained from telling the truth to the world body. He told that a) Israel's neighbors had "*waged repeated wars*" against it; and b) "*In Bahrain, steps have been taken toward reform and accountability*".¹⁹ Not long after Obama's UN speech, America condemned the UNESCO for formally admitting the Palestinian State as a member and cut US funding for the world body – worth \$60 million per year.²⁰ In this backdrop, it seems the Palestinian State will remain ever elusive unless "'something' that will 'somehow happen'", to paraphrase Mark Danner, who is critical of both the UN and US administration for their pro-Israeli bias.²¹

It is evident again that the overwhelming majority of Americans do not know anything about the plight of the Palestinian people at the hands of Israel, let alone the history of Zionism and Israel. As America does not seem to realize the gravity of the Arab-Israeli problem, the "mother of all conflicts" in the Arab World, so is the Muslim World unwilling to accept Israel's legitimacy. It is noteworthy that despite many secular Israelis' public assertion that their country can deal with their enemies and that they do not need American support, the "hawkish side of Washington" is more than willing to give Israel a "bear hug". It is, again, no longer a secret that George W. Bush sabotaged the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks by favoring the rightist Likud Party of Israel, and the "Right-of-Likud" policy of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.²² Americans simply do not understand that if the conflict persists, democratic and Islamist Arab governments will take a strong stand against Israel. What is most striking is conservatives' and other pro-Israeli Americans' total inability to understand the Arab and Muslim discourse on Israel – which redraws the pre-1948 map of Palestine – meaning the total obliteration of the Zionist State. Last but not least, the Israel Lobby is so well entrenched in US administration that even Obama has to concede undue advantages to the Zionist nation. Obama's inability to reverse the pro-Israeli US policy – and his helplessness in this regard – is well reflected in a private conversation with President Sarkozy (which journalists overheard as the microphone was on) at the G20 Summit in Cannes on November 3, 2011. On Sarkozy's terse comment on Benjamin Netanyahu, "I cannot stand him, he is a liar", Obama replied, "You're fed up with him, but I have to deal with him everyday".²³

In view of the emerging changes in the Arab World since the Spring of 2011, which have emboldened Islamist Hamas and other groups, they are least likely to cooperate with the West that is committed to protect the Zionist State to the detriment of more than ten million expropriated, humiliated and state-less Palestinians in the world. Meanwhile, Islamist parties are emerging powerful in Egypt and Tunisia. The fate of the rest of the Arab World will not

be that different in the coming years; “anti-Israel public opinion will remain a feature of Middle Eastern politics until a final and equitable peace treaty is struck.”²⁴ Even “secular” Turkey – a NATO member having diplomatic ties with Israel – is not immune to the growing anti-Israeli sentiment that one notices in the Arab World, Iran and elsewhere in the Muslim World. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan reflected his country’s strong reservations about Israel without any ambiguity. In an interview with the *Time* magazine he favored Palestine’s full membership to the UN; condemned Israel’s violations of UN Security Council’s “more than 89 resolutions on prospective sanctions related to Israel”; and killing of nine Turkish “activists” by Israel on the *Mavi Marmara*, one of the Turkish ships that the Israeli military stopped from reaching the Gaza Strip with humanitarian aid in 2010. He categorically denied that Iran was becoming nuclear or posing any threat to anybody. He posed the question: “Is it Israel or the countries in the vicinity of Israel that are under threat?” And he added, “Israel has nuclear weapons.”²⁵

However, despite the growing influence of the Israel Lobby on the Congress, many American security analysts and even a general consider Israel a threat to “U.S. national security”. In January 2010 General David Petraeus in his brief to Admiral Michael Mullen, the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, depicted Israel a “security threat” to America.²⁶ Despite many Americans’ strong reservations about Israel and the perils that Israel poses to America’s national security, the Congress remains unperturbed about having Israel as America’s main ally in the Middle East. America’s failure to understand why “they” (Muslims) hate Americans is unbelievable. As Ehsan Ahrari has pointed out: “It took the American policy makers more than fifty years to realize that the Arab-Israeli conflict has been a core Muslim issue.” And one cannot agree more with him that although Saddam Hussein was “no one’s hero” in the Muslim World, yet the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 made the average Muslim very angry at America.²⁷ What the West has persistently failed to understand that despite its avid promotion of democracy, Western tolerance of unpopular autocrats in the Muslim World, along with its pro-Israeli and, by implication, anti-Arab / anti-Muslim policy, secular democracy has become synonymous with Western “hedonism”, “materialism” and “Godlessness”, as we find in the writings of Sayyid Qutb and his ilk.

There is no room for taking Iraqi journalist Muntadar al-Zaidi’s shoe throwing at President Bush in isolation or condescendingly, as Condoleezza Rice attributed it to the “confirmation of the democratization” of Iraq. Zaidi’s emergence as a hero not only in the “liberated and democratic” Iraq but also in the entire Arab and Muslim World for his public

display of courage and hatred for the West tells us a thousand tales and reveals the “hidden transcripts” of the Muslim World. Muslims across the board, the vast majority being peace loving ordinary people, love to glorify anyone who hits the West, symbolically or literally.²⁸ This incident and its positive repercussion in the Muslim World should be an eye-opener to Western policymakers. The mass protests in the Muslim World against Israeli air raids in Gaza in 2008-09 and Israeli commandos’ killing nine Turkish civilians in the Gaza-bound aid flotilla in May 2010; and the Muslim mass support for Hezbollah’s war against Israel in 2006 simply reflect Muslims’ contempt for Israel and the West. Mahathir Mohamad, among many leading Muslims, condemned the Israeli attack on the unarmed Turkish flotilla as “most cowardly and deserving only of brutes, not civilized people”. He also portrayed Israel as a “rogue state”.²⁹ As the West condones Israeli retaliatory air raids as acts in “self-defense”, Muslims in general have no qualms about justifying Hezbollah or Hamas rocket-attacks against Israel to kill indiscriminately. It is noteworthy that while the Western media in general and the ones run by the neo-cons in particular – Fox News for example – portrayed the Israeli bomb victims in Gaza as “Palestinian militants”,³⁰ most other sources confirmed the bulk of the victims as non-combatant civilians, women, children and the elderly. In view of the above, it appears that Israel is more than a Zionist state. It is a rogue state serving the interests of the neo-imperialist West, as Theodore Herzl envisaged, “a *rampart* of Europe [and America] against Asia”.

The Israel Lobby and the Israeli Exceptionalism

Although a democracy and a promoter of equal rights and opportunities for every citizen and resident in the U.S., its government is not free from the influence of lobbies who regulate, transform, stop or introduce policies for the benefit of various entities in the most undemocratic manner. The lobbies are too many to count on fingertips. The Military-Industrial, and the Israel lobbies are the most influential ones. President Eisenhower registered his concern at the “overgrown military establishments” in his Farewell Address to the nation on January 17, 1961:

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience....Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society....The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We

must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted.³¹

One eminent scholar asserts, “Until we rein in what Eisenhower originally called the ‘military-industrial-congressional complex,’ we will never have a peace-based economy.”³² In view of the American Government’s, media’s and civil society’s almost total indifference and silence at the flagrant violations of human rights, international law, and U.N. Resolutions by Israel since 1948 – especially since 1967 – one believes the Israel Lobby is as influential as the Military-Industrial Complex; it could be even more influential than the latter. Not so surprisingly, no American president since the assassination of John F. Kennedy has ever raised a finger against Israel for acquiring nuclear weapons. In sum, there is nothing surprising about America’s covert support for Israel because American foreign policy has always been duplicitous, and after Kennedy, it is virtually run by the powerful Military-Industrial-Complex and the Israel Lobby.³³

However, the Israel Lobby is not as old as the Military-Industrial one. As one renowned American scholar put it:

While anti-Semitism was rampant in the U.S. in the 1940s; Jews as a group were weak and poor having limited access to higher education; were discriminated against in entry to the foreign service; and before 1948, most educated American Jews were socialists, not Zionists. How has all of this changed so radically in the next generation (1948-68)? Dominance in Economics, Sociology, entrance into new fields like Psychology; conquest of the banks and Wall Street, by corporate raiders in the 1980s, using junk bonds; change of dominant schools of economics from Keynesians to Friedman's market economics in the 1970s; conquest of Middle East studies from the so-called Arabists at State Dept to Zionists; and the rise of the neocons.³⁴

The Israel Lobby is so powerful that American politicians seem to be competing against each other in demonstrating their love and concern for the Zionist State, the “beacon of light”, “only democracy in the Middle East” and a “victim of anti-Semitism”. While John Edwards in 2004 assured Israel that “your future is our future”, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich felt that “Israel is facing the greatest danger for [sic] its survival since the 1967 victory”. In 2007, Hillary Clinton in her address to the powerful American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) meeting in New York expressed that Israel was going through “great difficulty” and “great peril”, and that it was a “beacon of what’s right in a neighborhood overshadowed by the wrongs of radicalism, extremism, despotism and

terrorism”.³⁵

Although it is almost a taboo in America to point fingers at Israel as a problem to world peace and America’s long-term security, a few people have dared to expose Israel as the biggest threat to world peace and America’s security.

Barack Obama, who sometimes talks about the plight of the Palestinians, was unequivocal in his praise for Israel in 2007, promising that if elected to the presidency, he would “do nothing to change the U.S.-Israeli relationship”.³⁶ In view of this, we should not take any American politician seriously whenever we hear them talking about a Palestinian State (what seems unattainable) or asking Israel to vacate those territories it occupied from Arabs during the 1967 War. Obama said these sorts of things soon after becoming the President, in Cairo in June 2009. He promised a “new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world” and urged Islamic nations to embrace democracy, women’s rights, religious tolerance and the right of Israel to co-exist with an independent Palestinian state. This initially pleased many Muslims around the world.³⁷ As a senior Aljazeera political analyst said, “[The speech] was about willingness to engage in soft power while keeping the military option alive”. Another Arab analyst felt that:

His [Obama’s] call for stopping settlement and for the establishment of a Palestinian state, and his reference to the suffering of Palestinians ... is a clear message to Israel that a just peace is built on the foundations of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.³⁸

However, as discussed earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected President Obama’s suggestion made in a speech at the State Department in May 2011 that a future Palestinian state must be based on the 1967 borders. Netanyahu said those borders, which existed before the 1967 Middle East war, were “indefensible”. An estimated 500,000 Israelis live in settlements built in the West Bank, which lies outside those borders.³⁹ Soon afterwards, addressing an AIPAC meeting in Washington, Obama made it clear that the Jewish state would likely be able to negotiate keeping some settlements in any final deal with the Palestinians. Obama, as expected, simply succumbed to the pressure of the Israel Lobby.⁴⁰ The US rejection of the proposed Palestinian statehood by President Mahmoud Abbas (of the Palestinian National Authority, not State) in 2011 further strengthens the notion that the tail (Israel) actually wags the dog (US). What Susan Rice, the American ambassador to the UN said is noteworthy. She felt that there was no greater threat to “US support and funding of the UN than the prospect of Palestinian statehood being endorsed by member states”; and that the US “could withdraw funding from UN if Palestine state is recognized”. Obama conveyed the

same message to Abbas.⁴¹

As Tirman explains, “The AIPAC is the apotheosis of the lobbying group as a representative of a foreign country. Few lobbies have been more powerful. Few have more single-mindedly pursued a narrow agenda in U.S. foreign policy, and few have done more damage.” He has also pointed out that the AIPAC represents the right wing of Israeli political spectrum, not the main stream of American Jews; and an ultra-right American think tank, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, runs the organization.⁴² Paul Findley, a former Congressman from Illinois, is also very candid in this regard. He reveals that the AIPAC spies on Congressmen and finds out if they say anything against Israel even in private conversation. He thinks:

It is no overstatement to say that AIPAC has effectively gained control of virtually all of Capitol Hill’s action on Middle East policy. Almost without exception, House and Senate members do its bidding, because most of them consider AIPAC to be the direct Capitol Hill representative of a political force that can make or break their chances at election time [emphasis added].⁴³

Findley reveals that American State and Defense employees since Eisenhower administration are “being suborned and bribed on a wide scale” by the Mossad to work for Israel. He cites an Ohio Congressman who was distressed at American policy-makers’ inability to “distinguish between our national interest and Israel’s national interest” because of the AIPAC influence.⁴⁴ In sum, AIPAC has an “almost unchallenged hold on Congress”. And no wonder Ehud Olmert (a former Israeli Prime Minister) was so grateful to the outfit: “Thank God we have AIPAC, the greatest supporter and friend we have in the whole world.”⁴⁵

Thus it appears that the Israel Lobby in America is as “American as an apple pie”. However, the Lobby’s interests hardly converge on those of America. The Israel Lobby can reward or punish politicians through campaign contributions, which has been its main weapon. Thus the Lobby is responsible for dragging America into wasteful and unpopular wars and conflicts in the Middle East, including the Iraq wars and conflicts with Iran and Syria. The Lobby is said to have been mainly responsible for Iran’s nuclear ambitions.⁴⁶ Some other findings about the Israel Lobby’s extraordinary influence on U.S. administration corroborate Shahid Alam’s arguments about “Israeli Exceptionalism”, which defies all laws, logics, commonsense and norms of international law and relations.⁴⁷

The following examples are simply mindboggling: a) Israel has the sole privilege of

borrowing from American commercial banks at lower rates than other borrowers; b) Israel is the only recipient of American foreign aid that does not have to account for how it is spent; c) America gives \$3 billion to Israel each year, one-sixth of America's total foreign aid, which amounts to giving \$500 to each Israeli citizen against \$20 for each Egyptian, and \$5 for each Pakistani and Haitian citizen; d) Israel also receives a donation of \$2 billion from American citizens each year, which is the only tax deductible donation by U.S. citizens to a foreign country due to a special clause in the U.S.-Israel income tax treaty.⁴⁸ Last but not least, one takes the risk of getting branded as "anti-Semitic" by merely pointing out Israel as a big threat to world peace, its excesses, double standards and the extraordinary influence of the Israel Lobby on US administration. Mearsheimer and Walt have pointed out how difficult it was to get a publisher for their book in America and even journals and magazines simply refused to publish their article critiquing the Israel Lobby in America on flimsy grounds.⁴⁹ Nobel-Laureate German poet Gunter Grass has become a persona non grata in Israel for his poem (in German), "What Must Be Said", which came out in the *Suddeutsche Zeitung* on 4th April 2012. Grass questions Western hypocrisy about nuclear proliferation and Israel, and as to why he took so long to write about Israel, which is a threat to world peace:

*Why only now, grown old,
and with what ink remains, do I say:
Israel's atomic power endangers
an already fragile world peace?
Because what must be said
may be too late tomorrow....
And granted: I've broken my silence
because I'm sick of the West's hypocrisy⁵⁰*

The Israel Lobby is so influential that America, which propounds the freedom of expression as a sacred constitutional right, its mainstream media shies away from publishing anti-Israeli news and views. It did not give any coverage to what Carter's former Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski said in a speech to the National Iranian American Council in November 2012 about Israel's belligerent policy towards Iran, and reprimanded the US for following Israel "like a stupid mule whatever the Israelis do".⁵¹ As Alison Weir, the executive director of "If Americans Knew" believes that due to the influence of the Zionist Lobby, Americans can lose their jobs by simply criticizing Israeli atrocities, especially killing of Palestinian civilians and children by the Israeli Defense Forces,⁵² few Americans dare go against the Zionist Lobby. Many conservative Congressmen and analysts stigmatized

Obama's Defense Secretary Senator Chuck Hagel as "anti-Semite" for his criticism of Israel's highhandedness.⁵³

The Arabs and Muslims in general despise Israel so much that even pro-Western Saudi Arabia and Jordan publicly supported all Arab-Israeli wars between 1948 and 1973; the latter took part in all of them. Pledging a billion dollars to rebuild Gaza at the Arab summit in Kuwait in January 2009, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia said "each drop of Palestinian blood [is] more precious than anything in the world". Other Arab leaders at the Summit also condemned Israel in unambiguous terms.⁵⁴ It is noteworthy that senior members of the Saudi Royal Family no longer shy away from publicly condemning Israel, UN and even the United States for the sufferings of the Palestinians. "America is not innocent in this calamity", asserts Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal. He also mentions the growing Shia-Sunni rapprochement, including former President Ahmadinejad's public recognition of Saudi Arabia as the leader of the Muslim World.⁵⁵

The Pro-Western Arab rulers' public support for Palestine against Israeli encroachment reflects their insecurity and desire to buy legitimacy at home. Conversely, Arab disunity and Arab states' past experience of catastrophic defeats at the hands of nuclear-armed and US-sponsored Israel are important factors behind Israeli conceit and complacency. However, the prospect of revolutionary regime changes in pro-Western Arab countries is a potential threat to Israel in the long run. Most importantly, anti-Israeli secular and Islamist militant groups have already been enjoying wide grassroots support among the *Ummah*, well beyond the Arab World. We may consider the Palestine conflict as the "mother of all conflicts" in the Muslim World. The diametrically opposite Muslim and Western discourses on Palestine and Israel make our investigation difficult. Nevertheless, we need to understand that this lack of convergence is the key to our understanding of the problems of Islamophobia and Westophobia.⁵⁶

Unless Israeli leaders abandon the belief "that harder you beat the Palestinians, the softer they will become",⁵⁷ there is no hope for any durable peace between Islam and the West. With the rising popularity of Hamas among Muslim masses, the standing of Arab leaders suffered due to their silence and duplicity.⁵⁸ Shiite Hezbollah and Mahdi Army and Sunni Hamas are forging ties under the aegis of Iran while the vast majority of liberal Muslims are turning anti-Western.⁵⁹ What is likely to be a perpetual headache for Israel in coming decades is the Hamas-Fatah MOU, signed in Cairo on May 3, 2011. Although Secretary of State Hillary Clinton refused to rule out further negotiations with a Palestinian

side that includes Hamas, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu refused to negotiate with any Palestinian side that did not renounce violence and recognize Israel.⁶⁰ Israel's refusal to come to an agreement with the Palestinians will not only eventually kill the "Peace Process", a united Hamas-Fatah-Hezbollah front with the blessings of post-Mubarak Egypt and other Arab neighbors will also further delegitimize the Jewish State. One Western analyst believes that "the pen that launched the reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas is likely to have more of an impact on U.S. policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than the bullet that ended Osama bin Laden's life."⁶¹ As it was bad news in 2009 that negotiations over a two-state solution to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had reached a dead end,⁶² Israel's refusal to stop Jewish Settlement in the West Bank under different pretexts have further aggravated the situation. Meanwhile, by early 2011 Mahmoud Abbas, the embittered President of the amorphous Palestinian State had lost faith in Obama's neutrality and any hope of getting American support for a Palestinian State.⁶³

In view of Israeli stubbornness and American vacillation, double standards, and bias against the Palestinians, the average Muslim from Morocco to Indonesia and beyond has become avowedly anti-American. To most Muslims Israel has been an illegitimate entity and will remain so for an indefinite period, or may be, forever. It was evident in the anti-Ben Ali movement in Tunisia. Tunisians denounced the dictator for hosting Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Tunisia. Their contempt for Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and his predecessor Anwar Sadat was also due to their forging diplomatic ties with Israel. Israeli illegitimacy and arrogance are at the core of Arab hatred for pro-Western autocrats in the Arab World. For the pro-democracy Arabs, Israel's "secret hotline" to Arab autocrats has been a stumbling block to their aspirations for freedom.⁶⁴ The overthrow of the Mubarak regime has brought changes in Egypt's policy towards Israel. The military regime in Cairo declared to open its only crossing with the Gaza Strip in May 2011, "significantly easing a four-year blockade on the Hamas-ruled territory but setting up a potential conflict with Israel".⁶⁵ One Israeli analyst has described the plight of the under-employed/unemployed Palestinians who live in cramped Gaza strip, and are regular victims of Israeli bombing, questions her own government in the wake of the 2012 Israeli bombing of Gaza:

What does it mean that a girl from Gaza – whose school was bombed and her best friend was killed before her eyes that they, too, are human beings? And how has a nation that has occupied other people's territory for forty-five years continued to tell itself, with such deep conviction, that we are the single and ultimate victims in this story? And the evil of the

occupation has become so banal that no one sees the evil anymore.”⁶⁶

Although things have changed drastically after the overthrow of President Morsi in a military coup in July 2013 and the election of pro-American General Abdel-Fatah el-Sisi – the coup leader – as the new President in 2014, there is no mass sympathy for Israel among the bulk of Egyptian Muslims. While 73 percent of Arabs in 2002 in six Arab countries considered the Palestinian issue as one of the most important issues, the corresponding figure in mid-2008 rose to 86 per cent.⁶⁷ Interestingly, the substantial rise in Arab support for the Palestinian cause took place in the wake of the US-led invasion of Iraq. What is most disheartening from the Western / U.S. viewpoint is that two surveys in 2006 and 2008 in some Arab countries revealed that three-quarters of Muslims based their judgment of America (a) “on its policies, not on its values”; (b) the “vast majority” of them considered the US and Israel as the “most threatening” states; (c) the vast majority of Sunni Muslims in these countries considered Hassan Nasr Allah of Hezbollah and other anti-Israel / anti-American Shiite leaders as their most favorite and (d) the vast majority of them did not trust the US as an honest broker.⁶⁸

Former President Ahmadinejad of Iran emerged as the most ardent champion of the “jihad for Palestine”. While on the one hand the inherent extra-territoriality of Islam is the driving force behind this global solidarity for the liberation of Palestine, Muslim populist leaders use the Palestine issue as their red herring and fig leaf to hide their incompetence. A recent Brookings research based on 24-nation study reveals that the Palestine-Israeli conflict still matters a lot for the average Muslim in the Middle East.⁶⁹ Consequently it appears that the Muslim-West understanding requires Israel’s abandoning the policy of “security for Israel, but no Palestinian state”.⁷⁰ Some analysts rightly believe: Israeli complacency and Western tacit support for Israeli occupation of Arab lands and Arab resentment against peace with Israel will eventually be catastrophic to world peace in the coming decades.⁷¹

Israeli nervousness at the political upheavals in the Arab World and the Muslim Brotherhood’s demand for a plebiscite in post-Mubarak Egypt to decide the controversial peace with Israel were some of the indications in this regard. British politician William Hague believes that if Israel abandoned the Peace Process to reach the “two-state-formula” in Palestine, Arabs would be forced to abandon the Process; and this would eventually lead to a bloody war for a “one-state-solution” in the coming years.⁷² Thomas Friedman reflects similar views:

Today, I believe President Obama should put his own peace plan on the table, bridging

the Israeli and Palestinian positions, and demand that the two sides negotiate on it without any preconditions. It is vital for Israel's future — at a time when there is already a global campaign to delegitimize the Jewish state — that it disentangles itself from the Arabs' story as much as possible. There is a huge storm coming, Israel. Get out of the way.⁷³

Conclusions

One believes it is time the United States realizes “Israel cannot for long endure as a colonial project. It must choose between wars – and destruction – or transition to a state for all its peoples.”⁷⁴ Thanks to Israeli complacency and the overpowering influence of the Israel Lobby in America, the Arab-Israeli problem remains in backburner. Meanwhile, following the overthrow of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, Arabs throughout the Middle East are calling for a “*Third Intifada*” (anti-Israeli mass demonstrations), which is likely to involve Arabs within and beyond Israel and Palestine.⁷⁵ The denial of basic human rights to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank – human dignity and security, health care, education, employment opportunities and clean drinking water – will never keep the status quo in perpetuity in favor of Israel. It seems, no durable peace is possible without recognizing the right of self-determination and the “right of return” to millions of Palestinian refugees and Diaspora in the West.

The growing American-Israeli-Indian nexus, which China and Pakistan do not consider a friendly triumvirate, is another factor behind the growing Muslim resentment against America and its allies. As Pankaj Mishra has elucidated, Obama does not mention why his country is callous about the “relentless tyranny of governments that deny their citizens dignity”, particularly America's “closest allies” and Israel, “the only democracy in the Middle East” and India, “the largest democracy in the world”.⁷⁶ Obama's ambivalence and unequivocal support for Israel has convinced the *Ummah* that there is no peaceful solution to the Palestinian problem. One analyst argues: “President Obama spoke at a time when U.S. influence in the region is at an all-time low in modern history. A new PEW survey ... finds that the rise of pro-democracy movements has not led to an improvement in America's image in the region.... in other predominantly Muslim countries, views of the U.S. remain negative.”⁷⁷

Last but not least, Professor Jerome Slater has convincingly argued, irrespective of what people think of Zionism – as racism or not – there is no denying that “to an alarming degree, an increasing number of Israelis are [racist]”; and that as Israel is not a Jewish refuge

(as most Jews do not want to live in Israel) so is the concept of a “Jewish State” is inconsistent with democracy. He considers Prime Minister Netanyahu’s demand for a “formal Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state as a precondition for negotiations” as full of cynicism. He thinks Netanyahu and Israeli Zionists have “*neither the intention nor the capability of reaching a two-state settlement under any conditions* (emphasis added).” Slater believes that Palestinians are more flexible on the issue of the two-state solution than Israelis provided Israel accepts the principle of the “right to return” to the Palestinian Diaspora across the world.⁷⁸ In this backdrop, it appears that no Arab-Israeli peace is on the cards in the foreseeable future.

It is time that America realizes it has a very important role to play as the “sole super power” in the “unipolar world” of the post-Cold War era, as a soft power and an honest broker to make peace between the Western and Muslim worlds. Nothing short of forcing Israel to respect international law and the various UN resolutions it has violated with impunity during the last six decades can appease the bulk of the global Muslim community. America cannot afford to wait another 50 years to abandon the Israel Lobby and America’s six decade-long pro-Israeli and anti-Arab policy – America took more than 50 years to understand that the Arab-Israeli conflict was also a “core Muslim issue” – for durable global peace and its own security. Sooner America understands that both Sunni and Shiite extremists – from al Qaeda to Hamas and Hezbollah – sustain by espousing the cause of establishing an independent Palestinian state, the better. America must not become the hostage to its own arrogance and ignorance.

In view of America’s unconditional support for Israel, one wonders if the Zionist State has been an asset or liability to America. Israel during the Cold War might have provided some helpful intelligence to America against Soviet Union, but they did not decisively affect the course of the Cold War. Conversely, the Arab oil embargo due to Western support for Israel adversely affected American economy. However, Israel has the capability to counter some “rogue states” in the Middle East to preserve Western interests in the region. Then again, Israel itself has become a rogue state, hence a strategic burden and a security threat to America. The Palestine issue is at the root of all conflicts in the Middle East, and America’s unqualified support for Israel is the main factor behind Muslim / Arab hatred for America.⁷⁹ America’s duplicitous policies, especially its vetoes against Palestinian and Arab interests and shying away from playing the role of an honest broker to resolve the Palestinian problem may be mentioned in this regard. More than 80 percent Arabs consider Arab-Israeli conflict very

important in determining their relations with America. They believe America to be a “partner in Israeli expansionism”. Most Arabs consider Israel as the root cause behind Muslim support for al Qaeda.⁸⁰

As Steven Kull elaborates, Muslims overwhelmingly believe that 9/11 attacks are contrary to the teachings of Islam; but they also believe that America is reviving the spirit of the Crusades among Western Christians against Islam, as after 9/11 instead of “backing away from the Muslim World” it invaded Afghanistan and then Iraq and expanded its forces in the Gulf. It appears that al Qaeda’s “intended goal” of the 9/11 attacks was to make Muslims retaliate against the American backlash to precipitate their “global jihad”. And America unwittingly is doing what al Qaeda wants it to do.⁸¹ The American administration simply does not pay any heed to the argument that Islamist terrorists have been mainly targeting American / Western interests by exploiting the plight of the Palestinians. In sum, while the Palestine issue has remained an open sore and Israel an unassimilated lump in the Muslim World, nothing short of a permanent solution to the Palestine problem, including the millions of Palestinian refugees’ “right to return”, the world is not going to witness a substantial decline in the level of Islamist extremism in the Arab World. The key to the solution of the Palestine problem lies in the West, which is unwilling to loose control of the oil and gas fields in the Middle East. Washington knows it well that supporting an unruly, over-indulgent and nuclear-armed Israel is its best bet to control the oil-rich and strategically important Middle East, at least in the foreseeable future. However, for a durable peace in the Middle East and the Muslim World, America and its allies must find out a solution to the Palestine problem, which should be totally acceptable to Arab and non-Arab Muslims. Only democracy, good governance and free market economy can ensure peace and stability by eliminating Islamist and ethno-national-sectarian extremism and terrorism in the Arab World and beyond. The U.S. must play a proactive role in protecting and promoting people’s democratic and ethno-national aspirations everywhere, especially in the Arab World, for the sake of global peace and a comprehensive homeland security strategy for America. Incidentally, global peace and order – to a large extent – depends on a just peace in the Arab World. We have reasons to believe that the first Arab-Israel War, which led to the creation of Israel in 1948, signaled the beginning of another “Hundred-Year War” in world history. And America can play the most decisive role in ending, what appears to be, a never-ending conflict in the Arab World, which has already spread to other parts of the Muslim World and beyond, and is potentially capable of destabilizing the entire world for decades.

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