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By

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Introduction

The October 7 Hamas attack on Israel's soil has been viewed as an aberration amidst speculation of the second installment of the Abraham Accords alluding Riyadh's formal recognition of the Zionist state. For the government in Tel Aviv led by the hyper-nationalist, Likud party, it was akin to Israel's very own "9/11". Its allies most notably, the US, have been in unison with Israel's narrative repeated ad nauseam that "Israel has the right to defend itself". Israel's position seems to be becoming untenable in recent years, especially since the *Sheikh Jarrah* eviction (neighborhood in Jerusalem). However, its posturing has been getting more bellicose and vainglorious due to the fact that far-right maximalist elements are ensconced in the Netanyahu dispensation as well as the Knesset, and more importantly, it is the unequivocal support Washington has extended to Israel irrespective of the political season in the Capitol Hill. This virtually all-weather US support for their Middle Eastern ally is part of this powder keg of a problem and subject of this issue brief.

It is important to dissect the various reasons that undergirds this iron-clad alliance that often invites censure from critics of US foreign policy. These reasons aren't the ones peddled by conspiracy theorists, rather a rational analysis shows how the US-Israel relation that transcends the type of US administration in the Oval office, is weaved

together based on ideological and cultural affinity, confluence of geopolitical interests, and crafting rapport amongst both nations. In the current context, the Biden administration as self-appointed peace broker, in particular US Foreign Secretary, Antony Blinken has been on a marathon diplomacy in the Middle East. Blinken has been blocking international bids for a ceasefire in Gaza and has been unapologetically defending Israel's military campaign - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has described Israel's recent actions as genocide – supposedly against Hamas.¹

Reasons for unwavering US support for Israel

Any debate that seeks to find a solution to cauldron of the Middle East will have to analyze the Beltway clout and how it is exercised; the US predominantly puts its weight behind arguably its closest ally with which many Americans claim to have a joint Judeo-Christian heritage, the Zionist state of Israel. To say this historic and deeply embedded relation is multi-faceted won't be hyperbole and the reason of this support is not monocausal.

Dissecting the Geostrategic interests

Particularly after 1967, the US-Israel geostrategic alliance grew strategically and rapidly as a result of America's USSR containment policy vis-à-vis the Cold war calculus, to countervail what Washington considered as the presence of communist "tentacles" in several Arab countries. The decision-makers in Washington were particularly impressed by how during the 6-day Arab-Israel war of 1967, Israel was not only able to vanquish the likes of Syria, Jordan and Egypt, but seize new territories such as the West Bank. This was a time when the demoralized US was dealing with the morass and debacle of the Vietnam War. The US saw Israel as a "victor" and "invincible", ergo they found an ally in Israel who could protect American interests in the Middle East while the US could shift greater focus towards other regions. Israel also turned into a consummate match for the anti-Soviet template due to strained relations with the neighboring Arab countries. In the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), Israel

¹ "Gaza: UN experts decry bombing of hospitals and schools as crimes against humanity, call for prevention of genocide," OHCHR, October 19, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/gaza-un-experts-decry-bombing-hospitals-and-schools-crimes-against-humanity>

continued to function as a bulwark of US interests in the region that is synonymous with global oil production, which was and is crucial for the US. In other words, any anti-US irritant or change to largely pro-US regional status-quo ensured by conservative players such as the house of Saud and military dominated Egyptian dispensation, could be neutralized by Israel. The onus of the self-appointed title of Middle East peace broker assumed by Washington despite having an overt Pro-Israel posture, also emanates from this very interest. The rationale behind this role that no other regional power officially laid claim to, is that even for the US, the Palestine-Israel crisis cannot ratchet up to the point of no return. In the same vein, this function as a force worthy of American conviction for Israel is much more than a sinecure, the Saudi genesis of the 9/11 perpetrators, shifted greater reliance on Tel Aviv, while concurrently diluting to an extent the once deemed indispensable ally status Riyadh enjoyed. For the US despite its intricate military presence especially in the shape of airbases globally, it still views Israel as a power ensuring Middle Eastern stability as defined by the Americans, while this give the US army greater bandwidth to focus on regions like Indo-Pacific, South China Sea et cetera.

Dissecting the Military Industrial Complex and beyond

Moreover, the military industrial complex straddles across the Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea. Since World War II, US aid to Tel Aviv has amounted to nearly US\$ 156 billion that has militarily guaranteed Israel's decisive edge and prowess amidst a not so friendly, predominantly Arab neighborhood.² It has also been a source of international condemnation in recent years particularly due to Israel's abominable treatment of Palestinians, an apartheid per se. Currently, Tel Aviv is the recipient a US\$ 3.8 billion aid annually from the US, which constitutes 16% of its total military budget – there is speculation of additional US\$ 2 billion dollars to be sanctioned by the US Congress for missile interceptors for the Iron Dome.³ The US is known for developing Israel through letting them access loans from US banks at rates that were lower than market. Israel has remained a buyer of US weaponry, however in the 1980s to 1990s, a significant dimension

² Nicole Narea, "How the US became Israel's closest ally," VOX, October 13, 2023, <https://www.vox.com/world-politics/23916266/us-israel-support-ally-gaza-war-aid>

³ Nicole Narea, "How the US became Israel's closest ally," VOX, October 13, 2023, <https://www.vox.com/world-politics/23916266/us-israel-support-ally-gaza-war-aid>

was added to this alliance when both nations collectively embarked on research and development (R&D). A case in point of this collaboration is the aforementioned short-range missile defense system that employs radar technology to intercept enemy rockets, commonly known as the “Iron Dome”. This extraordinary defense capability was funded and constructed partially by the US government. This decades-long joint military R & D has advanced Tel Aviv into 10th biggest exporter of military technology and equipment.⁴ According to some experts, today’s Israel can build many weapons without US assistance, but with the notable exception of F16 and F35, albeit some parts of these fighter jets are manufactured in Israel. Interestingly, the US is now a buyer of Israeli made military equipment, making the relation also a symbiosis militarily. Beyond this, the fact the US remains Israel’s largest trading partner, with US\$ 50 billion worth of trade, is self-explanatory to the US support to Tel Aviv.⁵

Dissecting the Politics of Israel in the US

One intriguing dimension to the US support for Israel has got to do with how Israel popular is amongst the constituents more notably since the 1980s, especially amongst Evangelicals (62.2 million) who theologically associate the reconstitution of the Greater Israel with Jewish population inhabiting it, to the second coming of Jesus Christ as part of the Biblical end-times prophecy.⁶ They are followed by the White demographic across the political spectrum (234 million) and American Jews (7.5 to 8 million) who also support the Zionist state, however this demographic isn’t a monolith.⁷ Rather nuanced as

⁴ Nicole Narea, “How the US became Israel’s closest ally,” *VOX*, October 13, 2023, <https://www.vox.com/world-politics/23916266/us-israel-support-ally-gaza-war-aid>

⁵ Nicole Narea, “How the US became Israel’s closest ally,” *VOX*, October 13, 2023, <https://www.vox.com/world-politics/23916266/us-israel-support-ally-gaza-war-aid>

⁶ David Masci and Gregory A. Smith, “5 facts about U.S. evangelical Protestants,” Pew Research Center, March 1, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/03/01/5-facts-about-u-s-evangelical-protestants/#:~:text=In%202014%2C%20there%20were%20roughly,are%20not%20white%20is%20growing.>

⁷ Jens Manuel Krogstad, Amina Dunn and Jeffrey S. Passel, “Most Americans say the declining share of White people in the U.S. is neither good nor bad for society,” Pew Research Center, August 23, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/23/most-americans-say-the-declining-share-of-white-people-in-the-u-s-is-neither-good-nor-bad-for-society/>

“The size of the U.S. Jewish population,” Pew Research Center, May 11, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/the-size-of-the-u-s-jewish-population/#:~:text=As%20of%202019%2C%20DellaPergola%20estimated,matches%20the%20current%20AJPP%20total.>

many American Jews in recent years have been vocal critics of the state of Israel and advocates of the Palestinian struggle such as Miko Peled (son of former Israeli General and American activist), Norman Finkelstein (son of Holocaust survivors and American intellect) , Dan Cohen (American Journalist) to name a few. This favorable opinion amongst a large multi-ethnic American populace is why we see extreme Pro-Israel position and asymmetrical support for Tel Aviv during the emergence crisis like the recent Hamas attack, in the Congress amongst Senators and House Representatives of both major parties with the recent exception of the phenomenon of Pro-Palestine members, known as “the Squad” in Beltway politics. In doing so, these hardcore Pro-Israel Senators and House Representatives play to the Pro-Israel gallery.

The reason for this outright support as part of the political gospel which appears to be illogical or even irrational at times, is how the American people view Israel as “the only true, liberal democracy with the semblance of American or shared values and moral”, even though this aforementioned accolade has slowly come lose its vitality of liberal democracy credentials under Benjamin Netanyahu. Many Americans have come to believe that ensuring the welfare and existence of Israel is somehow closely twined with America’s security and way of life. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that these Americans view Israel as a Jewish iteration of their own homeland in the Middle East, an anomaly of Western style liberal democracy in the Middle East that is not known for such dispensations. To reiterate, if America was a Jewish state, it would be more or less like the carbon copy of Israel. Moreover to quantify, a 2022 PEW Research center survey revealed that 55% of the Americans have a favorable view of Israel as opposed to 41% citizens who didn’t see the Zionist polity positively.⁸ Conversely, around 77% of the American populace deemed US-Israel relation as good, while 22% were critical of it or had a bad opinion. On the contrary a recent Gallup survey does reflect a shift of sympathy towards Palestinians among voters of the Democratic Party as part of an incipient trend of waning support for Israel. In 2023, 38% Democrats sympathized with Israel, while 49% chose Palestine. This is an improvement from how in 2016 53% of the Democrats chose

⁸ Laura Silver and Moira Fagan, “American views of Israel,” Pew Research Center, July 11, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/07/11/american-views-of-israel/>

Israel, while 23% sympathized with Palestine.⁹ This could potentially snowball into a substantial statistic in the future impacting electoral politics in the US.

Dissecting how powerful is the Israeli lobby in the US

The presence of an all-powerful cabal of Zionist Jews controlling America is often cited by many as a moncausal explanation behind the extent of support and aid Israel receives from the US irrespective of who sits in the Oval office. This whole notion of pantheon of Jewish figures with “deep pockets” clandestinely controlling the US or the World for that matter is supported by the tendentious reading of the matter by Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer’s *The Israel Lobby and the American Foreign Policy*.¹⁰ They find the influence of The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) as the sole reason behind America’s pro-Israel policies rather than mutual strategic interests or shared values, since the aforementioned policies undermine actual interests of the American people. While, this reductive Orwellian simulacrum is fueled by anti-Semitic tropes, it also lacks empirical justification or rational explanation.

Lobbying is sine qua non of the cut and thrust of Capitol Hill, and it could be safely said that one group might be more skilled in the art of lobbying than other players. The AIPAC is particularly proactive interest group and the largest pro-Israel lobby in the US. Its clout is ranked second only to American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB). AIPAC’s clout does come from the availability of copious resources and political access, but it is important to note how its advocacy for causes, isn’t deracinated, in other words it pushes for agendas that already have support of the a considerable portion of the American public and are not incongruous with America’s broader policy. There have been instances where AIPAC failed to succeed in the US Congress, such as in 2014 when it jockeyed for additional sanctions to be imposed on Iran in order to quash the Iran nuclear negotiations.

⁹ “Democrats’ sympathies in the Middle East Shift to Palestinians,” March 16, 2023, Gallup, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/472070/democrats-sympathies-middle-east-shift-palestinians.aspx>

¹⁰ Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, *The Israel Lobby and the American Foreign Policy* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008)

Dissecting how the media manufactured consent for Israel

The role of the mass media can't be underscored enough to construct the perception of Israel as a trailblazing people who transmuted an empty land into a model state synonymous with innovation and morality, a country tightly knit with America due to shared so-called Judeo-Christian heritage. The fact that Jewish people or Israelis generally fall under the category of "whiteness" certainly facilitated acceptance and admiration of the state of Israel. Hence, for many Americans, the idea of Israel is necessary, the public consent vis-à-vis deeming support for the Zionist state as a Christian obligation/ tenet or as an outpost of Western civilization/ liberal order in the Middle East was constructed by leaps and bounds. Israel has always occupied a largely positive position in the American News media and Hollywood that keeps its image as an ally and as a Jewish version of America in the consciousness of the American public intact. In doing so, the popular and news media has curated the case for the Zionist state at the expense of the erasure of Palestinian people and delegitimizing Palestinian claim to their ancestral land. This means disappearance of the *Nakba* of 1948 (forced displaced and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians), decades of genocide as well and the factors leading to an expanding diaspora of Palestinians. However, in 1980s, the mention of Palestinians surfaced in the US news either as terrorists or as piteous victims who were a collateral in the "conflict" with the Israel which indubitably possess the monopoly over violence, thus reserves the right "to defend itself through any means necessary". The Palestinians were pushed out of obscurity, and right into the consciousness of the American public as dehumanized individuals or as people with a sad tale. In this regard, the media in the US was able to uphold Israel's image despite its transgressions against neighbors or Palestinians, without having Tel Aviv's moral authority scrutinized. They made sure that if anyone was to question the actions of Israel, they would be denigrated as questioning the very existence or necessity of the Zionist state.

It is key to deconstruct this unparalleled, unassailable and almost reflexive deference for Israel amongst the American people. In 1947, the leftwing magazine "The Nation" was provided US\$50,000 in funds by the Jewish Agency which was created by Zionist Socialists who were responsible sponsoring immigration of Jews to Palestine. This important funding of The Nation broadly designed a blueprint of how the idea of Israel

will be consumed and accepted by Americans in years to come. This grant was provided to pen reports as well as articles to be distributed amongst United Nation's (UN) foreign delegates and American Liberals for the proactive advocacy of the cause and appeal of Zionism. Freda Kirchwey, the editor of "The Nation", instrumentalized the magazine to publish 12 articles from 1947 to 1954 which were widely distributed to lobby for the creation of a Jewish homeland in the British mandate of Palestine. She is also accredited with a 133 page Zionist memorandum for the UN that simultaneously demonized Arab Palestinians as similar to Nazis. Historians believe that this is amongst the reasons why this analogy became a permanent feature of liberal opposition to Palestinian self-determination. Moreover, Kirchwey is also attributed by some for compelling US President, Harry Truman to recognize the state of Israel. She is amongst the several media progressives as well as liberals to team up with Zionist forces to market Israel as a mirror-image of liberal democracy akin to the US. All the while, the same media also exhausted its journalistic resources to paint the Arabs as "struggling against the curse of medievalism" and envious of the beacon of hope, the modern Jews.

Moreover, during the 1950s and 1960s the relationship between Hollywood and the "land of the Bible" Israel reached its heyday with films like *Exodus*, *Quo Vadis*, *Esther* and *the King*, *Ben Hur* and *The Robe*, which were released with Judeo-Christian themes. Here the 1960s encapsulate the cusp of profound consensus on the matter of Israel amongst US citizens and the policy decision in US foreign policy in favor of the Zionist state. These two decisive moments are paired with two developments, the release and success of Israeli government funded movie *Exodus* along with the emphatic victory of Israel in a 6 day war with its Arab neighbors. The aforementioned movie purposefully narrates the plot in an American manner or register. Furthermore, in the aftermath of Israel's victory in 1967, American newspapers bantered about how Israeli General, Moshe Dayan needs to be brought in to turn the tide of the Vietnam War. This was a period when Israel was being idealized as a military powerhouse because of its battleground invincibility by virtue of the US media. Simultaneously, we see Palestinians depicted as "terrorists" due to the Massacre of 11 Israeli athletes and coaches by Palestinian organization "Black September" during the Munich Olympics of 1972. Whereas, in 1982, Palestinians appeared as "victims" during the Shatila and Sabra Camp Massacres in Lebanon, which were backed by Israel.

Dissecting the cultural narratives that bind Israel and the US

American consciousness and imagination has Israel as an expression of rebuke to Nazism, which is consonant with US war efforts and its contribution to fighting the Nazis. The Jewish country was seen as both “victim” of one of the greatest tragedies in contemporary history, the Holocaust and as “victor” finding a Jewish homeland with Biblical origins after years living in a persecuted diaspora. Moreover, both countries find their genesis in the ethnic cleansing as well as forced displacement of indigenous peoples. America views Israel’s right to defend itself no matter how violent, as justified to address existential threat, hence it holds the exact same opinion and rationale for its own actions as well. Another common factor is how indigenous peoples and Palestinians are completely absent from the history of founding of America and Israel respectively. If the US considers the true version of events or the vantage point of the Palestinians, it would also be essentially an indictment of its dark history of systemic oppression against indigenous peoples and African Americans. This would belie the idea of American exceptionalism and question anti-colonial hue in America’s inception as well as nationalism.

The question here is also how did Americanization of Israel transpire. Dr. Amy Kaplan explained that exponents of Zionism propagated similarities between the Jewish pioneers and Mayflower pilgrims who arrived in the New World from England. This was a carefully curated and diligently designed exercise where New World meanings, tales and emblems were equated to European settler colonial project of a Jewish polity. Parallels were drawn between the Promised Land/ Zion to the New World. In doing so, the creation of Israel was promulgated as a manifestation of modern development contoured by American ideals.¹¹ Another example of Israel’s Americanization is how Former Israeli Premier, David Ben-Gurion was extolled as George Washington of Israel. However, following the 9/11 attacks on US soil, there set in an “Israelization” of America, through imitation of Israel’s take no prisoners style of keeping its adversaries at bay, which has often been the subject of criticism due to infringement of international law.

¹¹ Amy Kaplan, *Our America Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance* (Harvard University Press, 2018), 11.

Conclusion

The support for the idea of Israel can be realized from how on more than one occasion, US President, Joe Biden famously said that had Israel not existed, the US would have invented it. He has even defended the US\$ 3.8 billion aid as the best investment, America makes. Israel is largely visualized as a beacon of democracy in a sea of barbarity, and adversaries that want to push it into the Mediterranean, this is why innocuous slogans like “From the river to the sea, Palestine will free” are preposterously likened calls for genocide of the Jewish people. Until recently, due to the popularity of the Zionist state, it was deemed politically suicidal to censure Israel, however, the emergence of Democrat party members collectively termed as the “Squad” have been vocal in their criticism of the state of Israel. Currently, this multi-faceted, lop-sided and deeply-entrenched support for Israel can be described as exacerbating the crisis in the Middle East, rather than toning it down.