Research Article

Tracing the Inclinations of Major Powers in Arab Israeli Conflict: Identifying Religious ideologies shaping up the Alliance System in Middle East

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to find out the extent to which the Arab Israeli conflict – arguably the most protracted one – has been shaped up by the religious and ideological belief system present in the USA and the EU. It is borne out through this research that on the surface the states evolve their foreign policies based on rationality and cost benefit analyses. But deeper studies into the phenomena of foreign policy choices taken up by the great powers has shown an unmistakable current of religion and ideology guiding the leadership of these two important regions. Obviously such a confirmation would provide new vistas for research and help the policy makers to have a look at this long simmering conflict from a different angle. The finding of this investigation would be interesting and value laden for the conflict resolution between the two communities and would also help strategic players to take rectifying measures in order to do away with political discrepancies and spurious reasoning. The paper follows through adopting a historical approach in which qualitative analysis has been directed at the emergence of the conflict between Arabs and Israelis and the significant positions taken up by the USA and the European continent.

Key Words: Arab Israel Conflict, Religious ideologies, Alliance System in Middle East, Role of USA in Israel

INTRODUCTION

The Arab-Israeli conflict has led to immense violence and catastrophe, within the region for many decades now. Various nations have taken sides with either Israel or Arabs setting the stage for continuous acrimony and hatred. The resolution of the conflict, though not in sight at present, and despite minimal progress has led to entrenched beliefs and commitments towards the two parties in the issue.

The aim of this thesis is to fathom the latent influence of the ideological beliefs on political policy makers about this protracted conflict. This attempt would be based on first examining the directions of idea based motivations of the key side takers and its potential impact on the foreign policies of concerned countries. Thus the predilections of the states in favoring one side more than the other would be gauged. For instance, why the U.S and EU take divergent sides when it comes to the Arab Israeli conflict. What part is played by the modern secularism of EU and the Christian value system of the US in influencing the conflict that has a direct bearing on their respective ideologies? These ideological associations will be examined grounded upon

documented ideational overtones and record data from Research centers.

The policy makers in various countries would make it a point that there foreign policy is not influenced or biased by any ideology or reasons. But interestingly, an attempt would be made in this research, that these same decision makers, unwittingly or otherwise would be influenced by the ideological beliefs and canons, that are religion prone and that this has a direct impact upon the conduct of foreign policy. This would be done with regards to the one of the most protracted conflicts of 20th century, i.e. Arab – Israeli conflict. This would be done systemically by doing an in depth analysis of the religious belief systems ensconced in the US, EU and Israel and examining the instances and patterns in which these religious norms influenced the foreign polices of these countries in taking sides in this conflict.

Generally speaking religious beliefs should be expressed in order to understand what they mean and how come they have the potential to influence people and decision makers. Religious beliefs denote to the notions and principles people cherish following a distinct scheme of thought and theology. Beliefs are known to be related to each person private life as every person holds beliefs for him, but in particular religions the presentation of some generalities do occur (Spector, 2009).

This could create a homogenous set of influence for all those who believe in the same religion. In this way there is a greater probability that the kind of action taken by the community believing in the same set of religious beliefs may concur with each other and the margin of deviation may be relatively low.

Judeo-Christian traditional emphasis on the unequalled supremacy of God, belief relies on mystic values that will supplant human decrees and will claim a grander level of compliance from devotees. For GrigorianaPreduca religions are powerful tools which dictate higher standards of ethics(Preduca, 2011). John Teehan explains:

"Religion comes into play with the integration of one or more minimally concepts (e.g., gods) into the moral matrix. God comes to represent the moral bonds that hold a community together and functions as both legislator and enforcer of the group's moral code. This gives that moral code a heightened sense of significance and obligation. Commitment to that god can then function socially and psychologically as a signal of commitment to the group." (Teehan, 2010).

Illumination thought, which raised the reliability of rationality over religious conviction, religion is a consideration for the private life, but it's not for the government to decide. In the best part of the last century one could establish the link between belief system and the polity For much of the last century, one might explore but that could only be judged under a religious garb or in the certain academic circles and at different levels (Heyer, 2006). This relationship was never having foundation in practicality. Another most important debate is the little domain of practice that is involved in handling religion and its amalgamation within the policy. The two fears that are identified that lie behind the uneasiness of introducing and shoving religion into policy. First the scholars believe that it retards the free discharge of ideas and will be retarding the growth and subsequent development of morality, for when its direction gets awry it can lead to harming rationality. Secondly, the stigma attached with the religion inspired conflicts and the religious terrorism discourages the mentioning of the religion outside the private life (Dionne, 2008). Nevertheless, J. Bryan Hehir states that it may not be to our liking but it's true in most of the cases that insulation of the foreign policy from the inclination of the religion or the pre held beliefs system is very difficult if not outright impossible. Coupled with that the issues of faith and morals have an outstanding place in the comity of nations and their role in deciding the outcome of the policy can't be denied.

Epistemologists Cornelius VanTil and Herman Dooyeveerd stated that it is not possible to avoid

the belief system in any society. As men tries to understand the place in which he lives he has to start with a basic proclivity and the freedom from partiality is never a given in analyzing a particular situation. In each discussion we have to start by presupposing a situation and as we move forward the listener interprets the dialogue according to his or her own prejudgments (Van Til, 1980). All belief cannot be regarded as religious but it's the kind of interpretations which a person makes in order to make sense of the world around him by seeing the world from the lens of some accepted and cherished ideas. Conflict becomes imminent when people are at cross roads of their long held belief and others (Dooyeweerd, 1975)

Historical Undercurrents

For comprehensive background knowledge of the conflict being played out between the Arabs and the Israelis in the territory between Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea the overarching history must be contemplated which has led to the present situation. Some look at the primeval struggle between the two communities Ishaq and Isamaeel, and the complex contention that was played out between the progeny of Abraham for the status of prophet hood.

Others see to the political competition being waged between the two communities and a fight over the scarce resources of land and political ideology of sovereignty in the past century thus limiting the scope of the study to several decades only. The start of the story cannot   be described without the inclusion of the past historical ties and the interactions between the two communities for centuries, which has led to the present situation. The historical account has stories of heroes and villains in the drama which has shaped up the present scenario. Additionally, the sanctity of the land both for the three religions and the subsequent command of region by the most powerful actor along with the strong support leaves the third, reeling over the fate of not only the ideological underpinnings but a substantial part of the religion.

Immigration of the Jews in the Earliest Period From 1516-1918, Ottoman Empire ruled the territory now known as Palestine, though its denizens were never given a specific administrative identity. The area was being divided into districts and provinces according to the geographical needs of the reign (Bickerton&Klausner, 2007).

The Arab populace that inhabited Palestine at the end of the 19th century were 446,000, comprising a hodgepodge elements and were segregated into municipal, nomadic and bucolic lines. The land was being controlled by the state with the local yeoman tilled the land and state provided the managerial services. The Arab Muslims were not at all conversant with the philosophy, however the European prelate authorities brought with them the teachings and preaching that infused the nationalistic fervor first influencing the Christians and then transferring to the Muslims (Oren, 2007). World War I encompassed the European theater and was mainly a European venture. However due to the reach and pervasiveness of the European great nations, many counters were affected due to the First World War. In the ME, the conflict saw the European powers make different alliances and pledges to the different parties, often not met in the subsequent events and pitting one nation against the other. The Arabs saw the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence offered the Hashemite ruler Sherif Hussein freedom for the Arabs in reward of the Arab being pitted against the Ottomans and breaking allegiance to the reign. Jews saw in Balfour declaration from British Foreign Secretary Sir Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild within the British Zionist Organization making it explicit that the British Crown was in support of a Jewish home for the Jews all over the world and directing the British efforts towards the realization of that goal(Rasor, 1998). Each of the party took the responsibilities seriously for honoring their side of the agreement, both of them were to be disappointed after the war, though too different proportions and with different reaction, after the British emerged victorious.

The scope of the mandate went along perfectly meshing the ideals of President Wilson put forth at the end of WWI and the imperialistic desires of the great powers (Bickerton and Klaussner, 2007). The Palestinian mandate went to the British which ignited the fervor among the populace for gaining their own freedom and own form of self – government in both the Jewish and the Palestinians. The British pledges to honor the commitments being made to the Arabs and Israel were never fulfilled or were fulfilled only to make the matters worse for the two communities. The League of Nations encompassed the Balfour Declaration in the responsibilities for the obligatory authority in Palestine at San Remo. This guaranteed Britain to create circumstances to promote the arriving Jewish people with their domination and subjugation of the indigenous people (Smith, 2007). The British were seen in the favorable light by the Jewish and extended a hand of cooperation towards them. The President of the Jewish agency, Chaim Weizmann was based in London to have a close liaison with the British in protecting the interests of the Jewish people (Bickerton and Klausner, 2007).

With the onset of WWII, the Jews were landless and shelter less. The British White paper of 1939 declared carving out a separate home land for the Jewish people in the next ten years which were to be present on the Palestinian land (Bickerton&Klausner, 2005). But for that the paper also restricted the number of the Jews to be no more than 75,000 subject to the consent of the Arab population consent before the immigration could finally began. The Balfour declaration was essentially shot down by the White paper. The danger of WWII was also instrumental in increasing the British anxiety to help sought after the approval and support of both the communities for UK wanted to have confidantes in ME and did not want any trouble during the massive war effort which required not only military wherewithal but also the human resource (Jacobson, 1995).

In April 1948, each side was involved in inflicting brutalities and historically that was proven each side committed an atrocity that historians remember for their brutality. On May 14, 1948, as the Jewish forces claimed victories against the Palestinians and were able to win wars mainly on the basis of their military preponderance. David Ben Gurion announced the State of Israel to occur within the boundaries given by the UNSCOP partition exercise save the Negev and also got approval from the President incumbent at that time President Truman of USA (Smith, 2002).

With the issue being referred to the UN, the Arabs political naivety with the European political discourse started to play up against the Arabs. Their unwillingness to compromise, their inability to present their case and the lack of organizational and leadership skills all played out against them severely jeopardizing their chances of wooing the European towards their cause thus leaving the play field open for the Jewish who took advantage of the system and plead their case in all the favorable circumstances thus carrying the day for the Jewish people (Shindler 2009).

In the aftermath of the 1967 war, the PLO went under a radicalized change that pursued the nationalistic agenda of purely Palestinian people and refused to become a pawn in the hands of the other Arab countries who made it a habit of transforming the PLO into an organization that was supposed to do propaganda stunts for the Arab nations. This led to an increased formation of identity consumes within the Palestinian people about the nationhood of their own ethnic formation and the concomitant attachment with the land they had lost in several wars to the Israelis.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is both intriguing and interesting. The policy makers in various countries would make it a point that there foreign policy is not influenced or biased by any ideology or reasons. But interestingly, an attempt would be made in this research, that these same decision makers, unwittingly or otherwise would be influenced by the ideological beliefs and canons,

that are religion prone and that this has a direct impact upon the conduct of foreign policy. This would be done with regards to the one of the most protracted conflicts of 20th century, i.e. Arab – Israeli conflict. This would be done systemically by doing an in depth analysis of the religious belief systems ensconced in the US, EU and Israel and examining the instances and patterns in which these religious norms influenced the foreign polices of these countries in taking sides in this conflict.

Research Questions

The following central questions were answered by this research study.

How the prevailing ideological beliefs and the concomitant motivations and drivers to take sides in the Arab – Israeli conflict hampers the efforts towards a peaceful conclusion of the conflict.

A number of other sub questions would also be addressed during the course of the research which are;

• What is the basis of ideological motivation in the country of the US and the European countries in the EU?

• Is it on the basis of this particular disposition that makes US and EU to perceive the situation differently thus ending up in supporting one side over the other, often taking opposite sides in the conflict?

• Is there a notice ble absence of ideology which drives the foreign policy of the US and EU. In other words can the decision making in the case of Arab – Israeli conflict be termed as disinterested?

• How far is the conflicting modern secularism of EU and the Christian value system in the US influencing the conflict in ME region?

Rational of the Study

The significance of the research lies in its appeal to the intellectual community in that the Arab Israeli conflict has been analyzed from an innovative perspective. Studies abound, that have examined the issue from the strategic, political, economic and humanitarian standpoint but the role of religious beliefs in influencing the decision

making process and its wider repercussions for the peace process in the ME has been seldom accorded a true place. This would, thus, open up new vistas of research for the students, thus focusing attention on the intractability of the conflict from a new perspective. The role of norms and values taking guidance from the mantle of religion would be examined in order to evince the potential of these elements in either disrupting or facilitating the peace process. Most importantly, the study would lead to finding a more durable and comprehensive approach towards conflict resolution by identifying the potential irritants that are stumbling blocks in the way of just peace and equitable harmony.

Hypothesis

The prevailing ideological belief systems in the nations, favoring one party or the other in the Arab Israeli conflict, leads to the conflict perpetuation and weakens the mechanisms which are essential for conflict resolution in the ME region.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the thesis would be centered on exploring the likely bearing of ideological motivations on the conduct of foreign relations by the key policy makers with regards to the Arab Israeli conflict. That would be done by first comprehending the ideological values of the elites that make up core of the foreign policy decision making as well as the prevalent contribution of the laity in democratic nations. The pattern of preferences adopted by these nations towards one party to the detriment of the other would be explored. These foreign policy decisions would then be gauged by the lens of the popular religious sentiments prevailing in those countries. Any discrepancy found in the thinking and executional pattern of the foreign policy decisions by the elites and those favored by the general public would also be taken into account in order to be sufficiently clear about the direction of the decision making as adopted by certain countries. Finally the impact of these decisions, whether

advantageous or otherwise for the conflict resolution in the region would be analyzed, which would provide for suggesting a more comprehensive approach towards resolution of this long standing conflict. The ideological bonds would be studied by sifting through the documented religious association and other research centers.

CONCLUSION

This investigation is conducted with the aim of analyzing the policy options and the trends involved in allying certain members of the international community. The role of the ideological and religious belief system on the kind of policy approach adopted by the leadership in the three vital entities of US, Israel and the EU, has been described with a view to provide import to these remarkable variables which are otherwise ignored in the debate centered primarily on the cost benefit analysis and rational choice polices in which states primarily seek to maximize their own benefits.

While the study notes a disconnect in the policies of the EU towards the Arab Israeli conflict in so far as the initial sympathy of the European powers for the creation of Israel and the subsequent opposition mounting to the actions of the Israel state, the US has been fairly consistent in its approval and the support of the Israel, this has to do with the US regional interests in the region as well as the Biblical information guiding the conduct of the American Presidential administration. The thesis also notes the strength of the office of US presidents in the American democratic system and the sway that the American politics takes with the will of the American highest seat of authority.

The study has delved also in the actions and the policies of the Jewish community and notes a particular zealot ideology displayed by those who are at the helm of affairs. The study also noted that usually the Jewish voters are more comfortable in voting those parties into power who are bold and brash and could take strong measures when it comes to survival and the national interests of the states. This seems to be the overall national psyche of the Jews all over the world that they give more import and meanings to the idea of nationhood and work tirelessly in support of the outfits – who may be radical to the fullest – are nevertheless more protective and staunch in protecting the national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Also, the Jewish community has a habit of seeing their Premier as someone who comes from a strong military background which can assuage their fears of a national catastrophe and the one who could talk tough and take severest of measures to ensure that the integrity of the state remains intact.

With the EU, the historical trend has also been one of the significant issues which has made them more sympathetic and forbearing towards the Arab world than the Israel. The formal trade relations and the consequent colonization of the Arab world started a mutual integration several decades ago. This relationship – though beneficial to the Europeans – also led to understanding and communication between the Europeans and the Arabs that was beneficial for the Arabs in the long run in which the EU states have better understanding for the Arab world and see them in better perspective. The issue with Israel seems to be its fairly shorter time of existence and the complete lack of interaction between the EU and Israel as a state. Though thousands of Jews lived in Europe but their experience with the statehood started fairly later in 1948.

By that time one of the reason that might have frustrated the EU might have been the oppressive and inhumane treatment being meted out to the Palestinians by the Israel. Still afresh in the European minds the horrors of the WWII, and the not too distant attitude of the Israeli military forces in the wake of the establishment of the Jewish state, the repeat of the Holocaust on the scale of human genocide must have gone down bad with the consciousness of the Europeans. Fed up with the atrocities of WWII, the Europeans must have looked with horror the kind of barbaric

tactics being employed by the Israeli defense forces against the hapless Palestinian people.

An interesting aspect of the study has revealed that the religious and ideological connotations have always been the primary motive behind the strategies and policies adopted by the successive American administration. The level of these commitments has varied from administration to administration and also has a lot to do with the kind of personality that was sitting in the White House. Apart from the personality cult that is being followed in the American politics that kind of attitude is also apparent in the kind of policy options pursued by the administrations. The Presidents of the America were and are supportive of the Israel as a policy option but that kind of commitment flows more from the religious and belief system of these Americans, though they have wrapped in terms of the larger strategic interests of the US also. The study has revealed that the liberal policies of US notwithstanding, over the years, the stated policy of US in defending and buttressing Israel flows more from defending the nation as an ideological commitment and the liberal values of human rights and self-determination have often been compromised in the larger interests of the nation though the real motive remained the ideological fervor underneath the business of international politics.

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