

Reflections on the Pillars of the US Policy in the Middle East during the Post Cold War Epoch

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to establish the extent to which the US has taken advantage of its status as a global lone superpower to shape its foreign policy towards preserving the status-quo. It is argued that because of the strategic importance of this geo-political terrain, the Middle East is an attractive foreign policy destination where the US policy radiates around three pillars: a perennial concern with energy economics, support for Jewish nationalism and counter-terrorism. These are the policy pillars which the US pursues in a calculated, coordinated and aggressive manner. The article then explores the consequences of the US policy on both the region and the attainment of the US foreign policy objectives in the region. The article concludes that it is important for the US to embrace a culture of collective responsibility in dealing with matters that affect long-term security of the region and of itself.

Key words: US, Middle East, policy pillars, energy economics, Jewish nationalism, counter-terrorism

1. Introduction

It is widely understood that the term 'Middle East' was coined by Alfred Mahan, while analyzing sea power in 1902, to refer to the area lying east of the Mediterranean Sea up to the Indian Ocean. What characterizes the geo-political terrain can be conceptualized as a consequence of two factors, that is, the clash of nationalisms (the Arabs versus the Jewish) and the US policy on the region. The intimate combination of these two variables naturally defines the character of the region today with regard to peace and security. The pursuit of incompatible interests by various actors has become a constant and consistent attribute of political life and practice in the region. Of interest and concern to this article, however, is scrutinizing the unalterable interests of the prime actor, the US. This arises from the understanding that the Arab voice over issues affecting the region is fast silencing and that the US has become the most noticeable and important of the Middle East actors. While in most cases the interests of the identified power have been overstated and depicted as extraordinarily apparent, this article proceeds from the position that the interests of the lone superpower are pursued calculatingly, systematically and in a pecking order of priority depending on the strategic factors at a particular interval.

The legitimacy crisis with regards to the state of Israel in the face of the Arab-Islamists is a permanent scar on the region. This aspect brings out an important policy area for the US in the region namely, Jewish nationalism. The proclamation and subsequent carving of the Jewish state of Israel in the heart of Palestinian lands in 1948 has given rise to much of the conflict, strife and the unnerving state of affairs that prevail in the region. The major fault line in this regard is the veracity of the perpetual clash of the Arab and Jewish nationalisms as either side claim rightful ownership of the disputed territories. The matrix of a right versus a right aptly shows that 'tragedies do not occur when right clashes with wrong rather they occur when right clashes with right.¹ This is the heart of the problem mainly between Israel and Palestine on one hand and, indeed, Israel and the U.S and the entire Arab nationality on the other.

The predicament of the region has risen in both enormity and intensity since the end of the Cold War and this can also be comprehended within the context of the interests of external powers within the region, particularly the US.

It is the contention of this writer that the US interest in the region radiates around three issue areas, *viz*; energy economics, fortification of Jewish nationalism and counter-terrorism. The interest areas which are often pursued simultaneously in turn determine and shape US policy towards the region and to a larger extent define the contours of unfolding politics within the geopolitical landscape. The article also attempts to make an evaluation of the US policy on peace and security in the region and beyond.

2. Theoretical considerations

In presenting the theoretical framework of the article, the analysis of the realist theory in international relations was found to be appropriate and provides sufficient and relevant theoretical framework to the problem. Realism emphasizes that an understanding of the world politics should be about what it is and not what it should be. John.T Rourke characterized world politics as a process in which each country “necessarily seeks safety by relying on its own power.”² The manner and behavior of the US in the era of facing the reality of unconventional threats to security, especially after the 9/11 incident, within the region is predicated on the understanding that terrorism could not be curbed entirely and effectively within the UN context and framework.

Realists further propound that the egoistic passions of states and the absence of a central government makes the international arena largely a realm of power and interest. When this is applied to the behavior of the US in the Middle East, it can be discerned that the lone superpower is entangled in the politics of the region mainly for its wide ranging interests. The interests as defined by the US are achievable through and by any means at its disposal including the resort to use of hard power. But because the U.S is pursuing its own interests, it finds itself in a gridlock with the greater number of influential regional powers such as Iran due to conflicting interests. Thus, Jack Donnelly observed that, “the interaction of egoism, national interests and anarchy leads to the overriding role of power in international relations and requires the primacy of power and security in all political life”³ It can be advanced that the US involvement in the Middle East demonstrates that states use whatever resources at their disposal to reach and actively involve themselves, whether as independent, bilateral or multilateral actors, whenever their interests are at stake and may resort to war as a viable policy route in worming their way to achieving such interests. The case of the US involvement in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 are cases substantiating this point.

3. Perspectives on the genesis of the Middle East instability: a synopsis

Throughout the centuries, the Middle East has been deemed to be of a peculiar strategic importance by big powers in the system. It is a shared belief that whoever controlled this area created a long range political dominance not only in the region but also along the adjoining regions such as East Asia.

To a larger degree, much of the unrest, competition, conflict and anxiety that characterize the region are premised on the strategic import of the region. For instance, James Wyllie observes that the strategic importance of the region, which he calls “treasures and tragedies”⁴, derives from a combination of three factors; firstly, the region connects the West to the East and the Far East, secondly, the Middle East controls access to the world’s most important sea routes (Suez Canal, Gulf of Eden, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf which hosts the Strait of Hormuz) and finally, the Middle East has the largest proven oil deposits. Two thirds of the world’s proven oil deposits are located in the area. Additionally, the oil is also reportedly cheap to pump and produce. These three factors, in combination or otherwise, make the region extremely attractive not only to the regional powers but also to the world powers that are constantly engaging in perpetual scuffles and struggles to either exert influence or control the area or achieve both. The scenario depicts one akin to a typical Hobbesian state of nature where anarchy is a result of the behaviour of self-interested actors. In the same light, the behaviour of the key actors in the region is determined by self-interest which in turn breeds tension and sometimes violent eruptions. The Middle East instability is thus a consequence of the pursuit of incompatible interests by the various actors rather than a cause of the problems inflicting the region.

In the context of US-Middle East relations, the problems in the region seem to be precipitated by the post- Cold War strategic posture where the military superiority of the remaining superpower is undeterred. The US has adopted a ‘bludgeon and bluster’ approach in dealing with real and phantom enemies poised to derail or block its foreign policy objectives in the region. This provided an environment conducive for the gestation of a radical US policy framework predicated on the pre-emptive strikes.

The Bush administration adopted the doctrine of pre-emptive strikes, which Christopher Hemmer referred to as the 'roll-back policy', as the main pillar of safeguarding its strategic interests in the region⁵ viz; counter-terrorism, democratization as aptly captured by America's declaration that 'the spread of freedom and democracy is...America's last line of defence and also its first line of attack'⁶ and energy economics. Seemingly, the 'roll-back policy' is an emotional regime change response to terrorism, particularly the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington D.C. However, by trying to solve the problem of terrorism the US, worsened the problem of religious fundamentalism. Since the effective implementation of the 'roll back policy' in October 2001 manifesting in the Afghanistan attack of the Taliban regime. Arguably, the threat from religious extremism to US interests is more or less akin to the threat the Soviet Union with its Communist ideology did during the era of bipolarity. Religious extremism, manifesting itself mainly in the form of Islamic absolutism makes the war against terrorism a costly and cumbersome enterprise. This made the 'end of history' hailed by Fukuyama at the end of the Cold War a fallacy.

The instability in the region is also fuelled by the more than a century long 'question'; the Arab versus Jewish nationalism contest. Mehran Kamrava observed that "one of the most vexing problems in the Middle East...has been the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians...two people have come to inhabit the same piece of land...they have come to view each other as enemies and devoid of rights or legitimacy."⁷ Since the proclamation of the state of Israel on 14 May 1948, the region has experienced a considerable number of conflicts; some major (the staining battles of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973) and others localized such as the second Palestinian *Al-Aqsa Intifada* (military revolt against Israeli occupation) which began around 2000. Although Israel has managed to inflict embarrassing defeats in the major conflicts against its neighbors, Mehran Kamrava heralded that "the death and dismemberment of geographic Palestine has not destroyed the identity of Palestinians...it continues to shape both identity and sense of nationalism"⁸ within and beyond Palestinian political frontiers. The Palestinians continue to fight against Israel's three-legged policy thrust against their nationhood namely; depopulation, repopulation (settler colonialism) and control through deliberate incapacitation of socio-economic and political development.⁹ Evidently, the conflict is continuing today unabated as Israel is increasingly expanding its control into Palestinian dominated areas.

4. Dissecting the pillars of US policy

4.1 The desire to control and influence the oil business

Since achieving the superpower status, the US has been consistently involved in the region seeking both direct control and influence. During the Cold War it was competing with the now defunct ideological rival, the Soviet Union to achieve its foreign policy goals. The end of the Cold War left the US as the lone superpower as the threat from the Soviet Union disappeared. Focus was redirected from a military driven foreign policy to one determined by economic necessity. This probably explains why presidents Bush (Senior) and Clinton's foreign policies were oriented towards the economic superiority of the US as economic development was prioritized instead of focusing on the institutions of war. In order for that to be achieved, the US had to maintain control and influence in the Middle East oil business to sustain its expanding industrial growth. Even during the era of combative policies of Bush (Junior) and Obama governments where the military instrument is the engine of American policy, the oil business continues to matter equally as ever before.

A survey of literature on the matter points that there seems to be a generally shared conviction among scholars on the presupposition that oil is one of the supreme interests of the US in the region. Dereck B. Heater and Geoff R. Beridge, Douglas J. Murray and Paul R. Votti, James Wyllie coincided on this issue. For instance, Dereck B. Heater and Geof R. Beridge wrote that the Western, motivation to control the Gulf region is the natural and perpetual concern to preserve Western oil interests¹⁰ including profits of the predominantly American and British companies operating in the area and the assured supply of the precious fluid. This explains why the US was determined to keep the Soviet Union off the region throughout the long night of the Cold War. The trend is continuing to date with the U.S struggling to deal with the potent influence of China in the region's oil business. The motive for US interest in the Gulf region is directly related to the value of oil to western economic growth. Oil is a major source of energy and a pre-requisite for the industrial sector. The IMF studies revealed that if the price of oil is increased by 5 per cent for each barrel, and if it is sustained for a year, the global economic growth rate will decrease by 0.5 per cent.¹¹ Oil is a non-renewable and a limited resource and the bulk of remaining oil reserves in the world are located in the Middle East.¹²

It is not only the mere aspect of oil that lure the US interest but also the proven reserves that the region boasts of. The proven amount of reserves in the region outstrips what is available anywhere else on earth; the region has 727 billion barrels while Central and South America, Africa and Western Europe and China have 99, 87 and 18 billion barrels respectively.¹³ This demonstrates the embedded fear that any sudden disruption of the oil flow could bring the western economies to an assured down turn if reliable alternative sources of energy are not fully developed. This may not be a fanciful fear given the unforgettable consequences of the 1973 oil shock. An unexpected disruption may also possibly force the West to rely on its meager oil reserves too soon, a situation which is most undesirable at this moment hence the West seems to be prepared to avert such an eventuality at all costs. This partly helps to understand the US reactions to Iran's threats to close the Strait of Hormuz in response to the latest round of sanctions against the Iranian central bank and its oil exports. The waterway facilitates the movement of 90 per cent of the Persian Gulf's oil exports, 40 per cent of the global seaborne oil trade as well as the entire Gulf's liquefied natural gas exports; it connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and the world's oceans.¹⁴ In response to the Iran threats, "the United States reportedly sent a letter to Iran via multiple intermediaries warning Iran that any attempt to close the Strait of Hormuz constituted a red line for Washington."¹⁵ This demonstrates that the importance of the waterway to American economic and military interest cannot be underestimated.

It is not only about the issue of accessibility and availability but also the costs involved in accessing the oil. It is widely supposed that the region's oil is cheap to pump and produce. This may partly explain why former US Secretary for Defense noted that "protecting oil flow from the Middle East is clearly part of our vital interest, which warrants any action that is appropriate including the use of force."¹⁶ The building block of US policy can also be understood within the context of former US President, Jimmy Carter's, lexis who asserted that "any attempts by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the USA and any such assaults will be repelled by any means necessary including military force."¹⁷ It can be argued that while oil may not be the primary interest it certainly occupies an important space in the national purpose.

However, assurance of access and control over the region's vast oil resource cannot achieve the national goals alone; there is also need for the US to ensure the continued existence of the Jewish state of Israel. There is a shared opinion among various authors that the Arab-Israeli conflict is structurally embedded in history. William J. Spencer wrote that, the land in question is Palestine, ancient Judea and Samaria for Jews claimed by modern Israel on historical, emotional and symbolic grounds.¹⁸ Palestine was the homeland of Jews until they were conquered and scattered by the Romans about 2000 years ago, on the other hand, the Arabs claim over Palestine is based on the historical fact that they have been the great majority in the land since the Romans drove out the Jews. The heart of the problem, therefore, is that both Arabs and Jews have legitimate claims over the land in dispute based on history. Given that explosive scenario, what then is the policy response of the lone superpower to the contest? The answer to this question points to a calculated policy which favors Israel's interest. This in turn raises a fundamental political yet strategic question, that is, what is the eternal motive for the world's superpower in supporting Israeli statehood despite violent disapprovals from the bulk of actors in the region?

4.2 The eternal concern for Jewish nationalism

The diplomatic maneuvering of the US is suggestive; the US considers Israel the closest ally in the region by virtue of shared values on religion, forms of government and models of economic governance. The superpower feel obligated to guarantee the statehood of Israel in order for Israel to be a face for American interest in the region. For the US, Israel ought to be protected and supported at whatever costs as long as its foreign policy objectives are protected. For this reason, the US has openly expressed its support for Israel. Other cases of clear support extend to the nuclear weapons and nuclear technology debate in the region. For instance, it is alleged that Israel has made significant progress in improving the quality and quantity of nuclear weapons since 1976. However, like Iran and North Korea, Israel has also refused to place its nuclear facilities under comprehensive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards that would allow for. Instead of equally directing the same attention to Israel, America has chosen to pay less attention to the same threat which it continues to vilify other countries for. America share the same conviction with Israel that nuclear weapons are the ultimate guarantee of Israel's survival as a nation in the work of constant, real or perceived, threats from countries within the region especially from Iran. The problem as to why Iran behaves in that manner are not given due attention.

The point emerging is that the US policy with regards to Israel is underpinned by selectivity which makes the Middle East a zone of an extended political tension which may lead to an explosive nuclear arms race between Iran and Israel. The problem is imbedded in the reality that the US has tended, throughout history, to give unqualified support for Israel's policies regardless of whether they breached international norms or not.¹⁹ This complicity is likely to continue, at least in the medium term, irrespective of which party assumes political office in the US, Democrats or Republicans. The trait for US policy is strategic in the sense that Israel is unlikely to work against US interest in the region as compared to other regional actors like Iran: Israel is considered a reliable ally at least in the medium term.

The US-Iran relations since the fall of Western aligned Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, who had ruled since 1940, in 1979 have been the most contentious in the world with a deep and pervasive resentment for the other.²⁰ Evidence of this came with the popular chants in Iran such as 'death to America' and the 'great Satan' which were only second to 'God is Great' especially during the years of serious revolutionary excitement. Since 1979, the US-Iran relations have been, largely, shaped by the Iranian ideological posture and the hostage crisis. Since then sanctions have been perennially employed against Iran but not Israel despite committing an identical offence.

The aspect of direct influence also comes to the fore: The US not only worries about the possible use of nuclear weapons, but also the political leverage to those who would possess such weapons in the region.²¹ It is US policy to support Israel's military ambitions at the expense of other regional competitors to enhance and maintain American hand and position in the region. Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of US foreign assistance since the Second World War.²² This is so because the US and Israel are in a strategic marriage aimed at confronting common threats to both nations. It is America's closest regional ally against international terrorism unlike Iran. John J Mearsheimer and Steven M. Walt reinforce this view as they opined that "US-Israel strategic cooperation is a vital component in the global security equation for the US."²³

4.3 Counter-terrorism

Preservation of Jewish nationalism alone without eliminating the threat of terrorism would end in futility. Terrorism did not only threaten American security it also extended to Israeli security. Terrorism is considered a common denominator in the broader security objectives of both. Hence counter-terrorism is another pillar of the US policy edifice in the region. Counter-terrorism became a priority policy thrust in the post-9/11 period when the administration Republican government of George Bush responded to the attacks in a military language. This was thought to be the most viable route in confronting the unconventional threats to American security. The institutions of war that were partially disengaged by the Bush (Senior) and Clinton administrations were reactivated and its machinery dusted and oiled to face the complicated threat posed by terrorism. In this way, the 9/11 incident forced America into using its military instrument of national power as the engine of its foreign policy and offensive action became the trademark of its defense policy targeting the region. The objective of the war on terrorism set out an ambitious program of action for the US policy embracing wide ranging activities which included, but not limited to, hunting terrorists, destroying their bases, dealing with states that supported or harbored the terrorists etc. Almost any action that the US committed/is still committing in dealing with 'rogue states' and 'terrorist groups' was/is justified under the broader objective of counter-terrorism.

What is clear from the foregoing is that counter-terrorism transcend the war against terrorist suspects in Afghanistan to include the destruction of suspected 'hideouts' and alleged supporters and funders who were branded by the Bush (Junior)'s government in derisive names like 'outpost of tyranny', 'rogue states', 'axis of evil' etc. Countries in the region such as Iran and Iraq were categorized as such. With the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet Union and its despised ideology, such states associated with the Islamic religion are regarded as the new threat. It can be advanced that the determination that the US retained in dealing with the threat emanating from the Soviet Union is similar to the one it has exhibited in dealing with the new threats. For example, John J. Mearsheimer and Steven M. Walt pointed out that America is deeply disturbed by the Iranian opposition to Jewish nationalism, its support for Hezbollah and its efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction.²⁴ This is underpinned by the belief that Iran and the like-minded states and the groups have a profound hatred of the Israeli-American shared Judeo-Christian values, western culture and ideology. This makes the case for democratization of the region as an intrinsic dimension to the counter-terrorism policy reasonably justifiable from the US perspective.

Democratization is however not a generic approach to the region as other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar are not targeted. It is rather tailor-made for the 'axis of evil' to achieve the grand political objective; dealing with the root of terrorism. There is a strong conviction within the American governance structures that Iran's relentless pursuit of nuclear technology harbors ill-intensions including activities related to state terrorism and clandestine support to alleged terror organizations. This is despite ample evidence that when Iran began to pursue its nuclear program in the mid-1970s it did so with the express support of the US after the signing of the bilateral agreements between the two states. This occurred during the era of Shah's tutelage when Iran was branded the 'island of stability' by America. With the establishment of Iran's Atomic Agency and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in operation, plans were made between the US and Shah Mohammed Pahlavi to construct nuclear power stations across Iran by 2000. However, after the 1979 Iranian revolution, that brought Imam Ayatollah Khomeini to power, the bilateral relations between Iran and US drastically changed in a negative way leading to the state of affairs obtaining at the present day (US-Iran strained relationship over the nuclear technology).

In some ways, the US policy appears defensible given the source of the deadly 9/11 attacks. Firstly, by virtue of the fundamental religious connections, (Countries like Iran and most of the alleged terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, Hamas and Hezbollah etc), converge on religious matters and hold similar religious principles against the West. The anti-American posture characteristic of the Iran government since the success of the revolution in the 1979 to date is a case in point. The US alleges that Iran secretly supports terrorist activities especially against Israel and is working against its democratic project in neighboring Iraq. Secondly, ideological congruence between the alleged terror organizations and Iran may justify US policy. For instance, unlike the US which has blacklisted the mentioned political organizations as 'terrorists', Iran has not.

However, a strong case can be made that the critical issues at stake for the US is the incessant threat posed by Iran to the three pillars of its policy in the region namely; the survival of the lone Jewish state in the region, democratization of the region and oil interests in the region. The US stance can be contextualized from the standpoint that threats and potential threats against western and American security should be dealt with before they mature. The potential for the development of a nuclear bomb by an unfriendly government like the one in Tehran is the last occurrence that the Americans are likely to accept under this philosophy. The concerted pressure on Iran by America makes sense in this regard: it is their assurance that preventing Iran from accessing the bomb is better than to respond to catastrophe. The idea is to disrupt real and phantom enemy plans before American security is at stake. This is based on the perception deterrence and containment which used to be the basis of US strategy have lost relevance in the face of terrorism; instead the US must identify and destroy the terrorist threat before it reaches the US borders by using pre-emptive force.²⁵

While fears of Iran's nuclear program by America to some extent appear exaggerated, they may not be erroneously wild. Iranian President claimed on February 2012 that Iran had loaded its first domestically made fuel rod into a nuclear reactor. This may be read as evidence of Iran's defiant commitment to its nuclear program. Alleged covert operations to attack Israel diplomats in various capitals around the world in countries such as Thailand compound the veracity of Iran's commitment to engage in negotiations over its nuclear program especially its underground Fordow nuclear facility near the holy city of Qom. Iran is also increasingly becoming an important player in the region which many states and anti-American movements look up for moral, diplomatic and material support. It is aligned to Syria and most resistance movements in the region. The current wave of acute tension between Iran and the US is related to the aspirations of an Iranian sphere of influence following the withdrawal of the US from Iraq later in 2011 and the pressure Iran could place on oil producing states on the Arab peninsula.²⁶ It is assumed that a powerful and influential Iran will work against the US and its regional ally Israel. The US also fears the possibility of the emergence of a strong alliance between Iran, Syria and the Islamic movements in the region that may threaten the joint Israeli-American interests.

This explains the US diplomatic push for the end of Al Assad's rule in Syria. The fall of the Ba'ath party in Syria may shrink the geographical influence of Iran. Iran will then emerge isolated provided the Syrians establish a pro-Western government. The surge in missile production in Iran may also be an indicator that the country may produce the nuclear bomb if left unmonitored. The behavior of Iran may also be a direct cause of the suspicion that the Americans hold. Similarly, the US policy towards Israel may also be an incentive for Iran's behavior.

In pushing for its policy agenda, America is relentlessly seeking to 'export' its model of governance (liberal democracy) to the region, not only by persuasion but also through the use of force especially in the identified pockets anti-Americanism. The US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, cited by Allen L. Keiswetter, remarked on 7 November 2011 that "democracies make for stronger and stable partners. They trade more and fight less... they channel people's energies away from extremism...so for all these reasons... opening a political system... is not simply a matter of idealism. It is a strategic necessity."²⁷ According to this philosophy, the relationship between democracy and the success of the war on terror is considered positive. It is presumed that extremism will be defeated if the West and the region share the same political and ideological values. The positive relationship however remains a specter which is yet to be confirmed by empirical evidence.

5. The corollary of the policy pillars

Having dedicated a wealthy of resources, both material and human, in pursuing the identified policy goals, the US appears to be fuelling unrest in the region. The explanation for the emergence of vibrant radical politics is mostly political in nature and primarily related to US counter-terrorism and the support to the Jewish nationalism. While the strategic rationale for the extensive US support of the Jewish state is a reflection of America's overarching strategic interests, over the years the support for Israel has turned out to be a liability to the US security.²⁸ The US policy on the region is making America more vulnerable and making it difficult to achieve its foreign policy goals. For instance, there is an emerging trend in the politics of the region, albeit, an unwelcome development for the West and Israel is the phenomenal growth of support for radical groups, mostly Islamic in orientation, that the West has for long associated with terrorism. The emergency of radical support Islamic political groups has been evident in Palestine where the Hamas control parliament while in Iran Amadinejad is firmly in control with no major impact of his recent slump in parliamentary elections. In Lebanon, the political impact of Hezbollah cannot be discounted. The same is equally true in Tunisia after the 2010 uprisings where the Islamic *Ennahda* Party won the majority of the Constituent Assembly vote. This serves to emphasize the importance with which the US should be cognizant of these actors and accept reality in its strategy in the region. The radical elements in the region regard the US as an enemy of their religion. The US is accused of *islamophobia*. The massive troop presence in the Gulf region does not ameliorate the tensions either. In Afghanistan alone, for example, there are an estimated 400 bases including camps, forward operating bases and combat outposts while the US troop numbers are estimated to be around 90, 000.²⁹

There is also the possibility of the strategy of containment backfiring. The US is on a mission to spread its liberal democracy and capitalism in targeted countries in the region as part of the counter-terrorism objective. This is calculated to minimize, or possibly eliminate, threats to its security objectives. In this goal, the US partners with regional actors, primarily Israel, who assume the proxy function to contain the targeted states and groups. This role for Israel is not new as it performed the same function during the Cold War environment when it was used to counter Soviet ideology in the region. Similarly, it is now being used for the same purpose in countering the ideals of 'rogue' states by passing on intelligence information on capabilities and intentions of hostile governments such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this way, the Jewish state is playing a crucial role as the 'eyes and ears' of the US security concerns which are also a matter of concern to the state itself. Such a role has nurtured an unnerving scenario between the Jewish state and the US on one hand and the 'rogue' states on the other resulting in serious fears for a possible military confrontation. One such consequence of the tense relations is the threat to seal the Strait of Hormuz by Iranian authorities in February 2012. This posture sent shivers not only for China but also Western European countries like Spain and Greece who are leading importers of fuel oil from the Persian Gulf. The current instability in Syria has also spared the US-Russia relations. The variation on the viable yet lawful approach in dealing with the situation has created some visible tensions between the powers due to the alleged role of the US and Israel in supporting the armed opposition working to overthrow the Ba'athist; a goal the US has vigorously pursued since the year 2005. A strong case can be made that if the proposed sanctions on Iran targeting oil exports are successful, then the relations between the US and some Western European countries importing the product from Iran may immerse as soon as the ugly impact is felt in Western European countries.

The US policy also casts a dark cloud of uncertainty on the overdue peace process in the region due to the incessant clash of nationalisms between the perennial foes; Jews and Arabs. Israel, through the use of its military muscle, has gradually but phenomenally annexed Palestinian land which may be regarded as a violation of international law.

It seems whenever the Jewish state feels like it desires to expand its territory, it does so without fear of reprisal from the international community because of the long-standing support enjoyed from the lone super power. Meanwhile, Israel's government is continuing with its settlement expansion into Palestinian lands. Such behavior is costly to coexistence and subsequently peace that the region has been longing to achieve for countless years. Although either side may be blamed for the failure of peace initiatives such as the Camp David attempt, the more belligerent policy of Israel certainly exacerbate the plight of the region. It will not be farfetched to partly blame the US for the situation given the tolerance it exhibits towards Israel in the whole peace fiasco.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The interest of the US in the region are wide ranging; political, economic etc. in terms of US policy globally, and indeed in the region, advancing and maintaining vital national goals has been consistent. The deliberate pursuit of national interest in the Middle East implies the establishment of noticeable presence, that is, a strong hand in the region's affairs. To achieve its grand objective, the US pursues a three-way policy route namely: the support for Jewish nationalism cause; attempt to control the oil business and counter-terrorism. While it is evident that the policy preferences are driven by the realist perspective in international relations, the consequences of such actions have largely been negative not only for the US or so for the Middle East as well. Peace has proved to be elusive and a distant reality by each day for the region. The end state has not been positive for the American security of counter-terrorism has activated mutual resentment between the West and radical Islamic movements and states. Yet another point to emphasize is that, before the commencement of the war on terrorism, the US enjoyed relatively stable relations with its veto wielding counterparts in the UN Security Council especially Russia.

On the same note, it is also imperative to note that the security of the US is of fundamental importance as evidenced by the Bush (junior) Doctrine and the consequential counter-terrorism drive. The doctrine emerged as a policy response in dealing with non-conventional threats to American security. This explains why counter-terrorism gained prominence in the post-9/11 dispensation. It is the conviction of this article that although the intentions of the US policy were and still are defensible, the responses to that end were however lacking as evidenced by consequences of the policy. This article holds the view that terrorism is a perennial question that has, and will continue to exist in political life, so long as political contest remains part of political life in the system. Its total eradication is hardly possible but only a desire. What may be a viable, practical and enforceable is to work toward diminishing the sense of extremism in politics. This may be possible through shared responsibility among key stakeholders in the world. The US as the leading power should bear responsibility for preparing the terrain for an approach that respect the principles of collective action in dealing with diverse and complex threats to the broader world security equation. In this instance Washington needs to rely more on its institutions of diplomacy than the military instrument. The UN as the epitome of collective security should also be taken on board to resolve challenges in the Middle East. The current US government's limited use of the military instrument in resolving international problems exhibited lately in both Iran and Syria may be a good foundation from which Americans can build their future policy toward the region. Such an approach will provide a favorable environment for the pursuit of other foreign policy goals including the perennial concern with Jewish nationalism and the access of the vital oil resource in the region.

Endnotes

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