

Palestinian-Israeli conflict: The Lobby Within

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A just and peaceful solution to the protracted Palestinian-Israeli conflict is only possible when the US ceases to block every attempt made towards it.

This assertion might raise many questions, for example, just how is one to define a just and peaceful resolution? And for what reasons would the US obstruct such a possibility, considering that stability in the Middle East is, or at least should be a top American priority?

A just and peaceful resolution is difficult to define, considering that the conception of justice varies both in definition and interpretation. In the case of this conflict, the long-held assumption is that a just resolution is one that would be consistent with international and humanitarian laws, and which would enjoy the largest possible consensus worldwide.

A consensus is indeed at hand and has been for decades; it is one that recognizes the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories as illegal and immoral, that unconditionally acknowledges the illegality of all Jewish settlements in occupied Palestine and the illegal transfer of Israeli settlers to inhabit unlawfully acquired Palestinian land. Strangely enough, despite its very cautious phraseology, the US, especially under the current administration of President Barack Obama recognizes these very facts. But then why is the man who leads the world's only superpower proving not only incapable of achieving what should be a practicable feat, but also going so far as to hinder the efforts of other parties to simply recognize Palestinian rights or pinpoint Israeli injustices?

This is precisely what has just taken place, a repeat of the same infuriating episode for the thousandth time.

A recent proposal presented by Sweden — the current holder of the rotating European Union presidency — called on EU members to recognize an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The proposal was watered down to a mere communiqué, issued by EU foreign ministers on December 8, which calls for the division of Jerusalem to serve as "the future capital of the two states." Naturally, Israel, as the occupying power rejected the statement. But so did the United States. "We are aware of the EU statement, but our position on Jerusalem is clear. We believe that is a final-status issue," declared Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs P.J. Crowley. He further declared that "this is best addressed inside a formal negotiation among the parties directly."

Crowley, like all of his bosses, Obama included, knows well that Israel is neither keen on 'direct' nor indirect negotiations, and is deliberately prejudicing any possible just solution with its continuing colonization of occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank. Israel's rightwing extremist government is not bashful about its true intentions, and the smart and savvy Obama is not ignorant of the prospects of a 'direct' negotiation between

those with the bulldozers, the tanks and big guns (based in Tel Aviv) and those with dismal press releases (based in Ramallah). But it's not just the rare initiatives of the EU that are being summarily dismissed by the US.

All initiatives, whether by individual states or regional groups, for example by the Arab League, or through international forums such as the United Nations are rejected, derided and at times suspected of anti-Semitism.

This is a continuation of a terrible legacy that goes back decades. The reason such a redundant policy is being highlighted now — as it should be — is because Obama promised change and pledged to lead a new decisive course, led by a gentler, kinder and more sensible America. In the Middle East, this is hardly being realized.

Why? Shouldn't the US, in desperately trying to maintain its role as a world leader, and to preserve its economic and strategic interests in the Middle East, embark on the frequently promised new course — not for the sake of Palestine and the Arabs, but its own?

Israeli newspaper Haaretz suggests an answer, one that many of us have already recognized long prior to Obama's presidency, or even his involvement in politics altogether. "In the case of Obama's government in particular, every criticism against Israel made by a potential government appointee has become a catalyst for debate about whether appointing 'another leftist' offers proof that Obama does not truly support Israel," wrote Natasha Mozgovaya on December 4.

Haaretz highlighted several cases in point, amongst them the intense war lead by the pro-Israel lobby in Washington against Chas Freeman, a widely respected US official nominated by the Obama administration months ago to chair the National Intelligence Council. He dared voice guarded critique of US foreign policy in the Middle East and became a victim of the worst possible vilification campaign, forcing him to concede the nomination.

Other examples include Robert Malley, a daring American political adviser who wished to believe that his country's national interests took priority over Israel's. He was let go even before the Obama presidency commenced.

More, a 'controversy' is currently 'raging' — as in, the Israeli lobby is not happy — over the appointment of former Republican Senator Chuck Hagel as an intelligence aide. According to Haaretz, "Republican Jews have...protested Hagel's appointment, citing an incident in 2004 when Hagel refused to sign a letter calling on then-president George Bush to speak about Iran's nuclear program at the G8 summit that year."

Stephen M. Walt, a Harvard University professor and co-author of the widely-read *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, recently wrote that "groups in the lobby target public servants like Freeman, Hagel...because they want to make sure that no one with even a mildly independent view on Middle East affairs gets appointed. By making an example of them, they seek to discourage independent-minded people from expressing their views openly, lest doing so derail their own career prospects later on."

Luckily, neither Walt nor numerous other independent-minded Americans like him are afraid to speak their mind, to safeguard the independence and integrity of their country. This should always be the case.

For the time being, don't be surprised when you hear that the US continues to block the

path for peace in the Middle East. At least now you know why.

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