Obama-Trump Diplomatic Relations Between Israel and the United States and their influence on the Middle East

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The purpose of the paper is to review the diplomatic relations between Israel and the United States under Barack Obama and Donald Trump and how these relations impacted the rest of the Middle East. It is argued that the relations between the U.S. and Israel plays a fundamental role in maintaining a relative stability in the Middle East and a compromise of this relationship could significantly challenge the geopolitical climate of the region.

I choose this topic because the relationship between the two countries is so important for stability in the Middle East and beyond, it is highly relevant to international relations studies. Due to these considerations, the main objectives of the master project are to analyze the relationship between the U.S. and Israel through the most recent history, namely during the Obama and Trump administration. By reviewing specific events that took place in the last years, it is possible to establish potential causal relationships between specific actions taken by the United States and events occurring in the Middle East.

The United States is arguably Israel’s most important ally and few politicians in the United States questions the role of U.S. as a key ally of Israel. Unlike most topics in the United States, supporting Israel is not a question of favoring a left, right, or moderate political approach. The fact that politicians of all colors favor strong U.S.-Israel relationships is explained by the fact that bilateral cooperation between the two countries plays an important role in handling several challenges in the Middle East, both military and non-military. On the other hand, the strong relationship between U.S. and Israel also affected U.S. image in Arab countries and sometimes in other parts of the world as well, as Israel handling of the Palestinian issue is often highly questionable. However, because a significant weakness in the relationship between the two countries could threaten stability, U.S. rarely questions some of Israel’s most questionable interventions the way other countries do. In other words, the U.S.-Israel relations have a strong strategic importance and a weakness of this relationship might affect stability in the Middle East, and maybe even in the world as a whole. Because the relationship between the two countries is so important for stability in the Middle East and beyond, it is highly relevant to international relations studies. Due to these considerations, the main objectives of the master project are to analyze the relationship between the U.S. and Israel through the most recent history, namely during the Obama and Trump administration. By reviewing specific events that took place in the last years, it is possible to establish potential causal relationships between specific actions taken by the United States and events occurring in the Middle East.

The relationship between U.S. and Israel has entered a new era when Barack Obama took charge. One of the most important events during this administration was Obama’s decision to achieve a peace deal between Israel and Palestine. In order to achieve this goal, the Obama administration pressured Israel’s Prime Minister Netanyahu into accepting a Palestinian state. The Israel Prime Minister eventually agree to negotiate and imposed a ten-month freeze on settlement construction in the West Bank. However, the Palestinians rejected the freeze for nine months because it did not include East Jerusalem (Zanotti, 2016).

 Barack Obama seemed to have tried to find an equilibrium between taking a stance against what many perceive as human rights violation and maintaining a positive relationship with Israel. For instance, while he pressured Israel to recognize a Palestinian state, he also authorized the sale of bunker buster bombs to the country, being the first president to ever do so. He also vetoed a UN resolution that was meant to declare Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal (Simon & Stevenson, 2015).

Obama took a firm stance against Israel when it declared that it would continue to build 1,600 homes in eastern Jerusalem, a territory that most in the international community regard as occupied. He tried to persuade Netanyahu to freeze all construction in East Jerusalem and give Palestinians a reason to believe that he wants peace, such as by releasing Palestinian prisoners and engage in negotiation over a partition of Jerusalem (Zanotti, 2016).

Obama suggested a return to the pre-1967 Israeli borders that would be characterized a mutually agreed land swaps. The speech was rejected by the Israel Prime Minister and was also criticized by the Republicans. Later Obama clarified that he believes that Israel and Palestine should negotiate a border that would not necessarily be the same as the one in 1967 but will take in consideration all the developments that took place since then in order to reach a border agreement. In reply, the Israeli Prime Minister agreed that a border negotiation between Israel and Palestine would take place but that Israel will not be willing to return to the borders that it had before 1967, as this did not allow proper defense (Risse-Kappen, 2016).

There are several other actions took by Obama during his administration that once again reflect his attempts at maintaining an equilibrium between defending the principles of self-determination while also maintaining a positive relationship with a historical ally. For instance, Obama guaranteed that he will not support a Palestinian application for statehood at the United Nations on the belief that peace must be attained through all the legal procedures before such an application can be accepted. He also signed a bill that allowed a three years extension of a program that the United States had for Israeli government debt. More so, the Obama administration expressed direct opposition to a Palestinian unilateral independence, insisting that such an independence must occur on mutual agreement. On the other hand, when the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution meant to put an end to Israeli settlements in areas considering to belong to the Palestinian, the U.S. abstain as opposed to vetoing it as it had done in the past (Risse-Kappen, 2016).

It is worth noticing that while the U.S. relationship with Israel has important strategic implications, Obama administration has not had a significant impact upon stability in the Middle East. This likely happened because Obama refrained from making dangerous moves by expressing, even more, support for the Palestinian cause and the threat that U.S. would not military support Israel in case of necessity never existed. On the other hand, Obama also failed to persuade Israel in negotiating an independence with Palestine, for which the administration had little or none contribution in improving the political situation in a region characterized by instability and conflict. That being said, it is still possible to examine these event in details and speculate whether specific actions took place due to them or whether other outcomes could have derived if the Obama administration had behaved differently.

Donald Trump only took charge in January 2017, for which the impact of his administration upon the relationship between U.S. and Israel and, consequently, stability in the Middle East, is yet to be determined. However, there are several aspects of Trump’s behaviors that suggests during his administration U.S. will take a firmer stance in favor of Israel. For instance, the Trump administration announced it will open the first permanent U.S. military base in Israel. President Trump claimed that he is a very good friend of Israel, which gave the Israeli government that the administration will be, as Republican administrations have usually been, more supportive of the measures taken by the Israeli governments. On the other hand, what the Israeli government may have failed to predict are the inconsistencies of the U.S. policies. For instance, the Israeli government was disappointed by the U.S. negotiation with Russia for a plan of a ceasefire in Syria that did not take into account the concerns of the Israeli government. More specifically, Israel was concerned about Iran’s closeness to Israel’s doorstep. President Trump claims closing the “ultimate deal” has also left the international scene confused, as nobody knows that that may mean (Kiely, 2017).

At the present time, neither the Israeli government or the U.S. administration have provided a clear solution for closing the conflict with Israel, and Netanyahu is clearly reluctant in accepting a two-state solution. Because both parties are vague about the issue and might be actually avoiding it, there are no signs that a negotiation between Israel and Palestine will happen anytime soon. Instead, the American government seems to distract the audience with other elements that might contribute to peace between the two states, including a water infrastructure agreement. Finally, the U.S. government continues to behave inconsistently, as not only the President makes claims that are difficult to be interpreted. For instance, while the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, claimed that all the settlements are part of Israel, the spokeswomen for the U.S. State Department make sure to clarify that the words of the ambassador do not reflect a change in the U.S. position toward these settlements (Kiely, 2017). Without a doubt, the new U.S. administration is not fully willing to support Israel in any of its demands. On the other hand, the administration does seem less willing to take a “moderate” position on the issue and instead prefers leaving others to interpret what its position is. It is yet to be seen whether the next months or years will be enough in order to gain a clearer picture of the Trump’s administration impact on the Middle East. Even though Trump era is still under development, it is possible to analyze in detail how specific actions taken by Trump’s administration has influenced Israel’s responses and other events in the Middle East.

In conclusion, the relations between the U.S. and Israel plays a fundamental role in maintaining a relative stability in the Middle East and a compromise of this relationship could significantly challenge the geopolitical climate of the region. Because this relationship is very important, neither the Obama or the Trump administration has taken a clear position regarding a peace negotiation between Israel and Palestine that will end with a Palestinian state. On the other hand, while Barack Obama clearly tried to maintain an equilibrium between defending Palestine’s right of self-determination and not losing Israel support, Donald’s Trump administration has so far taken an unclear position, though one that might be more favorable to the interests of the Israeli government. Considering that neither the current Israeli government or the American one seems focused on finding a solution to end the conflict, it seems unlikely that a peace treaty will occur anytime soon. If peace is reached, the United States will likely play a major role in it and the effects of any peace treaty between Israel and Palestine will significantly impact the Middle East and the rest of the world. The proposed master project will discuss both the potential role that the United States could have in such a peace treaty as well as the influence that past actions had on key events that has taken the situation in Middle East in the place it is today.

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