

## **Abstract**

This research attempts to examine US foreign policy in the Middle East, especially in Palestine. The issue is examined through three different approaches in order to try and understand why the United States has become so supportive of Israel. The first approach is that of the Israel lobby, and which revolves around the argument put forth by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. Two things were of interest to them regarding this issue; the first is the evolution and progression of the lobby, and the shift in US foreign policy to only supporting Israel. In the 1950s and 1960s, when US imperial foreign policy was first being formulated, there were different viewpoints regarding the Middle East. There were groups like the Arabists, for example, who filled the ranks of the US administration and who identified with the countries that they worked in and who also tended to be anti-Zionist. The change in these views, alongside the consolidation of power that became focused on one theme only is what interested Mearsheimer and Walt; the change from diversity and having different centers of power to having this monopoly over policy making in Israel by the Zionist lobby to the point where there is no more debate about who the United States should support – even the Arabists have disappeared

and were even written about as a historical relic. The second element of interest to Mearsheimer and Walt is more an issue of international relations: due to the influence of the lobby, America tends to act, from a realist perspective, against its own interests in the Middle East and against its own values. This irrational behavior is even more curious to them; why would a nation go against its rational interests? This was the theoretical framework that Mearsheimer and Walt were trying to apply to this case: a nation could work against its interests when there is a special interest group –usually an ethnic one– that is disproportionately powerful especially in specific dossiers, and which sways policy.

For others it is all about interests and oil, and this brings us to the second approach; the Marxist notion of imperialist hegemony. For Chomsky, the main problematic is to see how Israel becomes a microcosm of something larger; there is this imperial expansionist American policy at the global level that is mirrored regionally by Israel. There is a dynamic created between the United States and Israel that Chomsky is trying to explain which is that these two elements resemble or tend to be drawn together, and because the very nature of the logic of power, when Israel acts in an expansionist manner in the

Middle East and opts for that instead of coexistence with the Arabs (a choice they made a long time ago), they then find themselves more isolated from the Arab region and more attached to US power, both as a refuge and a source of help and aid as well as a representative of the region.

What I found from my research is that neither one of the two abovementioned approaches fully explains the relationship between the two countries, nor do they explain the impact it had on the people. This brings us to the third approach, which involves those focusing on the sociology of knowledge, such as Uri Avnery and others, who are academics and who tend to see how the Arab-Israeli conflict is treated in academic circles, and since they tend to belong to the cultural and linguistic camp, they attempt to see how culture absorbs these notions and propagates them. For some, the issue is about the production of knowledge on the question of the Middle East and Palestine and Israel in America that interests them the most, that is where you see how power works to create a notion of American interests, for example, that assimilates that of Israel. This approach attempts to understand how power works to produce knowledge that hides the histories of Palestinians and other victims – the same way as it does in America

with colonial victims in order to make settler colonialism into this kind of noble quest. To them, the game is more about how the production of knowledge creates culture, how power works and effects this production of knowledge that ends up creating these affinities, creating the other, and creating parties that would identify with Israel and the United States, thus creating the ‘other’ that tends to be seen as the barbarian... etc. –as in the Palestinians. For them, this would be the real problematic.

All the different theories of international relations have been put forth in order to explain how international relations are shaped. As we study US influence in the Middle East, we begin to realize that a lot of this knowledge is “contextual” and “utilitarian”, in the sense that it was formulated from the viewpoint of power, i.e. how to best serve the interests of the state; opposing theories (such as that of Chomsky) tend to express a critical, anti-imperialist culture within this same Western society.

However, if we examine these policies in their local, social context (i.e. in the Middle East) and see how US policies engender new facts on the ground, effect the lives of ordinary people, and engender

resistance and unexpected outcomes, then we are faced with a new outlook that challenges a lot of presumptions of theories of international relations, where “local” reactions and resistance are seen as mere “externalities” to the main theory.

Since we are not in an American society and are not part of an academic structure that discusses and rationalizes the interests of the American government, nor are we representing the opposition to internal hegemony in the US political scene, then we find ourselves faced with a major challenge: how do we locate agency within these complicated, transnational processes? From the viewpoint of the Palestinian society, it does not really matter whether these policies were borne out of imperial arrogance or a Zionist takeover of US Middle East policy, what matters to people in Palestine is how these policies are affecting their reality, daily lives, their hopes, and their future.

This research stresses the complexity of the US-Israeli relationship, which further enforces the notion that the United States should not in any way be involved in the Arab-Israeli / Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For Palestine, what matters now is to bring agency back to the local

society, to assist the Palestinians in looking toward more natural allies whom they share common grounds with. It is now important to look towards people who have also suffered occupation and the wrath of imperial hegemony: Mexicans, Native Americans, South Africans, Haitians, and many others may pose an important lesson for Palestinians from which they can learn from, in order to mobilize the people, and inspire the power of people over the power of politics.