



The failure of the United Nations in resolving the Palestine-Israel conflict: A Neorealist perspective

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Abstract

The existence of non-state actors at the international level has always been viewed within the liberalist and constructivist perspectives. However, despite being a major international organization, the UN's role and decisions are influenced by super-powers such as the United States (US). This article examines the continuing significance of the United Nations' (UN) inability to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine from the neorealist perspective. It delineates the weaknesses embedded in the UN and highlights the interventionist role played by the US. The method adopted was mainly qualitative, using a process tracing approach of secondary data to address events and key findings of the UN's weaknesses and of the US's intervention timeline. The findings revealed that the US influence was significant in that it instigated continuous violence in the Palestine-Israel conflict. The "what is" context in this study was further analyzed into a theoretical discussion the central argument of which was to explicate the neorealist approach, including the concepts of international systems and hegemony. It examined the state as the main actor in maximizing its capabilities to influence and dominate the international system. The role of the UN is now in question but the significance of its existence remains relevant to the international system because of state recognition besides humanitarian aids, development programmes and other member benefits. As this study demonstrates the result is that the state continues to be the most important factor driving the international system.

Keywords: hegemony, international systems neo-realism, Palestine-Israel conflict, United Nations, US's intervention

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflicts have been a recurrent concern of the United Nations from the foundation of the organization (Ziring 2005, 288). It was a subject of major concern to the old League of Nations. After World War II it was one of the first disputes in which the UN was involved. The conflict has been on the agenda of each session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) since 1946 and may possibly be the most discussed item in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Don Peretz 1996, 1). The United Nations has had several special sessions convened to cope with crises arising from this conflict. Several special UN organizations, that may exceed a dozen, have been created to deal with the situation: the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN Emergency Force (UNEF), the United Nations Observers Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL), and several others.

This article discusses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the neo-realist perspective, focusing on concepts of international systems and hegemony. The UN existence to promote cooperation and assistances among members at peace or war has been greatly valued but the ineffectiveness of the UN has been criticized by many. This article gathers a lot of scholarly literatures to establish arguments that criticisms on the ineffectiveness of the UN and the intervention of the US are not simply hearsay. The

scope of study covers from the beginning of the UN's role in providing resolution to the Palestine-Israel conflict, and for the US's policy, the literatures argue from the Bush Sr., Clinton, and Bush Jr. administration. The article does not discuss Obama's administration considering that there is nothing different on the policy towards Israel-Palestine conflict because the efforts for peace have been the failing agenda for many years.

The neo-realism perspective

Neo-realism starts with realism. Realism, widely regarded as the most influential theoretical tradition in international relations even by its harshest critics, argues that in international relations no hierarchy of authority exists (Burchill, 2001: 70). The international system is characterized by anarchy, where there is no central government and where authority resides with individual states. There is no international entity that exercises jurisdiction over states or reviews their domestic or foreign policies. Though the international system is anarchic, chaos is not the result. A power hierarchy exists among states, making the international system quite orderly. Power hierarchy is reflected in different endowments of resources among states, whereby some have plenty of resources and have attained great power-status, such as the US. Realists tend to classify states in terms of this hierarchy as super, great, middle, or lesser powers, and it is through this power hierarchy that the creation and nature of international organizations is explained (Pease, 2008: 51). International organizations represent the social arrangements among states whereby interests of the powerful are institutionalized. Furthermore, realists hold that international organizations are either created by hegemony or formed through great powers cooperating. They also tend to conceive of international organizations as institutions that serve as extensions of the hegemony or function as great-power directorates (Burchill, 2001: 55). Thus activities of international organizations are directly tied to the powerful states that control them.

Waltz, a neorealist, argues that realism reveals what liberal institutionalist theory obscures: that international institutions serve primarily national rather than international interests. Looking at the creation of the UN in 1945, its principal sponsor in terms of political leadership and finance was the US, which was the only victor to emerge from World War II unaffected both economically and militarily (Waltz, 2008: 209). Mearsheimer (1995: 5-49) argues that the most powerful states in the system create and shape institutions so that they can maintain their share of world power, or even increase it. Institutions, according to him, are arenas for acting out power relationships. They may foster cooperation on non-controversial issues where states have common interests. However, they rarely limit state behavior on issues where interests are diverse and opposed. As with the case of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, interests between the parties involved are opposed and diverse. This schism according to realist theory makes institutions like the UN ineffective in mediating conflict. Clearly, the realist view is that international organizations play little or no role in maintaining international peace and security.

Realism comes in different forms. Neo-realism, the focus of this research, differs from traditional or classical realism. Classical realists like Hans J. Morgenthau argue that it is from the nature of man that the essential features of international politics, such as competition, fear and war can be explained. Neo-realists do not endorse the classical realist assumption that politics is a result of human nature. Contrary to the classical realist, neo-realists like Waltz attribute security, competition and inter-state conflict to the absence of an overarching authority governing states and the relative distribution of power in the international system. He argues that the international structures are primarily defined by the ordering principle of the system- anarchy, and secondly by the distribution of capabilities among states (Waltz, 2008: 74).¹

The international distribution of power impacts the behavior of states, especially their power-seeking behaviors, in the sense that hegemonic states tend to be insensitive to the capabilities of other states. Such insensitivity may cause the use force to advance national interests. The most important concept in the neorealist theory is that the system structure is determined by the ordering principle: anarchy and the distribution of capabilities, mostly power amongst states, drive organization. Structural realism best

applies to the study of international organizations such as the UN because it focuses on structures rather than human nature. Hence it is suitable and applicable for use in this study.

The International System

Karen Mingst (2004: 84) reiterates Keohane and Nye's definition of an international system as being "an interdependent system in which different actors are both sensitive to (affected by) and vulnerable to (suffering costly effects from) the actions of others." Moreover, Waltz (1959: 16) delineates three levels, or images, at which events and trends in international relations can be analyzed. On the first image, Waltz (1959: 81-158) relates international conflict to human behavior, where he argues that the causes of war are found in the nature and behavior of man; wars result from selfishness, misdirected aggressive impulses and stupidity. The second image refers to international structure of states, where he argues that the cause of international conflict is the state and society: conflict occurs because some states and societies are more aggressive than others. The third image is attributed to the international system, characterized by anarchy or absence of a central government. Waltz (1959: 159-187) argues that the international system, characterized by anarchy or non-existence of a world government, makes the state the highest authority. Where there is no governance to protect one state from another, states must rely on their own devices for survival.

Choosing to limit the discussion, this study examines conflict based on only the third image, that is the international system, focusing on the role and influence played by the state that continues to be the highest authority in the international system. Both political and social aspects are attributed to the international system. The international system differs from domestic political systems in that its structure does not include elements such as a president, parliament, congress, or courts. Socially the absence of a central government does not mean the non-existence of an international society. Rules of conduct such as the international etiquette are based on diplomatic practices, well-specified rights and obligations, and international law (Nye and Welch, 2008:43-44). Another important aspect of the international system is its stability.

Nye and Welch (2008) further argue that the international system should be stable, able to absorb shocks without breaking down. Systems break down when they are no longer able to serve their intended purposes. The main purpose of international system is to safeguard the sovereignty and security of its members. However, there are times when minor wars occur. These small conflicts may be seen as a way to protect the sovereignty and security of certain states rather than pointing to systemic collapse.

On the other hand, major wars tend to jeopardize the sovereignty and security of most states, causing instability in the international system. As such Waltz's argument that the stability of the international system depends more on the distribution of power among states, and that sometimes it refers to material capabilities, is supported (Mastanduno and Kapstein, 1999:1-27). Those states endowed with more material capabilities have the power to influence institutions to serve them and to enhance their national interests. The UN is composed of states and some of the more powerful ones use their power to enhance their own national interests. When a powerful state's interests supercede the mission of the UN, it creates a challenge for the UN to play an effective role in resolving conflicts.

Hegemony

Since the end of the Cold War, the US has emerged as the predominant superpower. The question of global hegemony has a large impact on the global arena. Hegemony is defined as the international capability to advance long-range views of world order (Gregg, 1993: 6). It means the dominance of one state over others. This middle-level concept is rooted in the realist tradition, but draws from neo-liberalist and social economy theories (Kams and Mingst, 2004: 49-50). Here hegemony is exercised when a major power dominates or overly influences decisions of other states within its sphere of influence. Most of the

literature on hegemony and hegemonic stability is concerned with the dynamics of the world economy and the dominant state's role in creating and supporting a free trade regime. However, hegemony is more generally about governance, power and leadership in the international system. The two major components of governance in the international system are the distribution of power and the hierarchy of prestige (Gregg, 1993: 34).

When the UN was created, the US was the greatest power in terms of both military and economic capabilities. Based on the fact that the US was the greatest power, this study may easily conclude that its power was presumably reinforced by its prestige, that is, by the credibility of that power and the resulting willingness of lesser states to identify their values and interests with those of the US. These capabilities might be factors that further enhance the prestige of the US, making it in effect the hegemonic power in the emergent post-war international order. The concept when applied by this study describes the behavior of the US towards the UN and the impact of US behavior on the capacity of the UN to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The United Nation's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: The early years

The conflict, centering on the struggle between Zionism, also called Jewish nationalism, and Arab nationalism for the control over Palestine, has not only involved the Jewish and Arab inhabitants of Palestine, but also their respective supporters around the world. These factions include Jewish and non-Jewish advocates of a Jewish state along with members of the Arab Leagueⁱⁱ and their supporters throughout Islamic states and many Third World Nations. The UN, an international organization created to maintain peace and stability in the world, has tried to mediate this conflict. Some of its early mediation efforts include the following:

In February 1947, the British government turned the Palestine question over to the United Nations. Britain requested that the UN form a committee to discuss the future of a Mandatory Palestine. In response, the UNGA agreed to the request by establishing a Special Committee to consider the problem, the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP). The Committee suggested two proposals: one would partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states; and the other would form an independent federal structure consisting of Arab and Jewish entities with Jerusalem as its capital. The majority of the committee endorsed the first proposal, but a minority opted for the second.

On November 29, 1947 the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181- the partition plan. The Jewish Agency, the representative of the Jewish population at that time, accepted the plan despite major discontent, while the Arabs rejected it. This action heralded the end of the British Mandate over Palestine on May 14, 1948. In May 1948, Israel declared itself independent, following the UN's recommendation of the partition of Palestine. Israel was subsequently attacked by its Arab neighbors whose aim was to reverse the partition.

On July 15, 1948 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 54, ordering all parties to call a cease-fire in the strongest possible terms, stating that any infringement of this cease-fire would qualify as a "breach of peace" under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and trigger further action. Despite the UN appeal, fighting continued.

In April 1949, the UN Truce Consular Commission for Palestine (UNTCC), established by the UNSC to promote peaceful settlement, hosted a conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, that failed to achieve a consensus on the partition boundaries or the question of Palestinian refugees. Nevertheless, Israel became a permanent member of the UN on May 11, 1949.

During the Six-Day War in June, 1967, a mediation proposal arrived with UN Security Council Resolution 242, dated November 22, 1967. It stated that Israel should withdraw from occupied lands in exchange for peace and recognition. It also advocated for the termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for, and acknowledgement of, the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area. Despite all these efforts, the UN has failed to bring about a comprehensive solution to the conflict. This article aims to enumerate the reasons why the UN as an

international organization that was established with the purpose of maintaining international peace and security has failed to do so with respect to the Israeli –Palestinian conflict.

The United Nations has been concerned with the problems faced in the Middle East from its earliest days of inception. In efforts to deal with these problems, it has employed mechanisms ranging from the formulation of principles for peaceful settlement of the conflicts to the deployment of various peacekeeping operations. The main problem concerning the UN in the Middle East is the status of Palestine. The Middle East problem is the most enduring challenge faced the United Nations (Pubantz and Allphin, 2003: 122-145). The problem has its roots from the time the UNGA recommended the partition of the Palestine mandating separate Arab and Jewish states.

Palestine did not exist as a separate political entity until the time when Britain took over the country at the end of the World War I. During World War I, the British made promises to the Arab nationalists and Zionists to support both their claims for independence. They also signed secret agreements concerning the partition of the Ottoman Empire with various allied powers such as France, Russia, and Italy. In exchange for support against the Ottoman Turks, the British promised to support Arab aspirations for independence. Agreements were made through an exchange of correspondence, called the Husayn-McMahon Correspondenceⁱⁱⁱ between the High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, and the Sherif Husayn. The exchange of letters was not a formal pact but a moderately vague understanding that the British would support Arab independence should the Arabs join a military alliance against the Turks (Peretz, 1996: 11). The Zionists also assisted the British in the war against the Turks, taking into consideration Britain's promises for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, as they had little success in obtaining international recognition of their aspirations in Palestine. The Zionists noted that the major political attempt to achieve recognition lay nowhere else but in Britain. This insight induced Dr. Chaim Weizman, a Zionist leader, to complement larger British political interests, including efforts to persuade American Jews to support the British war in order to win over Jews in Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary and to gain support for British interests in the Middle East.

In response, the British Government on November 2, 1917, under Foreign Secretary Arthur J. Balfour issued a public statement in the form of a letter called the Balfour declaration^{iv} to Lord Rothschild, Head of the British Zionist Organization. Apart from trying to honor their commitment to the Jews in exchange for their support in the war against the Turks, the British also thought that supporting a Jewish national home in Palestine was the easiest way of securing lasting British influence in a strategic area of the region east of the Suez Canal, as Palestine was an important link on the land routes to India (Bickerton and Carla, 1991: 40).

As for the secret agreements with other allies like France, Britain signed an agreement called the Sykes-Picot Agreement (Bickerton and Carla, 1991: 38). It was signed between chief negotiators, Britain's Sir Mark Sykes and France's Charles Francois George-Picot. All these Agreements made Palestine a focal point of international conflict at the end of World War I, as they spurred major disagreements between all factions: Zionists, Arab nationalists, the British, and the British-French alliance. In short, the conflict involved all parties who had made pacts with Britain. As a way of honoring the Balfour Declaration, the British allowed about 10,000 Jews to enter Palestine annually from 1919 to 1931. To honor their commitment to the Arabs, they split off the Trans-Jordan from Palestine in 1921, and offered it to one of Hussein's sons, which in 1948 became the Kingdom of Jordan (Bickerton and Carla, 1991: 38). Palestine finally became a British mandate, something with which the Arabs did not agree.

The role of the UN after the Cold War

From the President Carter's Camp David summit, the US resolution of the 1982 Lebanese war with the direct deployment of US peacekeepers in Beirut, to President George H.W. Bush's Madrid Summit were all undertaken with little regard for UN involvement. With regard to the Madrid Talks that George H.W. convened after the victory of the UN-authorized operation removing Saddam Hussein through Kuwait,

the UN was allowed to only play the role of an observer (Kaczorowska, 2003: 345). History of the UN's involvement in the conflict notes that the organization has most often not been allowed to perform its task because the US tried to preside over most issues concerning the conflict. With the passing of the Cold War and the outbreak of the first Gulf War, the UN and the US merged forces by common consent of the administration in Washington and the Security Council in New York. This "marriage" between the two strands, the US and the UN, as Pubantz and Moore (2003) put it, opened exciting prospects for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, though it also put the UN in the high-risk position of being viewed as little more than an instrument of US foreign policy.

This convergence, on the other hand, raised the prospect that any future divergence of UN policy would produce an American antagonistic reaction and unilateral US sanctions in the Middle East. This circumstance emerged as the debate over disarming Iraq heated up in 2002, and ended in the American-British invasion of Iraq without UN sanction the following March (Kaczorowska, 2003: 345). The victory of the US in the Gulf produced a concerted effort by the George H.W. Bush administration to reach a comprehensive peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Still in the mode of the Nixon strategy of limiting the role of the UN in the conflict, the Madrid talks under George H.W. Bush were undertaken under the sponsorship of the US, without substantive participation of the UN.

Then in 1993 the Oslo Accord, held without US involvement, made the parties agree to sign treaties on the White House lawn (Jones and Hart, 2008: 105), seeking to produce a lasting peace settlement to the conflict. Once signed, the implementation of the Accords became the focal point of US foreign Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the Clinton Administration (Jones and Hart, 2008:102-107). There was still exclusion of the UN in the negotiations, and the UN Ambassador, Madeleine Albright, by 1994 wrote in a letter to the General Assembly stating that the US goal for that year was to make existing UN resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict irrelevant, since bilateral negotiations were underway (Bennis, 2001). The Oslo peace process did not meet its intended purpose. Oslo's five-year interim period as agreed by the participants and stretched to the year 2000 with no progress on the major issues concerning Palestine: a Palestinian self-governing state, borders, refugees, East Jerusalem, and settlements.

Moreover only small progress had been made on the less complex issues that were supposed to have been resolved. This failure prompted the need for another negotiation at the Camp David convened by President Clinton and followed by the second Intifada (Avi Shlaim, 2002: 183-194). UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan played a role by leading the effort to break the escalating violence. This success showed his new credibility on Middle East matters and made the UN's vital role to the peace process possible. This time, a crucial foreign policy challenge for the US was being addressed with an unusually complementary action by the UN, both cooperating to address the most complex international problems. In the process, the UN returned focus to the Middle East, particularly to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict it first addressed 53 years earlier, and the US gave up its lone performance in the region (Pubantz and Moore, 2003:122-145). Violence still escalated despite concerted UN and US efforts. The area witnessed a series of deadly suicide bombings in 2001 orchestrated by Palestinian groups, and subsequent reprisal military assassinations of Palestinian leaders on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. These actions effectively ended the possibility of an early re-commencement of peace talks.(Pubantz and Moore, 2003: 122-145).

The role of the US after the Cold War

From Reagan to George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, the US policy in the Middle East continued to paralyze the United Nations. The question of Palestine remained unresolved regardless of the different approaches to the peace process, and UN resolution 242 continues to cause controversy. The role played by the United States in the conflict continued to manifest throughout the post-Cold War period.

George H.W. Bush and Israel policy (1989-1993)

As the Gulf –War ended, George H.W. Bush's Administration adopted a five point-plan for the future of the Middle East, called the five pillars of Wisdom: i) democracy, ii) economic development, iii) arms control, iv) Gulf security, and v) the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Shlaim, 202: 183). The policy was a way of achieving the much-spoken of New World Order that emerged with the end of the Cold War, which saw the US emerging as the sole superpower. At that time the US and its Arab allies did not make any attempt to introduce democracy to the Arab world, to curb arms sales to the Middle East, to promote greater economic equality or to lay the foundations of an independent system in the Gulf (Shlaim, 2003:189).

However, the element of settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict received sustained attention and the American-sponsored peace process was launched in October, 1991 with the conference in Madrid. Just like the preceding peace process conference, the Conference was based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338. President Bush pledged to work for a settlement based on security for Israel and justice for Palestine. Bush's approach to the peace process maintained that Israel should cease to build new settlements on the West Bank. Israel was given two options: either continue building settlements in the West Bank and lose US aid to Israel or cease building settlements and continue receiving US aid (Shlaim, 2003:189-192). In doing so, President Bush dragged Israeli Prime Minister Itzhak Shamir, who was reluctant to negotiate, into the peace process based on Bush's two options. Bush's actions later went on to jeopardize his political aspirations as witnessed by his defeat in the US presidential elections the following year. The Palestinian question remained unresolved and Bush's earlier pledge for peace could not be realized.

Bill Clinton and Israel policy (1993-2001)

President Clinton's policy on Israel was more pro-Israel. He immediately reversed George H.W. Bush's equitable policy with the one that prioritized Israel. Martin Indyk, Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs during Clinton's Administration, delivered a speech at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy on May 18, 1993, reflecting the US government's strong support for promoting Israeli Interests (Shlaim, 2002:183). He also stated that Israel had to be kept strong while the peace process continued, and that Iran and Iraq had to be kept weak. The aim of the US government was to protect Israel on the Eastern front by negotiating the Middle East process from an angle of working with Israel, and not against it. One striking point portraying the role the US has played to prohibit the whole peace process lies on Indyk's statement that a withdrawal of Israel from occupied territories involved risks to Israel's security; Israel would, therefore, only take such risks if it knew that the US stood behind it (Shlaim, 2002: 183). This clear inhibition of the peacekeeping process also highlighted the UN's increasing lack of effectiveness.

United States' actions hindering the peace process continued to manifest again in the Oslo Accords of 1993 through the Camp David Summit of July, 2000. In the Oslo Accords, though Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) announced that they had reached an agreement and had the Declaration of Principles of the agreement formally signed by President Clinton on September 13th, 1993, the lasting peace settlement was still not achieved due to some controversies. The agreement contained some vague references to "territories and to powers to be transferred or kept." (Fernandez, 2005: 41-50). This ambiguity fueled great disagreements between Israel and the PLO, and two months later President Clinton rejected the UNGA's affirmation of Resolution 194 that endorsed the rights of refugees, a major issue in the conflict. The US position on this action was that there was no need to support the resolution, as the Oslo accord made the previous negotiations "obsolete and anachronistic." (Fernandez, 2005:51). The United States' waning support for the resolution made the Palestinian question lose legal claim to just compensation and the return of Palestinian refugees to their occupied lands.

The outcome of the Camp David summit also exposed the betrayal by the US in the peace process. President Clinton's actions were the cause of the failure of the Accords because he committed several blunders^v that made the Israelis ignore UNSC Resolutions 446 and 465 of the Fourth Geneva Convention,

both of which ban the methodical “transfer of civilian populations into occupied territories acquired during the Six-Day War.” (Fernandez, 2005:45). The conclusion can therefore not be avoided that Clinton’s strong commitment to Israel, as expressed in Indyk’s speech, undermined his credibility, and affected the competence of the UN as well.

George W. Bush (2001) – period before 9/11 attack

Unlike Clinton, President George W. Bush’s attitude towards the peace process differed in that he left the issue as the responsibility of both parties to solve. Gawdat (2009) asserts that Bush may have decided to alienate himself from the Middle East peace process after learning from the failure of his predecessor Clinton (Gawdat, 2009: 32-39). Bush, unlike Clinton, created no bond with the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, but established good relations with the Israeli leader, Ariel Sharon. Bush’s perception was that the PLO was a terrorist entity (Shlaim, 2002: 188). Influenced by Bush’s perception, Sharon maintained that he could not resume negotiations with the Palestinian Authority until there was a complete termination of violence. The researcher differs with Bush’s way of handling the issue, believing that it would promote hostility instead of seeking peace. This mentality cannot promote the mandate of the United Nations, as the action has already shown that Bush could easily veto any resolution that would aim at negotiating peace between Israel and Palestine.

The role of the US in the conflict after 9/11

After 1989, an important year in World Politics marking of the fall of the Soviet Bloc, September 11, 2001 (9/11) was expected to be another important turning point in world politics. However when the outcome is evaluated, it can be easily observed that despite the shock of September 11th many important aspects of world politics have not changed. The basic political structure of international politics built on the concept of the sovereign nation states and the dilemmas of global governance in an anarchic world arising from the system have not changed. The US’ response to 9/11 has resulted in a new assertiveness in the US foreign policy (Ramin, 2005).

The war on global terrorism and the struggle to curb the spread of weapons of mass destruction have become the focus of US foreign policy, thereby, marking the shift (Bernel, 2008: 389). The war on global terrorism has been implemented as a way to deter a repetition of the 9/11 catastrophe, manifesting in the US invasions of Iraq in 2003 and Afghanistan. The 9/11 terrorist attack on the US brought far-reaching consequences for many aspects of US foreign policy, not excluding the relations with Israel and Palestine. According to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the confessed mastermind of the 9/11 atrocities, the attack was conceived with the “purpose [of] focusing the American people on the atrocities that America was committing by supporting Israel against the Palestinian people and America’s self-serving foreign policy that corrupts Arab governments and leads to further exploitation of the Arab Muslim people” (Shlaim, 2002:189).

Avi Shlaim (2002) further asserts that many Israelis hoped that the 9/11 event would give rise to great sympathy and support for the US in its own war against Palestinian militants. Israeli Prime Minister Sharon made a statement that Arafat (PLO leader) was Israel’s Bin Laden. However, America’s response to Sharon’s statement was countered by Colin Powell, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Powell noted that Israel’s attempt to demonize Yaser Arafat would prove futile when he announced US plans to exclude Israel from any anti-terror military action. In fact, even as Israel was excluded from the emerging anti-terrorist coalition, some of its enemies such as Syria and Iran were being incorporated into membership. Hizbullah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad were conspicuously absent from the list of 27 terrorist organizations that had their assets frozen by the US Congress.

Soon after the 9/11 attack, George W. Bush made the strongest^{vi} statement to date, expressing that the US would wage a new war. That speech marked the beginning of a new direction in US foreign policy, though to some degree, it represented great continuity with the past. The statement followed the US government’s endorsement of an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The

endorsed plan, said to have been in preparation prior to 9/11, contemplated surrendering back nearly all of the West Bank to Palestinian control (Shlaim, 2002: 189). Israel's Sharon did not favor the plan because he was committed to keeping the whole of Jerusalem under Israeli control. He was not willing to yield to the Palestinian Authority more than 42 percent of the West Bank, ensuring a weak Palestinian entity. Sharon tried to express displeasure with US actions by acting aggressively against the Palestinian Authority. This action in return led to the US demanding that Israel abandon the West Bank immediately. The US warned Sharon that a war against Palestinians threatened the fragile coalition against the Taliban regime and Osama Bin Laden. However, Sharon flatly rejected the US demands, defying its chief ally that provided nearly \$3 billion in aid every year (Shlaim, 2002: 191).

The UN response to the 9/11 attack

The UN response to the 9/11 attack condemned the US, noting that the US should be responsible for its actions toward countries in the Middle East. The UNSC acted with remarkable swiftness with its resolution 1373 and set up the Counter-Terrorism Committee with extensive powers. To prevent future acts of terrorism, the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, underlined three important principles in his opening address to the fifty-sixth session of the UN General Assembly one day after the tragic events and again on October 1, 2001 (Jayantha, 2005:17-23). A year after the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration announced a policy toward the Security Council resolution against Israel, called the Negroponte Doctrine, stating that the US would not support any resolution that dodges the explicit threat to the Middle East peace process by Hamas and other such terrorist groups (Rosen, 2010).

The UN condemned the US for being responsible for the attacks because of its foreign policy in the Middle East. The UN expressed readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the attacks of 9/11 and to combat all forms of terrorism (Rosen, 2010). The Bush Administration, in response to a rise in violence between Israelis and Palestinians, adopted a more active role. In April, 2003 the Sharm al-Sheikh Summit, attended by President Bush and the Israeli and Palestinian Prime Ministers, Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas, established the Road Map^{vii} to address the violence. The parties agreed to negotiate and embark on phased, time-bound actions to be implemented in parallel process by both sides to progress as stated and mutually agreed upon for a two-state solution by the projected date of 2005 (Gawdat Bahgat, 2009: 32-39).

The Road Map failed and as Fernandez (2005) argued, "the possibility of a two-state solution literally means the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state existing alongside Israel in a bilateral relationship defined by cooperation, mutual trust, and respect. A sovereign state controls its territory, resources, and people, and provides for security of its citizens. In essence a Palestinian state must have a viable territory much like any nation-state. As part of this proposed solution which includes negotiations on the refugee and settlement problems, the status of Jerusalem, and water supplies, the basis for determining the border between the two states should be UN Resolution 242 and the pre- Six-Day War boundaries."

There seems to be some controversy here between the two parties. For once, Bush is attempting to support Palestine in order to deter terrorist attacks, while Israel, being always under support of the US, finds it difficult to accept. There is a clash of interests: Bush's plan seems to be incompatible with its drive to establish democracy in the Palestinian territories, and the goal of maintaining US interests in the Middle East. To complicate matters, it should be considered that Bush was preoccupied with the war on terrorism and the war in Iraq, thereby limiting the role played by the US in facilitating the Arab-Israeli negotiations during this period.

The Arab-Israeli confrontation from 2001- UNGA Resolution 10/14

Simultaneously the Israeli construction of a 720-kilometer separation wall in the region bordering Israel and Palestine became another important aspect of the conflict. Justifying its own self-defense, Israel

claimed that it had a right to protect its people from any terrorist attacks. Palestinians on the other hand viewed the act as an attempt by Israel to fix borders unilaterally ahead of any future settlement between the two nations, and as an excuse to occupy territory wrongfully (Fernandez, 2005:348). Palestine appealed to the UN on this matter and issued a draft resolution, seeking to ban Israel from extending the wall deep into the West Bank. In response, the UNGA adopted Resolution ES-10/14 requesting an urgent advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the legality of the building of the wall. The UN confirmed the illegality of the Israeli action in a report by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in November, 2003. He stated that the wall was not in compliance with UNGA Resolution ES/10/13 adopted by a vote of 144-4 in October, 2003, demanding that Israel stop its construction activities (Adel Safty, 2009:261).

Conclusion

The opposition groups in the Arab Southern Mediterranean as well as NGOs and international analysts worldwide have criticized the UN for falling prey to the maneuvers of the US and its ability to manipulate the UN's policy by playing the security card against the Islamic bogeyman. As a result, many have expressed doubt about the commitment of UN to promote democracy. There are major repercussions for the UN for not pushing the political reform agenda more assertively. Sustained political and social frustration in the Middle East will continue to fuel waves of illegal immigration to Western countries. More dangerously, it can also trigger renewed waves of terrorism aimed at the US as well as its partners. Islamic radicalization often emerges as a result of the citizens' frustration. The US concern with maintaining the status quo would be equivalent to inviting extremist reactions from the Arab Southern Mediterranean regions.

The ongoing nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict melds with the realist prediction of continuity both in international relations and in the nature of international governance. The state endures as the principal and most important actor in international relations, whereby international organizations are subordinate to the state's hegemony. The United Nations is an organization created to serve all states big and small. However, the search for securing state interests influences larger powers to create international organizations that can and will be used as tools to extend their national interests. The creation of the UN is no exception. It was created by a hegemonic state and through the cooperation of big powers that emerged unscathed following World War II.

The neorealist perspective emphasizes the structure of the international system by explaining world politics through the viable distribution of capabilities expressed as power among states in an anarchic world. Power determines the system structure and material capabilities that a state has which can easily influence and change the behavior of other actors in the international system, such as the UN. The UN expressed little or no independent influence on the calculations and the interests of the US. In so many cases, the US has used its veto power to block resolutions that could endanger its national interests. It can also be observed that small powers possess some influences that they could leverage to pressure international organizations to act in favor of their interests. Israel has done this several times, influencing the US to support resolutions that could bar Palestine from being declared a self-governing state. The failure of the UN in this conflict demonstrates the degree to which sovereign nation-states believe that international cooperation suits their own national interests.

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Notes:

¹Also see Tim Dune and Brian C. Schmidt, "Realism," in Baylis et al., *The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to International Relations*, 4th ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Pp.95-98. Also see Karen A. Mingst, *Essentials of International Relations*, 8th ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), Pp. 68-69.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.arab.de/arabinfo/league.htm> visited on 17/06/2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ For the Husayn-McMahon Correspondence, refer to Don Peretz, *Library in a Book: The Arab- Israel Dispute* (New York: Facts on File Inc., 1996), Pp. 235-236.

^{iv} For more information on the Balfour Declaration, refer to Ian J. Bickerton and Carla L. Klausner, *A Concise History of the Arab- Israel Conflict*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1991), p.58.

^v Some of the Blunders Clinton made was that he informed Arafat that Ehud Barak, Netanyahu's successor, had agreed to the transfer of three Palestinian villages outside Jerusalem under Palestinian control, but Barak denied making such a pledge and Clinton could not challenge Barak's denial. Refer to Erwin Fernandez, "The United States and the Arab-Israel Conflict: (UN) Forging Future Peace, *International Social Science Review*, Vol. 80:1&2 (2005), Pp. 41-50.

^{vi} Bush's statement had been considered by many to be the best speech of his presidency. For full text of statement, refer to David Bernel, *Readings in American Foreign Policy: Historical and Contemporary Problems* (New York: Pearson, 2008), 391-399.

^{vii} The Road Map for Peace is a basis for a US-guaranteed Middle East peace settlement devised by President Bush.