

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT: RHETORIC AND REALITY

Robi Chakravorti

There are two concepts used in study of politics that can be dramatically applied to an analysis of violence in Gaza—Religious Fundamentalism and Territorial Imperative. If religious fundamentalism can be applied to Hamas in Gaza, one can argue that it is, also, the basis of Israeli establishment amidst Arab countries. It is rarely that the scriptural basis of the Jewish approach to settlement issues in Palestine and the status of Jerusalem are called a case of religious fundamentalism. This is not meant as a selective critique of Israel, only to point out how violence in politics can be justified and supported by its practitioners.

Among countries in Arab-dominated area, Israel is a democratic one, owning powerful weapons financed and supplied by the US. Arab countries surrounding Israel do not have this aspect of superiority. Arab countries' approach to the Israeli-conflict is double-faced. According to a comment in an American paper, if they wanted to put pressure on Israel's big power supporter US, they could have cut off oil exports.

The Arab countries are ruled by monarchy and autocracy, directly and indirectly financed and supported by US. Egypt is a secular state under autocratic rule supported by US funding of millions of dollar. Syria and Lebanon are exceptions, but their power to support Palestine are limited. Arab countries are also, sceptical about the role of Islamic militant Hamas in Gaza. Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) under the secular leadership of Arafat who died in 2004 still operates, but its power in the area is now split because of Hamas' victory in Gaza sector.

Israel can be called an American satellite in the Middle East. According to a report, between 2001--2006, US, transferred into Israel over \$200 million worth of space parts to fly its fleet of F-16's and over \$100 million worth of helicopter space parts. US once also gave Israel 186 million gallons of aviation jet fuel and signed a contract to transfer an additional \$1.9 billion worth of littoral combat ships to the Israeli Navy and signed a contract with a company to send to Israel thousands of missiles.

According to a report, Gaza consisting of 1.5 million Palestinians are blockaded by Israel sealing virtually all entry points. People in Gaza, according to a report, are "hungry, thirsty and without light." A checkpoint controlled by Israel sometimes reopens to supply so-called "humanitarian food-aid" to people under "economic occupation" alongside militant actions of aerial violence of firing rockets and use of airborne bombs and missiles. These instruments of destruction are supplied by the US.

According to a report in the *Hindu* daily (Jan. 22,2009) Israel can be blamed for the total destruction of Gazan infra-structure. "Blaming Hamas for governing badly is difficult to sustain when Israel has reduced all of Gaza's governance mechanisms to rubble and ash."

Rocket attacks and mortar fires by Palestinians from Gaza are militarily and politically pointless. They have limited power to kill compared to Israeli attacks

in the area. According to a report, rocket attacks from Gaza caused about two dozen deaths while the three-day attacks by Israel killed at least 370 Palestinians with some 1,400 wounded alongside destruction of buildings.

One aspect of Arab-Israeli relations and conflict is the strong linkage between the US and Israel. The Israeli establishment after 1948 war involved expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians. The first President of Israel, Chaim Weizman described this expulsion as "miraculous clearing of the land" according to a report in "The Expulsion of the Palestinians : The Concept of Transfer in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1984" by Nur Masalha.

The UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israel's nation-building occupation in Middle East were opposed by America. US, voted against 32 Security Council resolutions critical of Israeli occupation policy. While the international community invokes the 1967 borders as a basis for a two-state solution, Israel has opposed it by occupying lion's share of historical Palestine plus the largest Israeli settlements in West Bank.

The powerful and highly intelligent Israeli lobby groups in the US with steady backing of Jewish people have used the US democratic process in not only influencing official policies but also in effective "mind-management" to use a term from the book "The Mind Managers" by Herbert Schiller. Paul Findley, a former Congressman from Illinois for 22 years presented extensive documentary evidence of the Israeli lobby in a book entitled "They Dare To Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby."

In the chapter entitled, "The Lobby and The Oval Office", he acknowledged the presence of ethnic group pressure in American brand of partisan politics and since the President is the executor of all foreign policies, pressure groups centre on persons who hold or seek Presidency. The book notes : "When pressure is from friends of Israel, Presidents and Presidential candidates often yield".

The book presents a dramatic illustration of the pressure of Israeli lobby during the election of President Truman. He initially opposed the prompt recognition of Israel as a Jewish state in Palestine. Middle East ambassadors supported his move. Truman not only rejected their advice, but, also, that of Secretary of State, George Marshall.

Truman's decision was influenced by the concern about the role of Jewish votes in three key states, New York, Pennsylvania and Illinois, in terms of partisan politics and influence of Jewish role in American politics. Truman's decision paid off. He received over 75 percent of Jewish votes which helped him win a razor-thin victory. □□□