



Partisan Realignment in U.S. Foreign Policy: Examining Shifts in Support for Israel during the Obama, Trump and Biden Administrations

Mamoona Bashir*, Shabnam Gul**

*PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations. Lahore College for Women University Lahore.
mamoonabashir82@gmail.com

**Professor, Department of International Relations, Lahore College for Women University Lahore.
shabnam.gul@lcwu.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the development of the partisan changes in the United States position with respect to Israel during the Obama administration, Trump and Biden presidency. The significance of Israel as a foreign policy issue has been a decades-long agreement between Republicans and Democrats, and it had been a constant in the American foreign policy. However, in the twenty first century, this agreement came apart, with the Republicans rallying firmly around Israel, and Democrats becoming increasingly ambivalent and even sympathetic to Palestinians. Using the comparative-historical analysis, the data on public opinion, and the secondary literature, the paper follows how the U.S. presidential leadership and the ideological changes within the country transformed the partisan dynamics. As analyzed, Obama saw a need to re-calibrate his relationship with Israel, but this move created tensions; Trump has had impactful pro-Israel policies not seen before, which has further polarized his party; and Biden has been taking a balancing act as centrist but this has caused a divided Democratic Party that is under pressure. The article concludes that while bipartisan commitment to Israel's security persists, the partisan framing of U.S. Israel alliance threatens the credibility of the special relationship and complicates prospects for peace diplomacy in the Middle East.



Introduction

Support for Israel has long been one of the defining features of American foreign policy. Since Israel's establishment in 1948, both Democratic and Republican administrations have regarded the Jewish state as a strategic partner, demonstrating democracy in the Middle East, and a recipient of significant proportion of U.S. aid (Cohen ,1990; Gilboa ,1987). For decades, this partnership enjoyed broad consensus: congressional resolutions were co sponsored across party lines, presidents from both parties emphasized Israel's security, and public opinion consistently favored Israel over its Arab neighbors (Cavari, 2012; Trice, 1977). Even during periods of domestic polarization, such as the Vietnam War, support for Israel was one of the rare issues that united hawks and doves alike (Rynhold ,2015). The collapse of the Oslo peace process, the Second Intifada, and the attacks of September 11, 2001, accelerated partisan realignments. Republicans increasingly viewed Israel through the lens of counterterrorism and religious affinity, while Democrats faced internal divisions as liberal and progressive factions emphasized human rights and criticized Israeli policies toward Palestinians (Rynhold ,2023; Pew, 2017). By the mid-2010s, survey data revealed a striking partisan gap: Republican sympathy for Israel surged to historic highs, while Democratic support declined, with

sympathy for Palestinians doubling between 2015 and 2020 (Saad, 2022; Telhami, 2021).

These changes have revolved around the role of U.S. presidents. The administration of Barack Obama attempted to restructure the relationship and focused on settlement freeze and nuclear diplomacy with Iran that deteriorated relationships with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu but maintained the security partnership (Rynhold, 2021; Rice, 2011). The administration of Donald Trump in turn did not follow the American tradition of neutrality, shifting the embassy to Jerusalem, recognizing the Golan Heights annexation, and pushing forward a peace plan in which Israeli interests were far better than those of the Palestinians. His policies solidified Republicanism and generated Democratic opposition (Harkov, 2020; Voice of America, 2019). Joe Biden has been centrist, making security commitments and seeking to re-establish diplomacy with Palestinians and re-enter the multilateral approach to Iran, and this is a tension within the Democratic Party over moderates and progressives (Magid, 2021; Rogers, 2023).

It is the paper about the polarisation of American support to Israel in the transition between Obama and Biden and especially the issue of interaction between leadership choices, party ideology, and popular opinion or its lack. It points out the long-term implication on the U.S. Israel relations and the sustainability of future peace operations in the area.

Objectives

1. To examine the partisan evolution of U.S. support for Israel during the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations, highlighting the key policies, public opinion trends, and congressional debates that illustrate this shift.
2. To analyze the structural and ideological drivers of partisan divergence, including demographic change, religious identity, polarization, and leadership decisions in both U.S. and Israeli politics.
3. To assess the implications of partisan polarization for the durability of U.S.–Israel relations and the prospects for American diplomacy in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Literature Review

Feuerweger (1979) says that both party platforms, since 1944, encompassed pro-Zionist statements and the both party parties' leaders were pro-Israel, analyzing that there were no real party differences through the mid-1970s.

Telhami (2019) has explained that as most Americans want the U.S to stay neutral towards Israeli–Palestinian conflict, partisan divides have strongly deepened. Republican's pro-Israel attitude has been enhanced, while Democrats –especially younger and liberal voters increasingly divided. Telhami attributes this divergence of opinion to right-wing Israeli policies, Trump's alignment with Netanyahu and the characterization of the dispute within Democratic values such as human rights and, international law.

Barnett (2016) places the U.S-Israel relationship within the framework of the liberal international order. He is of the opinion that as Israel has moved towards more nationalist and illiberal approach, its image among liberal Western democracies, including Democratic constituencies in the U.S., has worsened. Barnett argues that the breakdown of shared liberal values is reducing Democratic support, while conservative alignment with Israel getting stronger.

Rynhold (2015) argues that American Political culture builds support for Israel, emphasizing the durable pro- Israel consensus and its recent erosion. He relates it to ideological changes, specially within the Democratic Party, where liberals in the conflict increasingly shape the conflict through human rights lens. Rynhold also highlights the role of significant partisanship and political identity in modifying public attitudes, with Democrats becoming sharp critical of Israeli policies while Republican support remains vigorous.

Spector (2009) examines the role of American Evangelicals in widening Republican support for Israel and documents how the theological beliefs, such as Christian Zionism, have structured foreign policy trends enhancing an unconditional alliance with Israel. This religious backing strengthened after 9/11 and important factor in GOP'S strong pro-Israel stance, reinforcing partisan polarization on the issue.

Significance of the Study

The study is an addition to existing academic discussion on the internal origins of foreign policy and it captures how partisan polarization has saturated one of the longest standing international engagements in America. Through the case study conducted on the relation between U.S and Israel, this study throws light on larger trends of partisan realignment in American politics. These dynamics are important to Israeli policy makers in the American politics, U.S. diplomats in the Middle East that strive to develop a lasting Middle East policy, and congressional leaders that will keep to vital strategic commitments. This paper gives important background to the reasoning as to why the recent peace operations have failed and what circumstances could allow American mediation to be more effective. The relationships examined go beyond the relations between the U.S and Israel. The same situation is observed in other democracies with high

international engagements as the polarization of the national situation gains strength (Rathbun et al., 2016). The results provide comparative information to explain the effects of partisan divides on alliance politics in other countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and the European Union members.

Methodology

The specified paper uses a comparative-historical method to examine the changes in the partisan support of the U.S. to Israel during the Obama, Trump, and Biden periods. The qualitative nature of the analysis is based on the use of textual interpretation and contextual analysis instead of the statistical dimension. The first step involves reviewing presidential speeches, policy announcements, or congressional initiatives and pinpointing the turning points, e.g., the way Obama managed the Iran nuclear deal, Trump acknowledged Jerusalem, or Biden tried to reconcile between security assistance and new aid to Palestinians (Rice 2011; Harkov 2020; Magid 2021). Through these materials, one gets the knowledge of decision-making at the elite level and partisan framing. Second, the literature utilizes polling data based on Gallup, Pew Research Center, and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs as a contextual source of evidence of how the opinion of the population displays and supports partisan divisions (Saad 2020, 2022; Smeltz and Sullivan 2021; Telhami 2021). Such data are analyzed qualitatively to demonstrate changes in partisanship identity and political rhetoric. The last point is that the research is rooted in the secondary literature, offering the theoretical background and historical depth. Its methodology is not predictive but interpretive. It aims at following the developments, describing the causal dynamics and evaluating implications. Although it is based on published sources and polling data, neither of which can adequately reflect intra-party disagreements, triangulation of elite statements, opinion trends, and scholarly interpretations provides a solid foundation on which to assess the partisan change.

Theoretical Framework

The current research pursues a multi-theoretical approach incorporating the perspectives of Partisan Realignment Theory, Polarization Theory, Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism. Collectively, the above frameworks give a holistic picture of the reasons why the Republican Party united to gain pro-Israel stances, and the Democrats disintegrated in support.

- Partisan Realignment Theory: The partisan realignment theory describes the permanent structural changes in the U.S. party associations. White southern conservatives and evangelical protestants shifted to the Republican Party in the 1960s giving it increased support in the pro-Israel religious and ideological currents (Miller & Schofield, 2008; Spector ,2009). Meanwhile, Democrats became more associated with secular, minority, and liberal districts, which was more questioning of the Israeli policies (Pew ,2017; Rynhold ,2023). Realignment therefore formed the demographic and ideological foundation of the current partisan drift.
- Polarization Theory: Polarization theory is a supplement to realignment and is used to explain how partisan division deepened. The Democratic opinion about Israel has been affected by negative affective partisanship, which consists of opposing policies mainly because they belong to the opposing party, which in this case is Israel led by Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Trump (Mason, 2015; Schultz, 2017). This political development has hastened the Democratic movement toward Palestinian sympathy during the period between 2015 and 2020 (Saad , 2022).
- Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA): Structural theories emphasize the overall trends but FPA focuses on the agency of leaders. The diplomatic attitude to Israel and emphasis on diplomacy with Iran were signs of Democratic internationalism as demonstrated by Obama. The GOP identification with Israel was negotiated through Trump as the symbolic and transactional policies such as embassy move to Jerusalem and recognition of the Golan Heights. Biden has tried to find equilibrium, defending the security of Israel and condemning settlements and reinstating Palestinian aid (Rice, 2011; Harkov ,2020; Magid, 2021). The alliance between the Israelis and the Republicans, and in particular, that of Netanyahu, also heightened partisan differences in the U.S. (Rynhold,2021).
- Realism is the explanation of the continuation of the U.S. Israel strategic cooperation, irrespective of the partisan rhetoric. Israel is considered to be a good regional partner regarding counterterrorism and counterbalancing Iran. Even Obama, with his poor relationship with Netanyahu, signed a military assistance agreement of approximately 38 billion dollars the biggest agreement in United States history (Rynhold, 2015; Saad, 2022). This indicates the fact that the commitment to the security of Israel is based on realist interests which explain why even partisan wrangles do increase in the commitment to defend Israel by both sides.
- Liberal theory underscores the concern of Democrats with diplomacy, institutions, and rights of human beings. The nuclear agreement with Iran, Obama returned to the UNESCO, and the demands of the Democrats to condition aid to Israel are the indicators of the liberal internationalist preferences

(Rogers, 2023; Smeltz, & Sullivan, 2021). The concept of liberalism also justifies why Democrats, particularly progressives, are focused on the two-state solution as part of the international norms.

- Constructivism emphasizes the ability of identity and norms to influence the foreign policy. Evangelical Christian Zionism strengthens Republican support of Israel (Spector, 2009) and the progressive Democrats associate the issue of racial justice in the United States with the rights of Palestinians, in particular, in the era of the Black Lives Matter (Pink, 2018; Rynhold, 2023). The constructivist accounts can therefore explain the motivation of partisan identities and cultural discourse to attitudes beyond the realms of strategic interests.

Each theory highlights different layers of causation. Realignment shows how party coalitions shifted structurally. Polarization explains how those divisions hardened. FPA illustrates how leaders deepened or moderated partisan trends. Realism reveals why bipartisan security commitments persist. Liberalism clarifies why Democrats emphasize multilateral diplomacy and human rights. Constructivism demonstrates how identity politics shape partisan sympathies. Used together, these frameworks explain why Republicans increasingly equate support for Israel with party identity, while Democrats remain internally divided.

Historical Background: From Bipartisanship to Partisanship

For much of the post-World War II era, U.S. support for Israel was bipartisan and consensual. Both parties, Democrats and Republicans, viewed Israel as a democratic partner coordinated with American values and as a bulwark against Soviet influence in the Middle East. In public opinion, sympathy for Israel consistently outpaced sympathy for Arab states by large margins, and Congress regularly expanded foreign aid to Israel under administrations of both parties (Cohen, 1990; Gilboa, 1987; Cavari, 2012). During the Cold War, support for Israel united hawks and doves even when U.S. foreign policy was otherwise divisive, as during the Vietnam War (Rynhold, 2015).

Bipartisan Consensus, 1948–1992

The establishment of Israel in 1948 coincided with the emergence of U.S. global leadership. Early Democratic leaders, such as Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy, cultivated close ties with Israel, partly due to Jewish support for the Democratic Party and the framing of Israel as a liberal democracy. Republicans were initially more cautious, often wary of entanglements in the Middle East, but they too broadly supported Israel, particularly after the Six-Day War of 1967. That conflict transformed perceptions: Israel's decisive victory elevated its reputation as a strategic asset, and sympathy for Israel in U.S. polls surged to unprecedented levels (Rynhold, 2015; Goldman, 2009).

Through the 1970s and 1980s, bipartisan consensus endured. While Democratic presidents like Jimmy Carter expressed sympathy for Palestinian statehood, Republicans such as Ronald Reagan combined ideological support for Israel with recognition of its strategic value in the Cold War (Novik, 1986; Rynhold, 2023). Although policy disputes occasionally arose for example, over settlement expansion or arms sales the disagreements were primarily between administrations and Congress rather than between the parties themselves (Ben-Zvi, 1993).

Emerging Divergence, 1993–2001

The 1990s marked the first signs of divergence in bipartisan support. The Oslo Accords, brokered by the Clinton administration, were divisive within Israel and also in the United States. While Democrats backed the peace process, many Republicans, especially neoconservatives, allied with Israel's Likud Party to oppose it (Rynhold, 1998, 2000). Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich worked closely with Benjamin Netanyahu to question President Clinton's approach, attempting to use Israel as a wedge issue. Meanwhile, public opinion began to show modest partisan differences: Republicans sympathized with Israel at slightly higher rates than Democrats, though the gap was still relatively small (Cavari, 2012).

Setting the Stage for Polarization

Towards the turn of the century, the structural changes that were marked by the partisan realignment theory became apparent. The Republican coalition had been shifted toward the right with evangelicals and the southern conservatives joining it with a strident pro-Israel thrust. The Democrats, which were becoming more affected by the liberal and secular voters, were less reluctant to attack the Israeli policies and underline the Palestinian rights. Despite continuing support of the security of Israel, the undermining of the consensus had begun within both sides. These tendencies would gain momentum with the Second Intifada, the September 11 attacks and the Iraq War, and this was going to be the era of extreme partisan polarization that would characterize the presidencies of Obama, Trump and Biden (Rynhold, 2023).

The Obama Era (2009–2016): Democratic Recalibration

The presidency of Barack Obama was the defining moment of the partisan relations between the U.S. and Israel. The preservation of the bipartisan legacy of security aid notwithstanding, the critical approach of the new president Obama took toward settlements, as well as his efforts to establish diplomatic

relations with Iran, launched new tensions in the U.S. Israel relations and spurred the further partisan rift.

Recalibration of Policy toward Israel

The initial policy of Obama put pressure on Israel as far as settlement activity was concerned. His government wanted West bank settlement to be frozen entirely in 2009 as a pre-condition to resume peace negotiations. In 2003, Gallup polling indicated that 55% of Americans identified more with Israel than with the Palestinians, but also that partisan issues were evident: 66 percent of Republicans and 49 percent of Democrats identified with Israel (Saad, 2022). These numbers indicated an existing divide that would become more pronounced as the policies of Obama continue to materialize. Obama strengthened security co-operation despite the tensions. The U.S funded Israel with the Iron dome missile defense system which proved effective in intercepting any type of rockets during wars between the U.S and Hamas in 2012 and 2014. The budget also saw Obama approve of a 10-year 38 billion defense aid package in 2016, the biggest ever in U.S. history (Rynhold, 2015). Therefore, policy disputes were evident, but security relationships were strong.

The Iran Nuclear Deal and Partisan Division

The most divisive matter of the Obama era was the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015. In July 2015, a Pew survey identified that 59 percent of Republicans disliked the deal, but just 25 percent of Democrats disliked it (Pew, 2015). The move by Netanyahu to visit the congress without the White House consent supported by Republican leaders was perceived by most democrats as an intrusion of partisan politics in U.S politics (Rynhold, 2021). More than 50 Democratic members of Congress boycotted the speech delivered by Netanyahu, saying that the bipartisan agreement was rotting (Schultz, 2017).

Public Opinion Trends under Obama

According to Gallup polls, the Republican sympathy towards Israel increased by more than 75 percent in 2001-2015 compared to 50-55 percent in 2011-2015, whereas the Democratic one varied between 45-55 percent (Saad, 2022). In the Gaza conflict by 2014, 73 percent of Republicans supported the military operations of Israel, whereas only 45 percent of Democrats did (Pew, 2014). Likewise, as 70 percent of Republicans were against the establishment of a Palestinian state, in 2014, a majority of Democrats 58 percent, and 61 percent in 2014 and 2016 respectively, concurred (Saad, 2020). Such numbers highlight the partisan split: Republicans shifted to being in an uncritically pro-Israeli position, whereas Democrats shifted to being even-handed.

Balancing Security and Diplomacy

Although partisan divisions increased, Obama continued to give Israel, both symbolically and practically, support on its security. There was an increase in military collaboration and in the year 2012, he bestowed the Presidential Medal of Freedom upon Israeli President Shimon Peres, a sign that underlines the democratic principles of Israel. Such gestures emphasized the differentiation in the policy of Obama: the security of Israel was unconditionally supported, but the criticism of the government of Netanyahu was more vicious than in the previous regimes (Rynhold, 2023). The Obama years were a two-fold trend. On the one hand, the military assistance and tactical alliance were as high as ever, which is aligned with the requirements of realism. Conversely, there was an expansion of partisan divisions among the general public: Republican pro-Israel sentiments shot to the mid-70s, Democratic pro-Israel sentiments leveled off or dropped a few points as more people began to sympathize with Palestinians. This divergence was solidified by the Iran nuclear deal, and the partisanship of Netanyahu in his alliance with the Republicans. As of 2016, there was a decrease in bipartisanship, and the relations of the U.S. and Israel turned into a partisan issue in American politics.

The Trump Era (2017–2021): Republican Consolidation

The presidency of Donald Trump became the most radical shift in policy in the U.S.-Israel in decades. His administration also pursued the policies that were in line with the agenda of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, appealed to the evangelical and conservative voters greatly and established the Republican support to Israel. Meanwhile, Democrats continued to grow apart by losing affiliation with these policies and creating partisan divisions unparalleled in history.

Pro-Israel Policy Shifts

Trump has made a series of historic policy shifts that have long been supported by the government of Israel and its allies in Washington. He announced in December 2017 that Jerusalem was recognized as the capital of Israel with the U.S embassy in Tel Aviv being moved to Jerusalem in May 2018. As per a study by Pew Research Center, 80 percent of Republicans were in support of the embassy move, against just 34 percent of Democrats (Pew, 2018). In March 2019, Trump issued an Israeli presidential proclamation concerning Israeli control over the Golan Heights, which broke decades of non-recognition of the territory occupied since 1967 by the United States (White House 2019). Israel embraced this ruling but was rejected

by majority Democrats and European allies of America. In January 2020, Trump presented a peace initiative, the so-called Deal of the Century. The plan supported the annexation of up to 30 percent of the West Bank by Israel and allowed Palestinians to have a demilitarized state with limited sovereignty (Harkov, 2020). Although endorsed by Republicans and the right-wing government of Israel, the Palestinian leaders voted it down and most Democrats denounced it arguing that the plan was detrimental to two-state solution.

Partisan Polarization in Congress

The congressional responses to the policies of Trump were polarizing. The embassy move, the Golan recognition and the peace plan were overwhelmingly supported by Republican legislators. Democrats on the other hand expressed extreme dissent especially on annexation. In June 2020, 191 House Democrats also sent a letter to Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders threatening to take action against unilateral annexation of West Bank territory (Rynhold, 2023).

Public Opinion and Party Base

According to polling data, partisan animosity on the issue of Israel was at historic levels during the Trump presidency. In 2018, Gallup indicated that 79% of republicans were more likely to sympathize with Israel than with the Palestinians than 27 percent of Democrats highest in the history of the poll (Saad, 2022). In 2019, the level of Democratic sympathy towards Palestinians had increased to 38 percent, almost twice as much as it was 10 years ago (Saad, 2020). In a 2018 Pew survey, 75% of white evangelical Protestants believed that the U.S. was not pro-Israel enough, with only 32 percent of the U.S. Jews and 23 percent of people with no religion agreeing (Pew, 2018). This demonstrates that Trump policies were in close relation to the interests of his evangelical base which strengthened the pro-Israel identity of the Republican Party.

Strategic and Symbolic Dimensions

The strategy of Trump combined both strategic compromises and symbolic politics. His administration also terminated funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) serving Palestinian refugees and shut down the mission of Palestine Liberation Organization in Washington, further annoying Democrats. Symbolically, Trump and Netanyahu developed a personal bond of close alliance that highlighted how partisan the United States and Israel relations were. In the election in Israel, Netanyahu publicly ran on his relationship with Trump, further cementing the view among the Democrats that Israel had turned into a Republican cause. The Trump era polarized the U.S. in support for Israel. The Republican Party greeted the Trump pro-Israel policies with great enthusiasm, with approval among the Republican voters hitting record highs. The Democrats, in their turn, began to sympathize with Palestinians more, and express their criticism of unilateral Israeli moves. This divide was mirrored in congressional arguments, with progressive Democrats pushing the boundaries of long-standing bipartisan taboos by questioning U.S. military aid and applying such a term as apartheid to the mainstream political debate. Individually, by the time Trump came out of office, the American Israel relationship was no longer seen as a bipartisan relationship, but rather, it became a highly partisan American issue. That realignment strengthened the centrality of Israel in the Republican identity and hastened the splits in the Democratic Party, which led to a more cautionary and more balancing course of President Biden.

The Biden Era (2021–2024): Strategic Continuity and Democratic Division

Joe Biden came into power in January 2021 with the task of reworking U.S. Israel relations that had been highly polarized during the Trump years. As part of upholding the traditional security pledges to Israel, Biden aimed to revive the aid to Palestinians, rebound the multilateral diplomacy, and decouple the U.S. policy with the Netanyahu-Trump partnership. His presidential tenure is a case study of continuity of bipartisan support of the security of Israel and the division of the Democratic Party on the ways in which that support should be packaged.

Continuity in Security Commitments

Biden maintained several significant Trump-era policy alterations that had altered relations between the U.S and Israel. He ascertained that the U.S embassy would not be relocated to some other city, effectively making the Trump ruling watertight against the Democratic criticism in 2017-18 (Lesniewski, 2021). He even attested long-term security commitments such as military assistance in the form of the \$38 billion memorandum of understanding which was signed under the Obama presidency (Magid, 2021). Biden was a firm advocate of the Israeli right to protect themselves, signing a 735 million weapons sale during the conflict in May of 2021 in Gaza despite protests by the progressives (Rogers, 2021). Simultaneously, Biden was privately urging Netanyahu to agree to a ceasefire, juggling between unconditional security assistance and diplomacy in the direction of de-escalating.

Recalibration toward Palestinians and Multilateralism

Biden overturned a number of Trump-era policies in relation to the Palestinians. In 2021, his administration reinstated funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) of 235 million

dollars and reinstated U.S aid to the Palestinian Authority that had been cancelled by Trump (State Department, 2021). He also re-established diplomatic links with Palestinians but the move to re-open the U.S. consult in East Jerusalem was blocked by Israeli opposition(Pranshu, & Gladstone, 2021). In 2023, the U.S. officially rejoined UNESCO against the Trump administration indicating a return to multilateral engagement(Rogers, 2023). Even as he admitted that it would be difficult to realize a two-state solution in the near future due to political realities in Israel and Palestine, Biden has consistently reiterated his support of a two-state solution.

Partisan Divisions in Congress

Divisions in the Democratic party have been emphasized by congressional politics under Biden. Whereas moderates like the Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer and the House speaker Nancy Pelosi insisted on consistency in backing Israel, the progressives insisted on conditionality of aid. In May 2021, the progressive Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez proposed a resolution to halt the sale of 735 million dollars arms to Israel ,which the party leadership rejected (Rynhold, 2023). Though he failed, the program is significant in showing how bipartisan agreement was losing force, and intra-Democratic dissent was beginning on the issue of military aid.

Public Opinion Trends

These partisan dynamics are reflected in polling data of the presidency of Biden. A 2021 survey by the Chicago Council, found that among Democrats, 62% supported limited military assistance to Israel in case it did not stop settlement expansion. (Smeltz, & Sullivan, 2021). The first time in 2022, Gallup stated that Democratic sympathy towards Palestinians (49 percent) was higher than the sympathy towards Israel (38 percent) with Republicans showing widespread approval towards Israel (78 percent) (Saad, 2022). This was a reversal of history and it proved that there has been partisan discord which has never been so intense.

Strategic Balancing

Biden's presidency has been characterized by strategic balancing. On the one hand, he has maintained the bipartisan tradition of supporting Israel's security, preserving Trump-era decisions on Jerusalem and strengthening defense cooperation. On the other hand, he has sought to reestablish U.S. credibility as a mediator by restoring aid to Palestinians and reengaging with international institutions. His approach reflects both realist imperatives maintaining Israel as a regional ally and liberal internationalist principles support for multilateral diplomacy and conflict resolution.

Explaining the Shifts

The difference between the partisan positions on the U.S. support of Israel between Obama and Biden was not based on one factor. Rather, they represent the interaction between realignment, polarization, leadership choices and identity politics. Where Republicans united with a Republican Party's unconditional support Israel, the Democrats were torn apart by ideological, demographic and generational transformation.

Republican Consolidation: Evangelicals, Realignment, and Security Narratives

Long-term structural changes are the basis of the further consolidation of the Republican Party with Israel. The unique partisan realignment theory emphasizes the fact that the decision by the southern conservatives and evangelical protestants to join the GOP transformed the foreign policy identity of the party (Miller, & Schofield, 2008). By the 2000s, white evangelicals made up a majority of the Republican base and their Christian Zionism theology viewed Israel as a prophetic central part of the Bible (Spector, 2009). According to a Pew survey, 75 percent of evangelicals thought that the U.S. was not becoming supportive enough of Israel, as opposed to only 23 percent of religiously unaffiliated Americans (Pew, 2018). This religious background bounced off security accounts. Following September 11, 2001, the Republicans were increasingly making Israel appear as a frontline partner in the battle against terrorism and radical Islamism (Rynhold, 2015). This was reinforced under George W. Bush and under Trump, it was bolstered to its utmost extent, with policies like the Jerusalem embassy move, Golan recognition, and UNRWA defunding encouraging the feeling of Israel as a strategic and moral ally. The support was also cemented by partisan identity. According to Gallup polls, Republicans sympathized more with Israel than the Democrats by 2018 (79 per cent versus 27 per cent), by a 52-point margin, the largest in the history of the Gallup polls (Saad, 2022). To the republicans, being a pro-Israel supporter was no longer merely a policy but also a way of partisan identification.

Democratic Fragmentation: Liberalism, Identity Politics, and Negative Partisanship

The democratic aid to Israel took another path. As centrists, party leaders, continued the security aid tradition of both parties, liberal and progressive democrats also focused on human rights and international law. A 2021 survey of the Chicago Council showed that 62 percent of Democrats wanted the U.S. aid to Israel limited, but only 18 percent of Republicans did (Smeltz, & Sullivan, 2021). This trend was increased by generational change. Democrats who were younger, in particular millennials, had more chances to

sympathize with Palestinians. In 2022, a Gallup poll revealed that in the first time in history, 49 percent of Americans who identify as Democrats had more sympathy to Palestinians than to Israel (38 percent) (Saad, 2022). This was an indication of ideological liberalism, as well as the change in demographics as more and more Democrats were supported by minorities, secular voters, and younger Americans (Pew, 2017). These shifts can be explained with the help of the constructivist theory. The emergence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement created similarities between the Palestinian movement and the struggle of racial justice in the U.S. Intersectional frameworks were adopted by progressive democrats regarding Israel-Palestine, viewing it as a human rights problem, which is linked to systemic racism in the U.S. and occupation and inequality in other countries (Pink, 2018; Rynhold, 2023). Negative affective partisanship was another cause. The very nature of Netanyahu becoming overtly Republican such as his 2015 speech before Congress against the Iran deal and his strong association with Trump turned a number of Democrats away (Rynhold, 2021; Schultz, 2017). To the progressives, the Palestinian rights cause was not only a position to be taken as a moral stand but also as a method of opposing the politics of Republicans and Trumpists.

Leadership Effects: Obama, Trump, and Biden

These partisan dynamics were enhanced by the decisions of the leadership. The freeze of settlements and the ongoing Iran nuclear deal sought by Obama, although they were aligned with the Democratic liberal internationalism, were characterized by Republicans as anti-Israel. The open dissent with Obama by Netanyahu strengthened partisan lines. Trump did the reverse and passed a maximalist pro-Israel agenda. Republicans and evangelicals rejoiced at his policies on Jerusalem, Golan Heights and peace plan, which were criticized by the majority of the Democrats. Trump increased partisan sorting by transforming Israel into a Republican cause.

Implications for U.S.–Israel Relations

The partisan shift in the U.S. support of Israel has a lot of implications in the American foreign policy, domestic politics, and the future of peace in the Middle East. Although there is still a bipartisan consensus on the issue of Israeli security at the strategic level, the growing polarization of the popular opinion and the congressional debate poses a threat to the sustainability of the U.S.–Israel special relationship. The partisan divide is both threat and opportunity to Israel. The Netanyahu government took advantage of Trump presidency and obtained unprecedented U.S concessions regarding Jerusalem, Golan Heights, and settlement recognition. But this concurrence was at the expense of the Democrats. The free-association with Republican leaders made Netanyahu even more threatening to be seen as a partisan intervention in U.S. politics (Rynhold, 2023). The conservative nature of the policies of the Biden administration which kept the changes of the Trump administration and restored the aid to Palestinians as well as rejoining the international institutions is an indication of the awareness of this dilemma. As much as U.S military aid is safe, Israel stands to lose the goodwill of both parties in case it is still linked to the Republican Party. Such undermining of consensus might hamper Israeli flexibility in diplomacy in the long-term, especially by future Democratic regimes that will increasingly be pressured by liberal constituencies to make aid contingent.

Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy

In polarizing the U.S. foreign policy on Israel, the public is affected at the very level at which bipartisan policy was once assured of. The problem of consensus undermining makes U.S. diplomacy difficult in the Middle East. The Republican administrations will engage in maximalist pro-Israel policies, whereas the Democratic ones will exercise balance between supporting and criticizing Israeli policies and involving more in relations with Palestinians. Such vacillation undermines American credibility as a facilitator in the peace process because the constituents of the region can consider U.S. pledges as subject to the partisan make up of Washington. In addition, polarization can lead to destabilisation of wider alliances of the U.S. European partners, among others, were much more reticent on the Trump policies in Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, more closely meeting the preferences of Obama and Biden in their multilateral approach and international law (Rogers, 2023). Since the policy of the U.S. varies based on partisanship, it is harder to coordinate their allies.

Implications for the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

Partisan divide too has a direct impact on Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Democrats, particularly the progressive, are asking more for conditionality of aid a big break with the bipartisan tradition. A 2021 survey by the Chicago Council found that 62 percent of Democrats were interested in limiting military assistance to Israel in case it grew settlements, versus 18 percent of Republicans (Smeltz, & Sullivan, 2021). This implies that the future Democratic governments may be under pressure to use the U.S. aid as a vehicle to exercise control over Israeli policy. Simultaneously, increased Democratic support to Palestinians also indicates a change in the American politics discourse. In 2022, Gallup announced that 49 percent of Democrats

sympathized with Palestinians more than with Israel (38 percent), the only poll in its history that Democratic sympathy towards Palestinians surpassed the sympathy towards Israel (Saad, 2022). These trends in opinion make the Palestinian voices more probable to be successfully represented in the Democratic foreign policy discussions that might change the stance of the U.S. in multilateral arenas. In their turn, Republicans are hardly likely to adopt such positions. GOP leaders are also always against Palestinian statehood and portray Israel as an important partner in fighting terrorism and Iran (Rynhold, 2015). Therefore, the mediating efforts of the U.S are not only sabotaged by the Israeli and Palestinian divisions but also by the American partisan divides, which has diminished the viability of long-term diplomatic efforts.

Implications for Domestic Politics

On the domestic front, Israel has become a partisan distinction. In the case of Republicans, pro-Israeli positions are very strong appeals to the evangelical voters and foreign policy hawks which serves to maintain party loyalty. To Democrats, the matter has become a rift between moderates, who believe in the traditional pro-Israel commitments, and progressives, who believe unconditional support is not compatible with liberal values of human rights and equality (Pink, 2018). This has already changed the congressional debates. Proposals to conditional aid, freeze sales of arms, or slur Israeli policies are now taken off the political fringes but are tabled by members of mainstream Democrats. Although such initiatives very infrequently succeed, their existence itself is a sign of the weakening of the bipartisan taboos when it comes to U.S. Israel relationships. This trend indicates that there will be greater internal restraints on policy formulation towards Israel by succeeding Democratic regimes.

Long-Term Risks

The greatest danger, in the long run, is that the U.S-Israel association is brought to a complete partisanship level, based on electoral periods and not strategic sustainability. This would compromise the security of Israel, diminish the influence of the U.S. diplomats and it would be hard to manage the alliances. In the case of Israel, excessive dependence on Republican administrations will cause future Democratic administrations to drift towards becoming estranged; in the case of the U.S., becoming a partisan support to Israel, and linking it to its identity, will weaken its reputation as an international power with the ability to uphold long-term engagements. The strength of bipartisan agreement eventually depends on the decisions of leadership and framing by the institution. Israeli leaders endeavour to diversify political relationships outside Republican regimes and U.S. leadership placing this support to Israel in the context of greater national interests than partisan identity may help stabilize the relationship. However, recent demographic and ideological trends in either party Republican dependence on evangelical voters and Democratic realignment to liberal and progressive blocks suggest that polarization should still continue. This will continue to define U.S Israel relations not just based on the strategic imperatives but also on partisan politics, which have long-term consequences on the American diplomacy and stability in the Middle East.

Conclusion

The history of American policy in terms of supporting Israel under Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden demonstrates that this issue has been radically changed in terms of a bipartisan agreement. Throughout decades, the fact that Israel was a democratic ally on a volatile region ensured that it would have widespread support across party lines. However, the restructuring of the American political formations, the polarization of ideologies, and the both sides leaders have reconfigured this consensus into a highly partisan one. The onset of this divergence was manifested during the Obama presidency. Although he delivered Israel more military assistance than any other leader had ever gotten, and increased its involvement in missile defense, his on-record attacks on settlement growth and his pursuit of an Iran nuclear agreement worsened his relationship with Prime Minister Netanyahu and revealed partisan rifts in Congress. These policies were indicative of the Democratic Party liberal internationalist policies, which places more emphasis on diplomacy and international law, but it also elicited Republican attacks and expedited partisan sorting in voter opinion. This polarization was entrenched during the Trump administration. Promoting the Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, accepting Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and advancing a peace plan that was extremely pro-Israeli, Trump transformed the U.S. policy in a way that was popular with the Republicans, especially among the evangelicals, but unpopular among the Democrats. It led the most partisan gap in sympathy with Israel in the history of polling: as of 2018, almost 80 percent of Republicans and only 27 percent of Democrats supported Israel in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Trump maintained a strong personal connection with Netanyahu, which only further enhanced the Republican Party's association to Israel. Biden has attempted a middle way balancing act, trying to revive aspects of Democratic liberal internationalism without breaching the strategic commitments of his predecessors. His administration has maintained Trump embassy ruling and military aid and renewed aid to Palestinians and rejoined multilateral organizations like UNESCO. These decisions exemplify the internal differences of the Democratic Party:

moderates believe in traditional bipartisan defense of Israel, and progressives require conditional aid and accentuate more attention to the Palestinian rights. This tension is confirmed by polling data showing that the Democratic side has been sympathizing with Palestinians the most in history since 2022 despite Republicans being overwhelmingly pro-Israel. Partisan realignment, polarization theory, foreign policy analysis, realism, liberalism and constructivism are the theoretical frameworks used in this segment of the study that explain the complexity of these changes together. Realignment emphasizes the movement of evangelicals and conservatives towards the GOP and the rise of the liberal and minority areas to the Democratic Party. The polarization theory elucidates the role of Netanyahu and Trump in enabling the Democratic backlash regarding negative affective partisanship. The analysis of leadership highlights the importance of the presidential decisions, such as the diplomacy of Obama and the recognition policies of Trump and balancing of Biden. The continuity of security commitments is explained by realism, the focus on diplomacy and human rights by Democrats is captured by liberalism, and partisan attitudes are explained by a constructivist approach of how identity politics by religious Zionism among Republicans and intersectional activism among Democrats made the difference. The consequences of these changes are far reaching. To Israel, partisan rift has augmented short term benefits in the Republicans regime and has jeopardised long time bipartisanship. In the case of the United States, partisan oscillation makes its intervention in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute less credible and also troubles the coordinating relationships with allies. Domestically, Israel has turned into a partisan symbol: Republicans are using it as a symbol of religious and strategic solidarity, Democrats argue it has grown to be unconditionally supportive, and whether this is in line with liberal values. Demographic and ideological trends also indicate that polarization will continue in the long run. This is due to the fact that Republican attachment to the Israel will hardly diminish with the presence of foreign policy hawks and evangelicals within the party. The further polarization of Democratic choices is evident with the younger and more diverse generations becoming more concerned with human rights and international laws. Despite the fact that the bipartisan support of Israel's security is not going to disappear, the unanimity is broken, and the relations between U.S. and Israel will be caught in the middle of partisan issues. Overall, the Obama-Trump-Biden shift shows how the polarization of the domestic arena in the United States has transformed the foreign policy. It used to be a partisan symbol of unity with Israel, and today, it displays partisan identity, ideological commitments, and cultural narratives. It is not just the strategic imperatives that will be important in the sustainability of the U.S.-Israel relationship, but also the way the American and Israeli leaders manage this polarized landscape. Devoid of fresh initiatives to support Israel as a national and not partisan interest, the relationship will be left a subject of exposure to the impact of the electoral cycle undermining its strength and relevance in U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East.

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