

## The Palestine-Israeli Peace Process after the Cold War

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### Abstract

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This paper provides a detailed and intricate analysis of the impact of a New World Order on the Palestine-Israel peace process, which took shape after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The end of the bipolar World Order and the eventual emergence of a new unipolar World Order paved the way for the emergence of different opportunities as well as challenges in the Palestine-Israel peace process. In particular, the United States being the only remaining single superpower once the Soviet Union collapsed has managed to enjoy a substantial amount of influence and a form of hegemony with regard to matters of international relations (Aruri, 1992). This paper intends to provide a detailed and critical discussion of how the New World Order under the American superpower on the Palestine-Israel peace process. This paper explores and analyses the structural changes that took place both within and outside the Middle East region after the collapse of the Cold War as well as the political maneuvering involved in the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Israeli government. It looks at the effects of the structural changes that took place once the Cold War came to an end with regard to the Palestine-Israel peace process

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**Keywords:** Palestine-Israel Peace Process, the Middle East Peace Process, the Soviet Union, Post-Cold War, the United States, Arab States

### 1. Introduction

The economic and military superiority combined with the diplomatic as well as the technological strength of the United States in the absence of a competing super power has given the United States an upper hand or the influence to pursue its own geopolitical interests and policies.

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The Middle East peace process has particularly demonstrated this form of hegemony and American popularity with regard to international affairs. Chomsky (1994) notes that the unipolarity of the United States at the global level as well as its hegemony with regard to regional level matters has allowed it to pursue freely different policies aimed at resolving the Palestine-Israel peace process. For countries at the regional level such as the Arab states, which were once bound by the protection or constraints of the patron and client relationships during the Cold War were able to adjust their individual policies in order to fit into the New World Order after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Chomsky, 1994). In essence, the collapse of the Soviet Union, which marked the end of the Cold War led to a shift in the balance of power both at the international and regional levels as well as changes in the rules of how the game was played.

Some of the notable peace process initiatives directed towards addressing the Palestine-Israel conflict after the end of the Cold War include but are not limited to the Madrid and Oslo talks, which took place in 1991 and 1993 respectively (Abadi, 2004). It has been argued that the Madrid and Oslo negotiation processes be a direct result of the unipolar World Order system led by the United States of America. Whether these negotiations were done indirectly or directly by the Americans or it was the case of through the direct or indirect or indirect involvement of regional actors, the absence of a competing superpower was largely reflected in the Palestine-Israel peace process.

In the case of the signing of the Oslo agreement in 1993 signified a historical point in the prolonged Palestine-Israeli conflict. The Palestine-Israel conflict turned into a political conflict between what could be termed as the *de jure* equal players. The Oslo agreement is seen as the first comprehensive agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the state of Israeli in the history of the Palestine-Israel conflict (Bickerton, 2012). It is also regarded as the first time officials of the Israeli government, and the representatives of the Palestinian Liberation Organization entered into direct talks concerning the future of the controversial territories. Prior to the signing of the Oslo agreement in Washington, the then Prime Minister of Israel Yitzhak Rabin and the head of the PLO Yasser Arafat made exchange letters of recognition.

The head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the late Yasser Arafat in his letter reiterated the statement made by the Palestinian National Congress in 1988, which gave recognition to the rights of Israel to exist within the pre-1967 territorial borders (Ashton, 2007). For the Israelis, they recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization as the legitimate representative of the People of Palestine and agreed to put an end to the ban that had been in place with regard to dealing with members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Such progress in the Palestine-Israel peace process exhibited the will power to bring to an end prolonged hostilities between these two Arab nations by the use of peaceful measures. In addition, this was a sign that the Palestine-Israel conflict was shifting from the battlefield where military means was frequently used to the negotiation table where peace talks were held (Ahrari, 1996).

In retrospect, the Palestine-Israel conflict that has spanned more than a half century and the failure of numerous peace negotiations, scholars, as well as researchers, have been interested in understanding the underlying cause for the watershed in the Middle East history (Bakman-Flamhaft, 1996). One of the key argument has been the collapse and eventual withdrawal of the Soviet Union and the subsequent rise of the United States Hegemony in the Middle East, the presence of regional conflicts such as the Persian Gulf War, rising polarization between the Palestinian communities and the Israelis led to a window of opportunity in bringing to an end in the violent conflict between the Palestines and the Israelis.

## **2.0 Collapse and Disintegration of the Soviet Union: The End of the Cold War**

As it was explored in the previous chapter of this thesis, the Cold War presented a situation where there was a global competition for strategic influence between the United States, and the Soviet Union was evident in the Middle East and in particular the Palestine-Israel peace process. The rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States appeared regularly to mold the conflict structure of the Middle East region; hence, creating a connection between the regional level and the extra-regional (Baxter, 2008). After the crisis in the Suez Canal, the Palestinian national struggle, which was considered as a vital unifying and symbolic force for the Arab nations, gradually became the central focus of the politics of the Cold War politics particularly with regard to the Middle East. Leaders from the Israeli and the Arab sides appeared to exploit this situation to the advantage of their own nations.

This led to the establishment of a connection between the regional and the extra-regional levels of the conflict. Therefore, during the years of the Cold War, efforts towards peacemaking within the Middle East were held hostage to the considerations or interests of the Cold War (Brown, 1992). The argument for this deadlock appeared to disappear with the Cold War as well as the dividing of the Middle East region into two parts; the Western and Eastern spheres of influence also vanished.

As a result of the domestic economic and political upheavals, the Soviet Union appeared to withdraw gradually from the Middle East in the period between 1986 and 1989 (Eisenberg & Caplan, 1998). On the part of the United States, the withdrawal of the Soviet Union meant that there was no superpower rival to compete with; hence, the influence of the Americans in the Middle East increased substantially (Cohn-Sherbok and Alami, 2001).

At the start of the 1990s, leaders of the Soviet Union began to shift their attention towards the promotion of stability and peace in the region (Ciment, 1997). Moscow sought to work closely with the United States in an effort to regain some level of influence and supremacy within the Middle East. Moscow wanted to play the role of an advocate in efforts to reconcile the Israelis and the Arabs on one hand and the other the Israelis and the Palestinians (Cohen, 2007).

This change in the Middle East policy by the Soviet Union was demonstrated by the Helsinki communiqué of September 9<sup>th</sup> of 1990. In the Helsinki communiqué, the then leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev together with the United States President George Bush communicating their unanimous opposition to the invasion by the Iraqis into Kuwait (Dallal, 1999).

As the Gulf War came to an end in 1991, the then President of the United States George Bush made an announcement that a *New World Order* had risen; hence, problems that plagued the international community would be addressed in a much peaceful manner (Duffield and John, 1994). With regard to the Middle East, President Bush noted that it was the appropriate time to reach a peace settlement in the prolonged Palestine-Israel conflict; hence, United States started to push unilaterally towards the realization of the end of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Under the auspices of the United States, the Palestinians and the Israelis signed the famous Oslo Accords in 1993, followed by the conclusion of a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994 as well as the start of negotiations between Israel and Syria even though they were regrettably brought to a halt after the assassination of the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (Eugene and Chibli, 1997).

According to Eizenstat (2012), despite these auspicious beginnings in the Palestine-Israel peace process after the Cold War had come to an end, the changes both at the regional and international levels played a significant role in determining the developments that followed in the peace process. Most importantly, the United States had the lone role at the top of the world order system with its main focus being the need to retain its position as the sole global superpower. In the Middle East, the by-product of this was that Israel acquired greater freedom to act as it saw fit (Fischer, 1997).

It was at this juncture that the rules of the game changed, and both Israeli and American practices took a new turn. In addition to bringing to an end the problem with the Palestinian, the Israeli government needed to remove what it considered to threats to its own security; Iran and Iraq. Gradually, the United States desired to eliminate what it viewed as an obstacle to its Middle East policy; the political perceptions of the Iranians and the Iraqis.

This shift in the outlook by the Americans was propelled by the goal of the Israelis to accelerate the peace negotiations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization as well as Washington's desire to reshape the Middle East region according to the vision of US-Israeli ties (Garthoff, 1994). It is essential to point out that contrary to the widely held belief; the terrorist events that took place on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, the United States did not change its objects with regard to the foreign policy in the Middle East. However, the United States appeared to change the strategic approach it used to achieve its foreign policy objectives.

The United States appeared to shift from the use of diplomatic and political channels to the deploying of military means to achieve its foreign policy objectives (Golan, 1992). Such a shift has been credited to the changes that have taken place in Washington's strategic as well as political thinking.

A good example would be the focus of the United States on Iraq; bringing political stability in Iraq has been motivated by the need to ensure that the balance of power in the Middle East is in favour of the Israelis interests as well as provide a platform for bringing to an end the Palestinian-Israel conflict. In essence, the end of the Cold War appears to have favoured one stakeholder in the Palestine-Israel peace process; the Israelis, as opponents of the United States led peace efforts have expressed their concerns that the Palestine-Israel peace process has largely been dominated by the specific conditions set by the United States and Israel (Judt, 2011).

## **2.1 The Implications of the Soviet Union Collapse for Israel**

The withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the Middle East created a situation where former state clients have deprived a very vital supply of subsidized military equipment as well as training that came from the Soviets. In addition, they were also deprived political, financial support as well as moral backup from the Soviet Union (Karsh, 2013; Khalidi, 2013). The Soviet leaders abandoned their former political strategy of providing encouragement to the Arab client nations to both threaten as well as confront the State of Israel (Lerner, 2004).

This shift in political strategy by the Soviet leadership appeared to have a negative effect on the Syrians hard and appeared to be a major blow to their objective of achieving a similar military parity with the Israelis (Lukacs, 2009). The Syrians military ability to threaten the Israelis was significantly reduced in the long term.

On the part of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, its radical wing was encouraged to cooperate with the moderate centrist factions or groups and focus on a negotiated settlement with Israeli government (Milton-Edwards, 2009). The end of the Cold War led to a change in its policy with regard to Israel especially during the leadership of Gorbachev. In particular, the Soviet Union recognized the right of the Israelis to exist within the pre-1967 territorial borders as well as moved to reopen its embassy in Tel Aviv. Moreover, the Soviet Union allowed the Soviet Jews to have free access when it came to migrating into Israel after 1989 (Peters, 2013).

Since the establishment of a Jewish State, both the United States and Israel have always had a special relationship. On the part of the Jewish State, it has never been completely integrated as well as accepted into geographic region of the Middle East where it belongs.

This means that the central focus in the Israelis security policy has been the goals to attain strong military capability; qualitative military superiority incomparable to most of the larger Arab armies in the Middle East. This central dimension has been explicitly expressed in the political-military doctrine of the Israelis (Pinfari, 2012). The United States has been in agreement with the security assessment made by the Israeli government, which is still relevant despite the various changes that have taken place in the Israeli society as well as the dynamic nature of the Middle East conflict. The absence of the Soviet Union has propelled the intentions of the United States to commit itself to supporting the Israelis in three main ways; economically, political as well as militarily (Parker, 1993).

The collapse of the Soviet Union did not reduce or halt the supply of American to the Israelis. On an annual basis, the Israeli government receives over 3 billion US dollars in the form of grants, 50 percent of which comes in the form of military aid. The United States viewed Israel as a cost-efficient partner during the Cold War with regard to its regional policy of containment because the Israeli Defense Army was considered to be a has significant military strength in the Middle East region. In addition, Israel represented key Western values such as democracy and Western secular orientation (Patir, 2011).

The need to preserve this special relationship between the United States and Israel appeared to continue in being the corner stone of the Middle East policies of the United States even after the Cold War had come to an end. However, as the containment rationale gradually disappeared, the strategic value of the Israelis for the Americans appeared to reduce. The United States being the sole superpower had the opportunity to concentrate comfortably on other strategic nations or issues such as the need to promote stability within the Persian Gulf through a dual policy of containment of both Iraq as well as Iran (Perlmutter, 1995).

Another rationale was that since both Israel and the United States did not have a fundamental enemy within the Middle East region during the Cold War; they only had what could be termed as common adversaries, their strategic interests failed to coincide properly especially so after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Rubin, 1994).

The United States felt strong after gaining victory in the Persian Gulf War as well as gaining the position of the only superpower nation in the world (just like a hegemony), the United States through the then President George H. W. Bush introduced the idea of a *New World Order*, indicating the commitment towards peace especially with regard to the Palestine-Israel peace process (Podeh, 2005). It is the initiatives introduced by President Bush that led to the Madrid Peace Conference after of the Gulf War. President Bush was successful in bringing together all stakeholders involved in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

As it shall be explored in the section on the Madrid Peace Process, the American leadership played a critical role in ensuring the taking off of the Madrid Peace talks by putting immense pressure on the Israelis to participate in the Madrid talks, failure to which the talks would have not happened. In 1991, a disagreement between the United States and the Israelis appeared to climax as the Israeli government had made a request for a 10 billion dollar loan guarantee in order to build settlement houses for the Soviet immigrant Jews (Quray, 2015).

On its part, the United States government postponed the loan request by the Israelis insisting that the Madrid conference had to take place first. One of the reasons for this decision by the United States was a stopping of the Israeli's settlement expansion program was a demand made by a joint Palestinians and Arabs as well as a part of the Madrid peace formula (Reinhart, 2002). In addition, allowing the continuation of the settlement expansion activities by the Israelis could negatively affect the peace initiatives set up by the United States government. The Israeli government eventually accepted to work within the terms of the Madrid negotiation, put a halt on all the settlement expansion activities as well as joined the Madrid talks.

Nonetheless, the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the Middle East region, there was an increase in the space for the Israel's to politically maneuver. This was largely driven by the fact that the anti-Israeli Arab block that also involved the Palestinian Liberation Organization became weaker (due to the absence of the patronage support received by the Soviet Union), but most importantly the special relationship that had developed between the United States and the Israelis had become stronger (Schiller, 2009).

The Soviet Union was closely working with the United States by supporting the proposed idea of a land for peace formula in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 as well as 338; the space for the Israeli's political maneuvering, in reality, began to decline gradually (Shamir and Bruce, 2005). The Israel government was receiving immense pressure from the both the United States as well as the Soviet Union to join and agree to the principles of the Madrid peace conference.

The mounting pressure appeared to have put the Israelis in a tight spot especially by denying them the freedom to act, a freedom that Israel had substantially experienced when the influence of the anti-Israeli Arab block declined immediately after the collapse and withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the Middle East. This meant that in practice, Israel's rational strategies were significantly reduced coupled with the increased pressure to bring change to the status quo (Shen and Jean-Marc, 2010). The risk to Israel's security was reduced once Israel joined peace negotiations largely due to the reduced capacity of the Arab nations that were clients to the former Soviet. Moreover, Israel had the opportunity to join the peace talks from a position of strength enabling the Israeli government to devise a strategy of a negotiated settlement and not a military settlement in the Palestine-Israel conflict (Sher, 2006).

As the Gulf War took place, the Israelis appeared to shift to the right by legitimizing the political and economic sanctions that the Likud led government had imposed on Palestines. These sanctions had been driven by two critical circumstances; first, the failure of the Palestinians and in particular the Palestinian Liberation Organization as well as moderate leaders in the West Bank to express their condemnation of the invasion by the Iraqis; second, the images that were portrayed of the Palestinians who were cheering the Iraqi Scuds coming down on the Israeli City of Tel Aviv (Sutter, 2011).

This led to a decision by the Israelis to close down the borders between the occupied territories and the *Israel-proper*, hence, preventing the Palestinian workers from going to their workplaces in Israel. Regardless the increasing numbers of Soviet Jews who immigrated from Russia between 1989 and 199, which led to a rise in the Israeli population by close to half a million (Wanis-St, 2011). This policy resulted in a reduction Israeli's GDP as well as a deterioration of the economic situation.

A dwindling of the Israeli economy meant that the economic situation in Palestine got much worse. A worsening economic situation in Palestine led to a boomerang-effect for Israelis; thereby, leading to the intensification of conflict between Israel and Palestine. The Gulf War also appeared to have affected the Israelis psychologically, leading to a change in how the key policy makers perceived the Palestine-Israel conflict as well as the peace process.

Two of the syndromes that were identified after the missile attacks by the Iraqis included; the Scud syndrome and the Quadaffi-Saddam syndrome (Sayigh, 1997). The second syndrome (the Quadaffi-Saddam syndrome) provides a description of the feeling among the Israelis that somewhere in the world or the region there is another threat similar to posed by Saddam Hussein and which could happen readily to destroy the State of Israel.

The first syndrome (Scud syndrome) seeks to explain the sense of vulnerability to the new kinds of long-range military weapon systems. Therefore, the Israeli politicians it dawned on them that the security future of Israel would have to be founded on other practical principles especially that of self-reliance and not just over relying on the support received from the United States (Senarclens, 1995). Shimon Peres noted that the political changes that had taken place in the Middle East would automatically lead to changes in Israel's security policies as well.

According to Shimon Peres, the *New Middle East*; economic accommodation, cooperation and negotiation was needed in order to replace the use of military deterrence (Shiqāqī, 2006). In essence, the New World Order had as much impact on the politics of the Middle East and in particular the Palestine-Peace process. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a paradigm shift in the Middle East conflict; hence, further leading to a transformation in Israel's strategic thinking as demonstrated by the 1992 elections.

## **2.2 The Implications of the Soviet Union Collapse for Palestine**

The end of the Cold War meant that the Palestinian Liberation Organization had no opportunity to use the hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union for its strategic interests and advantages.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a significant reduction in the economic and military strength of the Palestinian Liberation Organization as well as shifting of its strategies in the efforts to liberate the Palestinian people (Showalter and Pau, 2000). The Soviet Union began to pressure the late Yasser Arafat (head of the PLO) as well as other Palestinian leaders in order to join peace negotiations with the Israelis regarding the future of Palestine.

Although the Soviet Union did not appear to be on the side of the Israelis, Soviet leaders did not want to continue supporting the Palestinian's use of violent means in the struggle for their liberation (Smith, 2013). As a result, the space for political maneuvering was tremendously reduced for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Spiegel, 1992). Therefore, in order survive, the Palestinian Liberation Organization began to approach Israel and the United States, which the sole international actor with the capability of changing the policy of the Israelis by using both economic sanctions and political pressure. In essence, the Palestinian Liberation Organization was basically forced to reduce its political demands as well as its territorial claims.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the eventual shift in the Soviet's Middle East policy placed the Palestinian Liberation Organization in a precarious situation. The Palestinian Liberation Organization had to change its hard-line stance and adopt the willingness to compromise as well as reconcile with the Israelis on fundamental issues that dominated the Israel-Palestine peace process.

This was illustrated by the fact that the Palestinian Liberation Organization had managed to sustain its recognition of the state of Israel as well as the continued to denouncing of terrorism. This move by the Palestinian Liberation Organization appeared to soften the United States as well as to an extent the attitude that the Israelis had towards the PLO (Sālih and Muḥammad, 2000). These developments were seen vital prerequisite for the Palestine-Israel peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Due to the poor relationship that existed between the Egypt, Palestines and the Syrians, the Iraqis gained the position of the principal ally to the Arabs in the PLO in the late 1980's (Cordesman, 1996). This explains why the leadership in Palestine did not condemn the invasion of Iraq into Kuwait in 1990.

This was interpreted as the PLO's direct support for the Iraqi invasion even though it was not a correction interpretation of the situation (Bakman-Flamhaft, 1996). As a result, the Palestinian Liberation Organization eventually lost most of the international support it had earned in the 1980's. In addition to losing international support, Palestinian Liberation Organization also experienced other setbacks such as losing the support of the political leadership in the United States as well as the loss of financial aid from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Aruri, 1992).

The majority of the Palestinians working in Kuwait as foreign workers were eventually declared as *persona non grata* by the Kuwait government. An estimated 330,000 Palestinian workers left Kuwait and majority of them immigrated to Jordan, leading to a rise in the Palestinian section of the Jordanian population. An estimated 82 percent of the Jordanian population was made up of Palestine, which created economic and political difficulties for Jordan (Ahrari, 1996).

In terms of the losses made by the Palestinians due to the lack of financial support, it is estimated to reach 10 billion US dollars. Moreover, the Israeli government imposed heavy economic sanctions for the Palestinians that were living in the occupied territories. Border closing was initiated, creating a situation where Palestinian workers could not go to their workplaces in Israel. As a result, Palestinians were hit by numerous economic setbacks not just in the Palestinian territories but also the Palestinian populations that lived within the Middle East region but largely the standards of living significantly decreased for those that lived in both the West Bank and Gaza.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization was going into bankruptcy, and the presence of disputing factions within the organization severely threatened the national unity of Palestine. Yasser Arafat received criticism from both Arab nations as well as and the Palestinian opposition. Particularly, the radical and Islamists branches in the PLO began to attack the leaders that were seen as pragmatic in the moderate center of the organization. The leadership of the PLO began to focus on maintaining its initiative as well as power within the Palestinian camp as opposed to concentrating on strategies geared towards Palestinian national liberation. This meant that the PLO's mere existence was largely dependent on the ability by Yasser Arafat to restore the international standings of the organization, get the concession of the Israeli concessions as well as work towards improving the economic condition of the Palestinians living in the occupied territories.

In essence, Yasser Arafat was needed to moderate the Palestinian claims as well as show an acceptance of the demands by both the Americans and the Israelis prior to the commencement of the Madrid peace conference because of the combination of external and internal. As the preparations for the Madrid peace conference were taking place, the special friendship between the United States and Israel appeared ironically to play the role of an advocate in the repatriation of the Palestinians as well as PLO from a political perspective. The space for the PLO's political maneuvering was significantly reduced.

In addition, pressurized and weakened Palestinian leadership had only one option of approaching Israel and the United States in an effort to be internationally relevant and be power; thereby, preventing its total complete from the Palestine-Israel peace process. On the other hand, the state of Israel became stronger after the Gulf war. However, the experience during the war as well as the political pressure by Americans appeared effectively to reduce the space for political maneuvering-space of the Israelis.

### **3.0 Geopolitical Changes and the Palestine-Israel Peace Process after the Cold War**

The position of the Middle East in the bipolar international system or politics was viewed as being very clear; the Middle East region was a symbolic representation of the pivot point between the Asian area and the European front, a region that was regarded as being endowed with a substantial amount of natural resources. The control of the resources found in the Middle East was seen as a vital strategic objective by both the United States as well as other major Western powers. As the international balance of power began to shift in the period between 1989 and 1991, the strategic position of the Middle East was also dramatically changed. In essence, the changes that took place in the period from 1989 to 1991 involved the collapse of Soviet rule within Eastern Europe to the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In order to properly understand the geopolitical changes that took place after the end of the Cold War and their implication on the Middle East peace process (Palestine and Israel), it is important first to look at the consequences of the emergence of a single "non-ruling" international power; the United States of America.

To begin with, the United States needed to establish and maintain a form of regional configuration that provided both securities as well as stability for the good being of its vital economic interests and also for its traditional allies, in particular, the state of Israel and the so-called moderate Arab states. Secondly, the need to have strong loyalties and alliances became less relevant in the presence of a unipolar new world order. Therefore, the presence of a non-ruling" international power led to the disorientation of some of the hard-lined Arab allies of the former Soviet Union. Even though there has always been a special relationship between Israel and the United States and the fact that this special relationship plays a critical role in the United States Middle East policy, it has been noted that most Arab analysts tend to overestimate this relationship especially after the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Cold War came to an end.

The collapse and the eventual disappearance of the Soviet Union, which was a global power during the Cold War, had a direct effect on the Middle Eastern region. This was clearly illustrated by the role that was played by the then foreign Minister of the Soviet Union during the Madrid Peace Conference. According to analysts, the leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev started to initiate the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the Middle East region much as early than it is thought, around 1987.

Nonetheless, there was a part of the Soviet leadership that wanted to maintain a level of influence within the Middle East region and especially so during the final phase of the Iraq and Iran war. In addition, from 1987 to 1991 and particularly during the Gulf crisis and eventual war, there were some strains as well as differences which emerged in the Kremlin with regard to the matter of the Middle East policy.

The events of the Cold War and in particular during the final years led to a situation where the Soviet Union became marginalized. This was despite the fact that the Soviet Union had put tremendous efforts towards having an influential role in the Palestine-Israel peace process and its eventual withdrawal from the Middle East region.

However, even though Israel was among the main beneficiaries of the withdrawal of the Soviet Union in the Middle East region, Israel paradoxically found itself in a disadvantaged position in some areas.

As Syria lost its main supplier of military aid and protector, Israel relationship with the United States became more entangling than profitable as it would be demonstrated later in the events culminating to the Madrid Peace Conference. In particular, the United States was now in a position to put substantial political and economic pressure on the Israelis without having to jeopardize its own strategic interests in the Middle East. This to some extent played a critical in advancing the efforts towards the Palestine-Israel peace process.

A look at the perspective of the regional system, every decade that led to the end of the Cold War was characterized by a perfectly defined ideological trend as well as polarizations, which corresponded to power related confrontations among some Arab states in the Middle Eastern region. For instance, during the 1990s, immediately after the second Gulf War, which took place from January to March 1991, it was marked by the weakening of both the state-sponsored nationalism as well as pan-Arab ideologies. This particular failure was as a result of the inability by the Arab League to come to an inter-Arab solution to this crisis as well as the decisive foreign military intervention by the United States in the affairs of the inter-Arab nations.

In addition, during the mid1990s, Islamic radical groups were seen as a transnational factor posing a threat to most if not all elite or regimes within the Middle East. This meant that these Islamic radical groups were not considered a factor to dictate the foreign policies of Western States since they did not appear to be well coordinated and consolidated into an ideology.

During this period, there was no ideology that drove the foreign conduct or policies of Arab states; hence, the decision makers were more inclined towards specific policies that could be labeled as being pragmatic realism or as a form of surrender. Therefore, the perspective of the United and Israel with regard to the Palestine-Israel peace process was largely in the context of the threats that were posed to the security of Israel by the hard-lined Arab States and not the Islamic radical movements. This view was also supported by the theory of regionalization, which appeared to into account two partially conflicting factors; First, local key players in the Middle East viewed the United States as the sole major global superpower and especially in the case of the Middle East region further reinforced the ideology behind the presence of a unipolar world order.

Secondly, the presence of two interacting complexities; the region and the global led to the production of a complex higher degree. The Palestine-Israel peace process once the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended was viewed as being as being the result of the fragmentation as well as the general weakness of the Arab nations in the Middle East. However, it is essential to point out that the Arab nations had made a request for there to be a global conference geared towards the use of diplomatic means in order to find a solution to the long standing Palestine-Israel conflict. This request for an international conference had been made long before the end of the Cold War. However, it is thought that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the United States as the only global superpower meant that the United States had the entire international platform to reshape all agendas in accordance with its global strategic interests especially in the case of the Palestine-Israel peace process.

Although the Palestine-Israel peace process was viewed as being bilateral talks and a peace conference, Israel appeared to prefer the bilateral talks more than the conference. However, the possibility of holding bilateral talks within a comprehensive framework could not be easily dismissed. One important aspect of the Palestine-Israel peace process after the end of the Cold War was that the process needed to the involuntary participation of all stakeholders that were involved. There was a case where certain group of Arab nations wanted to separate peace by using varying degrees of success in the peace process. Moreover, two head of States (the then king of Jordan and the Egyptian President by they were assassinated for their actions) attempted to engage directly with the State of Israel or the Zionist movement.

The end of the Cold War brought about a change in both the regional and international power systems, which in turn impacted the relevance, as well as policies of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and particularly, these effects, were devastating during the initial stages of phases after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet-Israeli détente meant that Yasser Arafat was losing much needed political, eventually placing him in a desperate position. In addition to the negative effects that the pro-Iraq attitudes that had on the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinians, the intifada also had some effects on the Palestinians as well as the public opinion of the international community. The intifada provided proof to the Palestinians that they had the capability to come together and organize themselves independently with regard to dealing with the occupation. This was one of the main reasons as why the political leadership in the United States needed to set up a peace process that was acceptable to both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

For the Israelis, the intifada was evidence enough that it would be very challenging to occupy and rule over the Palestinian people in a manner that was against their will; hence, the Palestine-Israel conflict could not be easily wished away or neglected. As a result, Israel gradually made steps to becoming a stakeholder in the subsystem of the Middle Eastern region through the engaging in the peace process as well as participation in the various multilateral summits and conferences. The increasing role of the Israelis notwithstanding, the acceptance of the Jewish state by the Arabs on the basis of deterrence as well as power as opposed to the perceived legitimacy; therefore, the Old Middle East region based on the Cold War disappeared but the New Middle East region was not yet clearly understood in the context of the New World Order.

### **3.1 The Middle East Interests of the US after 1990: Context of the Palestine-Israel Peace Process**

The United States has always been to have strategic interests with regard to the Middle East region. The collapse and eventual disintegration of the Soviet Union opened a door of opportunity for the United States to expand further its influence in the Middle East as well as safeguard its strategic interests. Being the only superpower and holding the position of regional hegemony, Americans perceived any form of development in the Middle East region to affect its strategic interests. It was expected that the superiority and dominance of the United States would make take on the role of the global policeman especially on matters related to the international peace and security.

In the case of the Palestine-Israel peace process, the United States had interests in ensuring that the security of the Israelis (the strategic partner of the US in the Middle East) was maintained. Therefore, in analysing some if not all of the interests that the United States had with regard to the Middle East, the State of Israel topped the list followed by oil. According to Louis Cantori (1994), it could be speculated that the ending of the Cold War meant the dissolution of Cold War policies of the United States. Therefore, this could make it possible for the United States to pursue its strategic objectives of ensuring the oil in the Middle East was secured as well as ensure the security of the both the air and sea routes through addressing the regional disputes.

The end of the bipolar rivalry that existed between the former Soviet Union and the United States did not result in the abrupt decline in the US interests with regard to the Middle East. Rather, much of the diplomatic efforts by the United States after the end of the Cold War were focused on ensuring that there was a free flow of oil to the West, the dismantling of emerging Islamic extremist groups, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as well as safeguarding its traditional Arab allies.

During the Cold War, the United States foreign policy with regard to the Middle East was largely focused on ensuring that the Soviet Union was denied the region, establishing a guaranteed supply to the region oil resources, safeguarding Israel's security as well as getting access to the crossroads of both the air and sea, which intersect the region. The security of the Israelis formed the first as well as the foremost of the strategic interests of the United States. Moreover, the United States needed to promote the security and peace of the Middle East region, which was closely linked to protecting its national interests (including protecting Israel).

One of the reasons as to why the United States considered Israel to be its first and foremost strategic interest in the Middle East region was largely due to the prevailing political conditions in the US as opposed to the public opinion or considerations of the international community. For a long time in the history of the United States, the US Jewish community has always had a very special as well as an influential part in all of the country's ethnic communities. The attachment that the Americans and especially the American Christian Conservatives in the US have towards the State of Israel has always been strong to the point that it is regarded as a key issue during local as well as national elections.

The role of the Jewish lobby community, as well as its influence with regard to the Middle East foreign policy of the United States, cannot be ignored when it comes to the matter of the Palestine-Israel peace process. This resulted in a situation whereby, Israel together with its lobby groups could do everything possible in an effort to prevent the development of close relations between the Arabs and the Americans. In addition, the Israel lobby community has been focused on ensuring the role of Israel as being the sole strategic ally of the United States within the Middle East region. Therefore, the interests of the United States in Israel was and is a vital factor in the dual containment policy largely driven by the essential role that Israel has in the American domestic policy through the Israel lobby community.

Also understands its alliance with the Americans has and will always be the only guaranteed source of security especially in the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Even before the end of the Cold War, the United States has always had the chief role of being the ultimate defender of the Israelis within the United Nations as well as being the supplier of key technological and economic aid. American-Israel Public Affairs Committee also known as AIPAC is regarded as the most powerful organisations in the politics of Washington DC.

The power that AIPAC wields is considered to be overbearing to the extent that no one attempts to ignore especially in the case of US political leadership. According to a comment made by Daniel Bloch in the Jerusalem Post where he indicated that the political leadership in the United States Capitol Hill usually automatically sign any letter that originates from the offices AIPAC even if such a letter mentions that the sun tends to revolve around the earth. It has been noted that close to two thirds of the members of the United States Congress have been elected since 1990 at a time the Cold War was coming to an end, the pro Israel political leadership has always been strong; hence, sometimes swaying the progress of the Palestine-Israel peace process in favor of the Israelis.

This has always been demonstrated by the voting pattern in the United States Congress such as the case when the House of Congress overwhelmingly voted in favour of affirming Israel's claim to Jerusalem. However, it is essential to note that the interests of the Israel as much they tend to influence matters in the domestic politics of the country only do so in a manner that they coincide with the overall foreign policy interests of the United States.

Although oil comes in second place after Israel in the strategic interests of the United States, it is still regarded as playing a vital role in safeguarding the national as well as the international security of the US. The Gulf became a vital region for the United States during the Cold War largely due to the presence of vast oil resources; hence, the need for the United States to maintain close relations as well as ensure the security of the region as part of its international energy policy. This is because for a long time, the United States viewed oil from the Persian Gulf as a strategic priority for two main reasons; the need to prevent the USSR from gaining complete influence and domination in the oil rich regions and the dependence of the United States on the oil rich allies.

The Jimmy Carter administration made it clear that the oil reserves in the Persian Gulf were of significant strategic value as well as the national interest of the United States. The Carter Doctrine was based on the declaration that any attempt by an outside force aimed at gaining control of the Persian Gulf would only be viewed as an attack on US vital interest. The Carter Doctrine further restated the awareness of the United States on the strategic significance of the region's supply of oil supply. As a result, the United States began to strengthen its military forces as well as military supply arms to the region in an effort to deal with any form of the threat posed on its interest in the region.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the eventual end of the the United States was the only superpower left with the responsibility of maintaining world order regardless of the fact that the United States needed to get the cooperation of allies and friends as well as a potent United Nations. In addition, the emergence of the *New World Order* once the Cold War came to an end brought about new conditions, as well as a new framework for the international relations platform and in particular for the Middle East peace process. It was believed that the new international relations framework under the United States transitional hegemony would lead to effects on the Middle East nations and in particular the Palestine-Israel peace process.

In the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War as well as the Second Gulf War, the US continued in the implement of its hegemonic policies and role and policies within the Middle East region. This was largely driven by the geo-political and economic interests and particularly the key interest of ensuring the safety of the Israelis followed by maintaining the region's vast oil reserves. The strategic oil interests of the United States paved the way for the emergence of similar lobby groups or organizations such as the Zionist lobby organizations. Similar to the Zionist lobby organizations, the oil lobby groups have always had significant influence in the domestic politics of the United States. This is further enhanced the foreign policy of the United States with regard to the safety and security of Israel such as demonstrated by the dual containment policy of the Americans towards both Iran and Iraq.

Being the only superpower with regard to global matters, the United States has on many occasions mentioned as putting pressure on hard-lined Arab states and in particular those Arab states that fail to show support or recognition of Israel as a legitimate state in the disputed territories.

For instance, a blacklist of the Arab states that were believed to be sponsoring terrorism also included the Islamic nations that opposed the foreign policy of the United States of ensuring that the Israelis integrated into the Middle East region. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its eventual withdrawal from the Middle East paved the way for the United States to be fully involved in the affairs of the region. This meant that the United States engagement in the region would largely be driven or influenced by its strategic interests in the Middle East and in particular the Palestine-Israel peace process; Israel and oil.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The emergence of major developments as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the eventual end of the Cold War affected the Middle East region in a unique way. This was due to the fact that the two Cold War rivalries had involved themselves deeply in the matters of this region and in particular the Palestine-Israel conflict. One particular way the Palestine-Israel peace process benefited in the post-Cold War era was the co-operation and partnership between the United States and new Russia (former Soviet Union).

This partnership and co-operation were critical in pushing the main stakeholder nations to the Palestine-Israel conflict to participate in peace processes such as the Madrid Conference and the Oslo peace talks. Moreover, the co-operation between the United States and the former Soviet Union (new Russia) led to a change in attitude among the Israelis and the Arabs; hence, they also saw the need to revise their strategies as well as behaviour with regard to the Middle East peace process.

The fact that the United States agreed to put pressure on Israel marked a turning point for the peace process even though such pressure was still driven by the strategic interests of the United States. In essence, the hegemonic position of the United States was critical in propelling the Palestine-Israel peace process even though the United States was largely seen as being biased to most of the hard-lined Arab states.

The post-Cold War period has had its ups and downs with regard to the Palestine-Israel peace process, but it is difficult to state that much progress has been made in addressing the main questions of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

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