Why Joe Biden Wouldn’t Change the US-Israel Ties

Despite the fact that it took Joe Biden a few weeks to call the prime minister of the largest recipient of the US military aid, Israel, it remains that the US state remains committed to its policy of protecting, aiding and financing the Israeli state in the Middle East. Yet, the fact that Biden took more than a month to call presents a stark contrast to the way Donald Trump took only two days to call the US’ strongest ally. But this contrast has nothing to do with the way the Joe Biden understands the Israeli role in the Middle East. As a matter of fact, this contrast explains a widely-held perception in the US about Netanyahu’s close ties with the Republicans than the Democrats, a perception that Netanyahu has been trying to change since at least 2016 when he appointed Dani Dayan as Israel’s counsel-general to New York. Biden’s distance from Netanyahu, therefore, is more of a political difference than a growing distance between the US and the state of Israel and the role it has been playing in the Middle East as a counter-balancer vis-à-vis the Arab states in the Middle East and North Africa. It is for this very reason that Joe Biden didn’t waste any time to support and reinforce Israel’s right to “self-defence” during the recent Israel-Palestine crisis in Gaza.

In fact, the Joe Biden administration, as compared to the Trump administration, is a lot more enthusiastic about supporting Zionism than the Trump administration. This is due largely to Joe Biden’s own commitment to the core ideological beliefs of Zionism, and his open declaration in 2007 about being himself a Zionist. Like Joe Biden, Biden’s secretary of state Antony Blinken, too, is well-known for his unflinching commitment to Israel’s future as a strong and prosperous state in the Middle East, one that the US can always rely on to counter-balance and neutralise any potential threats to its interests. It means that even though the Biden administration is pursuing a path that could lead to the US’ re-entry in the JCPOA deal with Iran – which Israel sees as a possible set-back – the US remains
committed to the Zionist ideology and opposes a two state-solution to the decades old crisis. It remains the linchpin of the US Middle East policy.

This policy has become even more relevant in the present era when the US-China competition is very much on the cards, one that can have serious repercussions for the future of the US as the most dominating power. While the US has considerably disengaged militarily from the Middle East, it remains that the region remains critical for the US ascendance. Although the US is no longer dependent on the Persian gulf oil, there is no denying that the US continues to see its ability to control this region as intrinsically tied to its ability to control and shape global economic and political order. For instance, despite the fact that the US-Saudia ties are undergoing a transition, the US-Saudia agreement of 1979, which the made USD as the central currency for all oil contracts, holds a central importance in the global edifice the US has been able to build for itself. At the same time, playing a leading role in ensuring the stability of oil production and trade has a direct impact on the US’ ability to continue shaping the global oil market and, therefore, its role in maintaining global economic stability and its leverage vis-a-vis Europe, Japan and China.

Middle East/West Asia, therefore, remains critically important for the US, especially because China and Russia have now started to establish their own influence. The presence of China in the Middle East has created a possibility of new petrol-currency contracts between the Gulf states and China, which is the biggest importer of oil in the world. Therefore, to counter China’s rise as the biggest US rival, the US needs the Middle East within its own orbit. Therefore, by facilitating Israeli ties with a number of Middle Eastern states (the Abraham Accords) the US has expanded its orbit through Israel. Israel, therefore, is a lot more closely tied to the US than it was before 2020. It explains why the Abraham Accords were swiftly followed by agreements to increase the US aid flow to Israel. This policy is a continuation of the previous US administrations’ policies. For instance, when the Obama administration started “disengaging” from the Middle East, it was immediately followed by a 10 year agreement between the US-Israel providing Israel with military aid of over US$38 billion over a period of 10 years. The agreement happened when Biden was also the vice-President.

While the Abraham Accords have now gone out of steam, it remains that the agreements reflect US policy to recalibrate the Middle East in ways in which Israel becomes the de facto super-power, one that can continue to pay the same role the US has been playing since the Second World War. The US-Israel ties, therefore, are unlikely to change in any possible way regardless of whether Netanyahu remains in power or not.

Therefore, despite the apparent political ‘differences’ between Joe Biden and Netanyahu, the Joe Biden administration, reflecting its strong commitment to Israel, was quick to announce a fresh sale of US$735 million in precision-guided weapons to Israel. The Joe Biden administration is, therefore, taking steps that completely negate any possibility of a deep recalibration of US-Israeli ties, or the possibility of a US recognition of the state of Palestine.

Given the trajectory that the Biden administration has now put the US-Israeli ties on, it is obvious that this trajectory will be maintained and reinforced overtime, especially if a political change in Israel in the form of Netanyahu’s replacement with a new leader happens and Joe Biden finds a more agreeable and ‘pro-Democrat’ prime minister on his side to deal with. In that scenario, it will become a lot easier for the US to deepen its ties with Israel, encourage it to expand its tentacles in the Middle East, making it possible for the Biden administration to shift its focus to Asia and implement its ‘Asia Pivot 2.0’ as a means to counter its truly global rival, China.

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