POWER AND IDENTITY IN FLUX:

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD THE MIDDLE EAST

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The main purpose of this paper is to bring an eclectic approach to understand American foreign policy toward the Middle East. I have two constitutive variables for this purpose: power and identity. How do these two elements influence American policy toward the region, or in other words, how do and/or can power and identity help explain the formulation of America's 'national interests' in the Middle East? This study does not take 'national interest' as an independent variable here, rather it is taken as dependent variable that is constituted by power and identity. On the other hand, power and identity are also in dynamic interaction with each other. It is especially clear when one talks about the use of American power in correspondence to America's democratic and liberal identity. In this respect, legitimacy of the use of American force in the eyes of the rest of the world is also an important issue when one evaluates American foreign policy in the context of American identity. Finally, how can September 11 and its aftermath make an impact on American policy toward the Middle East in this framework? Does the United States weigh power considerations over identity concerns? Or specifically, how does the United States approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as to democratization in the Middle East in the context of power and identity concerns? How can the U.S. follow policies in

regard to these important issues in serving both American power and identity? These are the main questions, which the U.S. has faced after September 11. Though each question may require a separate paper itself, this paper aims at providing a general framework.

The paper consists of two main parts. The first part is about history and theory. For this purpose, this section briefly examines primary interests at stake in the region for the U.S. It also deals with general patterns and peculiarities of the U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East in the second half of the twenty-century. Besides, this part of the paper touches upon the existing theoretical approaches of international relations and foreign policy, which are relevant to the analysis of American policy toward the region. The second half of the paper, on the other hand, is about the current developments in U.S. policy. In this respect, September 11 and its consequences play the most important role. The campaign against al-Quida, the Iraq issue, the heightened tension in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the rampant anti-Americanism in the Middle East are the major developments in respect to the U.S. policy toward the region. This section makes an effort to bring identity/power elements together to define American 'national interests' in regard to these issues. Then, it focuses on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and democratization in the Middle East. In the end, the importance of identity-based explanations in analyzing American foreign policy toward the Middle East will be re-stated.

A Historical and Theoretical Background

To make a general evaluation of the last fifty years of American foreign policy toward the Middle East, no doubt, first demands to look at the Cold War conjuncture. The four decades of the American-Soviet rivalry had a great impact on the formulation of

America's national interests and strategic priorities toward the region. Both superpowers had deep strategic interests in the region vis-à-vis each other. On the U.S. side, the Containment Doctrine played a significant role in competition with the Soviets. The United States wanted to contain its rival by means of having strategic airbases in Europe, Asia as well as in the Middle East. In the early years of the Cold War, the Truman Doctrine launched the containment policy by providing military and economic aid to the two strategically important states in the region, Turkey and Greece. The Eisenhower Doctrine, on the other hand, expanded more the containment policy toward the Middle East. The Suez Crisis in 1956 and Jupiter Missiles Crisis in 1961 also resulted in high tension between the superpowers in the region. As a part of the containment policy, the U.S. generally held power politics or balance of power considerations in this period. For this purpose, the U.S. sometimes exercised covert operations. For example, the CIA with the British Intelligence Service overthrew Mossadeq government in Iran (1953). Though oil considerations were also important, as the CIA's recently released document (*The CIA History of the 1953 Coup in Iran*) shows, the Cold War concerns were primarily important. Like Turkey, Iran was one of the strategic countries in this period in terms of the U.S. interests in the region; hence, the U.S. supported the Shah against nationalist and communist forces in the country. In this respect, the Cold War calculations or power politics played primary role as regards the U.S. policy toward Iran. On the other hand, the United States was at high alarm against Nasser's nationalist standing, which sometimes went hand in hand with the America's rival, the Soviets. Moreover, balance of power considerations could also be observed in fluctuations in the U.S. policy toward the Iran-Iraq war of 198O-1988. U.S. policy fluctuated as pro-Iraq or pro-Iran in different stages

of the war. While the official American policy was against Iran in the aftermath of the hostage crisis, the Iran-Contra Scandal showed the centrality of balance of power concerns in the mindsets of some key American security elites. In sum, to keep these examples in mind, the Cold War conjuncture and power politics played an important role in U.S policy toward the region in this period.

Besides the Cold War concerns, the special commitment to Israel and oil factor have constituted the three-legs of American interests in the Middle East. The dynamics of American domestic landscape (the influential Jewish lobby for instance) as well as positive public attitudes toward the Jewish cause resulted in continuous American commitment to Israel. On the other hand, the United States had concerns over oil that the Arab countries and Iran had. In general, as the leader of the international economic system in aftermath of the Cold War, the U.S. wanted to keep oil prices stable, neither too cheap nor too expensive. The oil concerns were one of the reasons why the U.S. overthrew the Mossadeq government. They also played a significant role in the U.S.-led international operation against Saddam Hussein in 1991. With the Cold War's security-strategic concerns, Israel and oil factors in mind, the United States should have maintained a balance among the three legs of American interests in the region. For example, as a consequence of the 1973 oil crisis, the United States had to respond to the demands of the Arab world in respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict and, henceforth it played an important role in American efforts to resolve the conflict in the Nixon-Kissinger era and in Carter's term.

What happened to American interests in the Middle East when the Cold War was over? First of all, when the bipolar rivalry of the Cold War years disappeared, the United States

was able to follow more flexible policies than the past in the region. Yet, it does not mean that the U.S. no longer had strategic-security concerns in the region. Rather, in connection with the other legs, which are preservation of oil interests and Israel's security, the U.S. still had strategic/security concerns in the region. The Gulf War of 1990-91 and its aftermath, and the Middle East peace process in the 1990s were the major issues that the U.S. was concerned in the region. Finally, September 11 has brought a new dimension to American interests here. Even one can say that transnational terrorism has replaced the Cold War concerns in the so-called three legs of U.S. interests in the Middle East. Now, the U.S. is not only concerned about its oil interests and Israel but also it has to deal with transnational terrorist networks like Al-Qaeda. The American response to the problem has many dimensions.

After this brief examination of U.S. interests in the Middle East in the last fifty years, a critical question comes into mind; which theory or theories of international relations/foreign policy is/are the most useful one/ones in order to understand American policies in the past, present and in the future? As stated earlier, this work has an attempt to provide an eclectic approach in bringing power and identity together in this process. Before arguing that power and identity concerns together can make a good contribution to the understanding of American foreign policy toward the Middle East we may briefly look at the existing literature in this field.

The major theories of international relations are realism, liberalism, neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism. According to classical realist Hans Morgenthau, interest defined as power. The essential goals of a state are maximization of its power and preservation of its 'national interests'. The weakness of realism is, however, the lack of

elaborated notion of 'national interest'. Realism only defends 'national interests' but it does not talk about what defines 'national interests'. Liberalism, on the other hand, has much more idealistic and optimistic outlook as compared to alleged pessimism of realist theory. Liberals pay attention to idealization of international cooperation and even world community. It also recognizes the importance of national interest, yet it has a much more positive approach to the existence of common interests among nations. In contrast to realism, liberalism allows ideas, values and domestic politics to make an influence when states make their foreign policies. Though being part of realist and liberal tradition, neorealism and neoliberalism have important differences in analyzing international affairs. Both are systemic theories, or in other words, their priority is on an anarchic international system not primarily on states and national interest. States are the central actors in world politics but the anarchic international system determines state behavior. According to neorealist Kenneth Waltz, distribution of (material power) capabilities and balance of power determine state behavior. (Waltz 1979) Unlike classical realism states are primarily concerned with maximization of security not power. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, is much more optimistic than neorealism about international cooperation and effectiveness of international institutions. Finally, constructivism has a very different perspective, especially as compared to realism, neorealism and neoliberalism. Though constructivist theory or thinking of international relations has various and even different strands, like domestic and systemic constructivisms, it generally problematizes 'national interests' or state preferences. It means constructivists call first for the need to define 'national interests', not defend them as neorealists and neoliberals do. In doing so, they argue that inter-subjectively shared ideas, norms and identities shape state behavior and

'national interests'. In contrast to its neorealist and neoliberal theories, constructivism does not take interests and identities as given. Power and interests are not unimportant but they are constituted by ideas and identities. State interests are socially constructed. In regard to anarchy, constructivists argue that anarchy is 'what states make of it'. (Wendt 1992) States can ameliorate the negative effects of an anarchic system and even they can set up a non-anarchic international order. One more difference between constructivism and neorealism-neoliberalism is that domestic politics play a significant role defining 'national interests'. As stated earlier, identity is an important force in defining 'national interests'. In this respect, state-society relations and domestic politics in general are taken seriously because they have an important role in constitution of national/state identity and its influence on states' foreign policies.

These are the major theories of international relations. Then, we can briefly talk about major theories of foreign policy. In fact, one may question the difference between IR theories and theories of foreign policy. It may be said that IR theories are generally macro-level theories, which are primarily about the nature of international system (polarity e.g.) or about general patterns of inter-state relations like cooperation and conflict, war and peace. Theories of foreign policy, on the other hand, are micro-level theories, that are concerned with how states formulate their foreign policies. No doubt, there are important convergences or entanglements between the two sides. Examples of theories of foreign policy are bureaucratic politics model, groupthink, and rational-actor model. In fact, these theories can also be considered as decision-making theories. In this respect, cognitive theories, psychological theories (on perceptions and misperceptions), and socio-psychological theories (schema theory-historical analogies) can also be cited

within the category of foreign policy theories. Unlike system-level theories of international relations like neorealism, neoliberalism and systemic constructivism, these theories are concerned with the way presidents, and foreign policy elites take decisions or make foreign policies, especially in focal points or in crisis situations.

Then, what is the relevance of these different theoretical perspectives to the making of U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East? How can one incorporate these theoretical models in order to better analyze American policies toward the region? Is it possible to find a general theory of IR and/or foreign policy, which has the most explanatory power to understand American foreign policy toward the Middle East? Though this paper does not endeavor to answer these questions, it is possible to state strengths and weaknesses of some of the theories, which mentioned above. In this respect, neorealism as one of the most dominant theories of international relations deserves special attention.

First of all, neorealism does seem to be very useful in looking for the U.S. foreign policy in the heightened years of the Cold War. For example, the U.S. policy of containment can be easily understood in the context of the emerging bipolar international system in the aftermath of the World War II. Moreover, balance of power considerations or power politics can be considered as useful theoretical insights in understanding the reasons why the U.S. involved in covert operations in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), and Chile (1973). They are also useful to understand the American military and economic aid to Turkey and Greece in 1947 (the Truman Doctrine) as well as the reason why the U.S. supported the Shah. As stated earlier, balance of power considerations can also be helpful in looking at U.S. policy toward the Iran-Iraq War of 198O1988. owever, neorealism does not offer sufficient analytical power in understanding U.S. policy toward the Arab-

Israeli conflict. In fact, the Cold War conjuncture was sometimes relevant to the conflict when the Soviets attempted to gain leverage against the United States by aligning with some of the Arab regimes like Egypt's Nasser. However, it cannot explain why the United States made a special commitment to Israel. It cannot be explained without considering the dynamics of American domestic politics and the existing positive elite and public perceptions toward Israel. It means it is about domestic politics, elite perceptions and public opinion, which neorealism completely ignores. Moreover, neorealism generally takes states as the black box. According to neo-realist K. Waltz states are functionally similar while they differ in material power capabilities. (Waltz 1979) Neorealism does not go beyond states' power capabilities, especially military capabilities. It does not deal with the various dimensions of power (military, economic, cultural or hard-soft power) nor with the elite perceptions of power. More importantly, neorealism misses the important role of foreign policy elites or leadership structures, and domestic politics. It evaluates states as rational unitary actors. However, this framework misses the various aspects of U.S. foreign policy. For example, presidents have played a significant role in American foreign policy toward the Middle East. In respect to the Israeli attack, which started the 1967 war, President Johnson was perceived as providing 'green light' by the Israeli side. The Nixon-Kissinger team was the key element in shuttle diplomacy after the 73 Arab-Israeli War, which made an important contribution to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. President Carter had a special personal interest to the Arab-Israeli conflict and it was the primary force in the American efforts to realize a peace at the Camp David in 1978. Reagan's hawkish approach no doubt played a primary role in starting the Second Cold war. In his term, the Middle East conflict was relegated

to secondary importance while Cold War considerations gained priority. Senior Bush was also the key factor in America's inability to prevent Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Bush failed to do so because he followed the policy of constructive engagement and did not enforce necessary deterrence mechanisms against Saddam. Like Carter, Bill Clinton had special personal interest to the Middle East conflict and the United States in his term actively involved in the conflict. Junior Bush, on the other hand, like Reagan, has no personal interest to the conflict and his team (except Powell and his supporters) is much more ideologically oriented (like neo-conservatives in Reagan's term) and the U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East has been dominantly circumscribed by war against terrorism and the Iraq issue. In sum, presidents play very important roles in U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East. In this respect, domestic politics approaches, cognitive and psychological/socio-psychological theories can make an important contribution in analyzing how presidents make influence U.S. foreign policy toward the region. For example, presidents sometimes use historical analogies to support their policies. As classical examples, Truman used the Munich analogy for the Korean War while George Bush used both Munich and Vietnam analogies for the Gulf War of 1990-91. In this respect, we can get useful insights from socio-psychological theories.

Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this paper is to bring power and identity together in defining American 'national interests' in the Middle East. Though it has an eclectic character as incorporating key realist and constructivist variables (power and identity respectively), it has leaned toward the constructivist side. Rather than taking the two variables separately and as casual variables, this work attempts to take them as

constitutive variables as regards the U.S. 'national interests' in the region. Then two key questions are to be considered. First, how does American identity (or identities) influence the use of American force abroad? Second, how does the convergence/divergence of power and identity make an impact over U.S. policy toward the Middle East?

In respect to the first question, it is necessary to define American identity. In this regard, Henry Nau mentions internal and external identity. According to Nau, internal identity 'defines the rule for the legitimate use of force at home'. External identity, on the other hand, 'deals with how states evaluate ethnic, ideological, and other sources of identity in their relations with other states'. (Nau 2002: 23) For Nau, internal identities inform external behavior. Moreover, national power and national identity both define the national interest. One interesting point in Nau's argument is that the United States does not have one set of national interest, which is determined by its power. Rather, it has several sets depending on both distribution of power and identities between the U.S. and other states. For example, the U.S. relations with the EU states are characterized by cooperation as the two sides have similar identities despite the fact that the United States is more powerful than European states. On the other hand, U.S. relations with the developing world (Asia, Africa, Middle East and Latin America) are characterized by hegemonic terms. In terms of power distribution, the United States is more powerful than the developing or third world countries (including the Middle East). Besides, the U.S. and these countries greatly differ in respect to identities. Identities are diverged unlike the convergence of identities between the U.S. and the E.U. (p.39) Furthermore, Nau mentions four different traditions on American foreign policy. They are as follow; neoisaolationism or nationalism, realism, primacism and internationalism. For Nau, all

these traditions share the same separatist self-image, which creates a trade off between American values at home and American power abroad. (p.44) Hence, Nau criticizes all these traditions because each one fails to integrate American power and American values. Nationalists give so much emphasis on unilateral power that eventually turns against American values; primacists exhibit much less ambivalence about American values than do realists and neoisolationist perspectives, and they 'enlist American values to sustain a world role but stretch American power to the breaking point'. (p.59) Nau's story about the existence of four separate traditions is quite interesting to show that how 'national interests' are defined in a different way depending on the existence of different images about the United States. It also underscores the importance of domestic differences about self-image or national identity and its different repercussions on American foreign policy. Nau also talks about some elements of the self-image in the U.S., which will likely prevail in the future. For him, these elements are the ideological one (associated with the American constitution and creed), the nativist one (associated with history, language, and class), the religious one (associated with the Puritan, and Judeo-Christian heritage), and finally the ethnic one (associated with race and multiculturalism) (p.61). Nau's point is remarkably important in demonstrating that there are various different self-images about the country, and this difference greatly influences the notion of American 'national interests' and eventually American foreign policy.

In addition to Henry Nau's point, Samuel Huntington talks about the gap between American ideals and institutions. He also signifies the divergence between American power and American values, which sometimes has deeply influenced American foreign policy. Huntington brings an important question into agenda; to what extent should the

United States attempt to make the institutions and policies of other societies conform to American values? In other words, should the United States make an effort to expand American values internationally? On the other hand, he also cautions the necessity to maintain American power to protect and promote liberal ideals and institutions in the world. (Huntington 1982: 252) Huntington's point is remarkable to show that American values and power do not always converge and the divergence has important consequences not only for the U.S. but also for the world.

Furthermore, Richard Payne makes an analysis about the relationship between American values and American foreign policy. Payne suggest that 'the stronger the cultural similarities between the U.S. and another country, the less likely Americans are to perceive themselves in conflict with and to use force against it to settle disputes'. (1995: xvi) Then, he exemplifies his argument with the existence of positive public perceptions about Israel in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Paynes' point is somehow different from Nau's argument since he takes values, not identities, as the important factor, which influences the likelihood of the use of American force abroad.

How do collective identities play a role in the formulation of American foreign policies? Christopher Hemmer and Peter Katzenstein's recent study is about this question. These scholars argue that collective identities matter since they help shape the definition of 'national interests'. To Hemmer and Katzenstein, the different levels of identifications that U.S. policy makers had about Europe and Asia led to different institutional forms during the early Cold War; multilateralism in Europe and bilateralism in Asia. (2002: 587) As a result of American collective identities, U.S. policymakers had different identifications about Europe and Asia, and hence it resulted in different policy

consequences in U.S. foreign policy. Hemmer and Katzenstein's example show how collective identities or elite identifications can make an impact over the making of U.S. foreign policy

Power, Identity, and U.S. Foreign Policy toward the Middle East

How can power and identity help to understand American foreign policy toward the Middle East in the past and nowadays, especially after the September 11? First of all, both power and identity-values have played important role in U.S. formulation of 'national interests' in the Middle East. For the early years of the Cold War, power politics played the most important role for U.S. policy toward the region. The Truman and Eisenhower Doctrines can be best understood in this framework. Though it would be an open-ended question, one may speculate that U.S. policymakers had not any similar identification with the Middle East unlike Europe because of the divergent identities (remember Nau and Hemmer-Katzenstein argument), henceforth the United States had generally pursued power politics in the region. On the other hand, one may argue that identity framework can be useful to understand American policy to the Arab-Israeli conflict. American domestic politics, no doubt, played a significant role in that process. However, as Payne suggests, the stronger cultural similarity between Israel and the United States may have led to a special commitment to Israel. In similar vein, Michael Barnett argues Israel's secular, democratic and western state identity as well as Judeo-Christian heritage, which the US and Israel shares have played a significant role in this commitment. In this respect, the identity factor must also be taken into consideration in evaluating American policy toward Israel.

Furthermore, how do power and identity factors influence American foreign policy toward the region in the present time? For this purpose, it may be useful to focus on two main issues; the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and democratization in the Middle East? The most distinctive characteristics of the Bush administration's Middle East policy has been no doubt the strategic priority given to the Iraq War. In this context, the Arab-Israeli conflict had been relegated to secondary importance. In fact, this can be explained in many ways. First of all, because President George W. Bush has no special knowledge and personal interest in regard to the question, the administration has not involved very much in the conflict. On the other hand, other argument would focus on the ideological nature of the Bush administration. As some argue that the Bush team, (especially Vice President D. Cheney, Secretary of Defense D. Rumsfeld, and Assistant Secretary of Defense P. Wolfowitz) has particular ideological orientation (neo-conservativism) and it is very positive to the Jewish cause, henceforth the administration follows pro-Israeli policies even when Israel has disproportionably been using force against the Palestinians. In this respect, the importance of ideologies or ideological orientations can make the most useful contribution to understand U.S. policy toward the region. In fact, identity or self-image considerations are not out of this framework. Bush's team can be considered as the primacists who 'endorse affirmation of domestic values in foreign affairs and propose a neo-Reaganite foreign policy of military supremacy and moral confidence' in Nau's classification of different traditional perspectives on American foreign policy. (Nau 2002: 51-55)

To what extent can the American approach toward democratization in the Middle East be evaluated in the context of the power/identity framework? This issue is a clear example

of the divergence of power and identity elements in respect to America's regional policies. In Clinton's term, as a part of liberal internationalism the United States supported democratization in the Arab world as in some of the Gulf States. However, it did not overweight the primacy of preservation of American 'strategic interests', which are related to security and oil in the region. The U.S. continued to cooperate with repressive regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In sum, power considerations were above identity concerns. For the Bush administration, it cannot be talked about a significant change in this policy though there are some differences. For example, the administration called for to the end of Saddam regime and eventually realization of democratic government in Iraq. The administration expects that if democracy is realized in Iraq, then it will expand to other parts of the region. Yet, the administration's concerns do hardly seem to be democratization because one may question why the administration has pursued 'strategic' relations with the region's most anti-democratic regimes Egypt and Saudi Arabia. (Friedman 2002, Selçuk 1997) In this respect, it can be talked about the differences between strategic and moral imperatives to democracy promotion in the Middle East. (Kaplan 2002) In this respect, the Bush administration's support for democratization in Iraq and the expectations about its expansion to other regional states is for the most part related to strategic concerns and power politics rather than America's liberal and democratic identity.

Conclusion

Power and identity as two important elements play central roles in defining 'national interest' and they greatly influence state behavior. This working paper aims at looking at the dynamic interplay of power and identity in American foreign policy toward the

Middle East. The role of identity in American foreign policy toward the Middle East is an open area for further research. For this purpose, students of American foreign policy can work on the impact of identity on U.S.'s specific policies in the region. In this regard, qualified case studies can be very helpful to show the strengths and weakness of identity-based explanations. In this process, constructivist theory may offer plausible alternative viewpoints. However, it does not mean that power/interest-based explanations do not have any value. Rather, eclectic approaches, which take both power and identity seriously, can make a better contribution to our understanding of American foreign policy toward the Middle East.

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