BEING RECOGNIZABLE: IDENTITY BEYOND STATE GREAT POWER POLITICS, NON-STATE ACTORS AND THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

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Abstract

The forgetfulness of the procedures through which the objects, identities and agents are recognized in international relations has emphasized in international law the reifying tendencies in the process of recognition. The article investigates the relation between the process of becoming recognizable and being recognized in international relations and how they are interrelated. Recognizability is a pre-condition and epistemologically is prior to recognition. According to international law perspective, a minority or a religious group has to be recognized by other entities or groups before getting a legitimate status of recognition in international relations. In doing so, the case study of the Non-State Actors (NSAs) in the Israel-Palestine conflict has been scrutinized. The recognizability of these NSAs by the great powers and regional powers vindicates their 'being' in international relations. Moreover the role of great power politics in intensifying the Shia-Sunni divide in the region will be elaborated through their support to their regional proxies i.e. Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel and further by the regional proxies' support to their proxies' i.e. the non-state actors will be elaborated under the theoretical framework of Connolly's concepts of Identity/Difference underlying the question of responsibility and the problems of evil in conflict.

Keywords: Identity Politics, Great Power Politics, Non-State Actors, Recognition, Recognizability, Problem of Evil, Question of Responsibility.

Introduction

Identity plays a vital role in almost all conflicts ranging from national to transnational level. The valuation of its role in the Israel-Palestine conflict accentuates its considerable role in mounting tensions in the region. The Palestinians' proclamation over the territory that Israel occupies and now irreconcilable Zionist religious claim on the same territory have hardened their identities on one hand, and the role of "Other" in existential conflict has intensified disagreements between the two identities, on other hand. Political emergence of Hamas in Occupied Territories and the rise of Religious Zionism in Israel have further strengthened their territorial claims.

The persistence of enduring conflict has engendered the potential to involve non-state actors as major proxies in war dyads for para-military interactions.

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Increased involvement of these non-state actors in prolonged interstate conflict has directly entwined them in wars with rival states. Both Hamas and Hezbollah point towards salient non-state actors in the dynamics of the conflict and their increased involvement in the conflict has provoked Israel to handle them directly as war enemies. Due to the enduring antagonism and militarization of the conflict, other states have also involved in the realm of persistent enmity.

The regional and great powers rivalries have forced them to support these proxies in the Israel-Palestine conflict in order to accomplish their interests in the region at the same time to preserve status quo. The Iran and Saudi's ideological clashes, US and Russia enmity in the global politics, U.S coalitions with Israel and Saudi Arabia, Russian support for Iran and all powers' urge to dictate the regional politics in the Middle East has forced them to support and to fund the non-state actors against each other. The modification from regional to international dimensions of the conflict has further aggravated tensions between the two identities.[1]

Connolly calls the relation between identity/difference as the site of two problems of evil. In the scriptural determination of divine identity, the first problem of evil vested in the human efforts by freeing god from responsibility of evil in order to save the munificence of a supreme god. On the political level, the first problem of evil resides in efforts to shield the certainty and purity of a hegemonic identity by outlining those differences as an evil that pose a direct threat to the certainty and integrity of that identity. The second problem of evil emerges out of the solutions to the first problem of evil.[2]

In the theoretical context of Connolly's identity/difference, the role of external actors (U.S., Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia) fits into the frame of first problem of evil while the second problem of evil is defined by the role played by the non-state actors (Hamas, Hezbollah and Religious Zionism). In order to except them from responsibility of evil and to save their magnanimous status, these powers turn upon their proxies. They support them by providing funds just to make their position strong in the conflict.[3]

Great Power Politics and Non-State Actors in Israel-Palestine Conflict

After the Second World War, Egypt, the most populous Arab state, was Russia's foothold in Middle East. In 1970s, when Anwar Sadat re-aligned Egypt with the US, it was a major setback for Russia. After 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran offered Russia another meaningful entry into the Middle Eastern politics. It had provided Russia a chance to get a strong foothold in the region. Russia's inclination towards Iran had prompted USA to bolster its support for Sunni Arab states. In this shifting

strategic landscape of the region, Tehran, with the support of Russia has adopted a more definite line to its policy to develop nuclear program and regional concerns such as links with Hamas and Hezbollah. In order to preserve its regional partners and to accomplish its national interests, United States has sought to construct a strong coalition of Sunni Arab states in amity with Israel.[4] Thus, the politics of super powers has determined the Shia-Sunni divide in Middle East in this shifting landscape of the Middle Eastern politics.[5]

The great power politics in Middle East has not only frustrated any regional attempt for peace but it has also reinforced the ideological divide between two blocs (Sunni and Shiite). The desire to dominate regional politics and to prevent any other power to succeed, regional powers then introduced increased militancy by supporting the non-state actors, directly or indirectly, most overtly in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Iran

Iran's sway in Islamizing the Palestinian question was advanced promptly after the revolution by Fathi Al-Aziz Shaqaqi, a young Palestinian Physician. He pledged to the philosophy of Khomeini; "Islamic Solution", against Jewish dominance. He sowed Iran's influence in Palestine, with a promising future.[6] The Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Shaqaqi worked closely with Hezbollah and received training from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Hamas equally received training, military and financial support mostly from Syria and Iran. In 1988, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Hamas leader travelled to Saudi Arabia for his medical treatment and after that moved to several Middle Eastern countries and raised considerable amount of funds. He then visited Iran where he was cordially welcomed and established a permanent Hamas office in Tehran.[7]

Financial Patronage of Hamas

Iran sponsors Hamas so as to enhance its influence over the group and to establish a liaison parallel to its relation in Lebanon with Hezbollah. It is widely believed that Iran is leading financer of Hamas, leaving behind Sunni Arab sponsors such as Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. James Woolsey, retiring Director of the Central Intelligence Committee said in January 1995 before the Senate Intelligence Committee that more than $100 million in aid has been sent to Hamas by Iran without giving a timeframe for when those coffers were delivered.[8]

Following 2006 elections, Syrian-based Hamas leader Khaled Meshal visited Iran to restart their mutual schema of advancing political Islam. "Just as Islamic Republic of Iran safeguards the Palestinians' rights," he said, "we preserve the rights of Islamic Iran. We both are part of a common front against the challengers of Islam."[9]

Iran-Hezbollah Nexus

In Lebanon, Iran's activities against the European and the U.S. interests have been linked directly to its foreign policy objectives.[10] According to Iranian sources, Iran's support for the organization could bring two major foreign policy advantages; the ability to fight Israel through proxy which allowed Iran to enter directly into the war/peace equation of the Middle East and expansion of impact of Shiite Islam in Lebanon through Hezbollah's more aggressive role.[11] Iran is alleged to fund Hezbollah to the tune of at least $100 million a year. Recently, Western analysts and diplomats in Lebanon contest that Hezbollah gets closer to $200 million a year from Iran.[12] Following the demise of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, in order to support Palestinian radical groups, Hezbollah presumably received an extra $22 million from Iranian intelligence.[13]

Iran has amplified Hezbollah's participation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its support to the Palestinian activists. U.S. envoys maintain that just after Palestinian Intifada in September 2000, Iran assigned Hezbollah's international operations commander, Imad Mughniyeh to support Palestinian radical groups, explicitly Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). According to a former Clinton government official, "Mugniyeh got instructions from Tehran to work with Hamas."[14] Since the last Israel-Hizballah encounter in 2006, Iran has also supported Hezbollah in direct violation of UNSCR resolution 1701. Iran has also provided hundreds of millions of dollars and has trained thousands of its warriors at military camps in Iran.[15] Iran's support to Hezbollah and Hamas has reinforced the religious militants in Palestine thus further challenging the position of Fatah.[16]

Saudi Arabia

In the Middle Eastern region, Saudi Arabia's significance cannot be denied due to its stable, monarchic regime, oil wealth and its close relations with the US Hamas and other Islamic radical groups draw considerable coffers and even man power from Saudi Arabia. As per Gilles Kepel, 'however once Saudi Arabia has chosen the propagation of Islam as a tool to enhance its influence abroad, it had continued with no choice but to be the benefactor of all those who claimed their belongings to Sunni Islam.'[17] Like other Arab states, Saudi Arabia has never been at ease with the state of Israel as a sovereign state right in the midst of Arab world but as compare to Israel's other neighboring states, Saudi Arabia's antipathy with Israel is low. Once King Saud proposed President Roosevelt that if a state is given to the Jews then the land must be seized from German land mass for them.[18]

Saudi Arabia and Hamas

The disclosure that in Saudi Arabia, Hamas managed a command center with close interactions with Hamas activists performing attacks and the movement's political and social prosperity (Dawa) operations was insightful. But neither the fact that individual operators of Hamas are active in the Kingdom nor the fact that Hamas gets significant aid from Saudi Arabia is new. Unlike its formal manifestation in Yemen, Iran, Syria and Sudan, Hamas has never kept an official headquarters in Saudi Arabia. But individual Hamas campaigners, as well as many cohorts have raised funds from within the Saudi Kingdom.[19]

Since the early 1990s, there have been unsubstantiated reports of Saudi official and private funding to Hamas, the fundamentalist Islamic Resistance Movement which the U.S. has designated as a foreign terrorist organization. Yet, Saudi Arabia has not declared Hamas as a terrorist organization.[20] The state department noted in the annual report on terrorism (Patterns of Global Terrorism) that Hamas is beneficiary of funds from its private donors in Saudi Arabia as well as from other moderate states. The 2003, 2004 reports did not declare the Saudi official funding of Hamas. The 2005 report on terrorism which was published in 2006 specified that the primary source of aiding Hamas is the private patrons in Saudi Arabia and other Arab and non-Arab states.[21] The report did not mention about the authorized funding from the government of Saudi Arabia specifically.

United States

Since the war of 1973, the U.S. has provided Israel with a colossal support that dwarfs the amounts given to any other state. In 2003 alone, overall direct U.S. financial support to Israel aggregates to well over $140 billion.[22] Washington has provided with nearly $ 3 billion to Israel to advance munitions systems like the *Lavi aircraft* that the Pentagon did not require Congress approval for giving Israel access to top-flight U.S. munitions like Blackhawk helicopters and F-16 Jets. Finally, Israel is provided with ingress to intelligence by the United States that it refutes its NATO allies and has blatantly disregarded Israel's acquirement of nuclear weapons.[23]

In the Israel-Palestine conflict, Washington has given Israel far-reaching autonomy in dealing with the Occupied Territories (Gaza Strip and West Bank) even when its provisions were at odds with specified U.S. plan. In short, the super power's provision is unique for Israel. Perhaps the most contentious use of the U.S-supplied armaments derived during Israel's war in Lebanon in 2006, a conflict provoked by Hezbollah's internment of three Israeli combatants near the occupied Shaba farms on the Israeli-Lebanese border. According to Human Rights Watch and other on-the-ground observers, the majority of the cluster bombs used by Israel in the conflict were of U.S. origin.[24]

The interminable support of the U.S. for Israel has gone a long way to shape the landscapes of the Palestinian struggle. In their struggle against Israel, the Palestinians, on no occasion expected unbiased U.S. involvement. The support of the super power for Israel has aggravated tensions by inflaming militancy not only in the Palestinian territory but in the entire Muslim world. By serving as its proxy, Israel also facilitated the U.S. in containing Soviet expansion in the region.

Russia

Russia's role in the Middle East, for years, was witnessed primarily through its acquaintances with Iran, Iraq and more lately Syria. However, in 2006 a practically arbitrated dimension of Russia's strategy towards Middle East came to the forefront with a new amplification of the Israel-Palestine conflict, this time in Lebanon. Russia has long played a superfluous part in the Quartet on the Middle Eastern region, the grouping composed of United Nations, European Union, United States and Russia. A more vibrant Russia has now emerged, however, following plans which, at times, are substantially unalike than those of United States.[25]

Russia's patronage for Iran through weapon auctions, the diplomatic fortification and the building of the $800 million Bushehr nuclear plant was such that a headline ran in one of the Russian newspaper while succeeding the Iranian presidential polls of 2005 and the triumph of the hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad with more than an indication of irony, with the question 'Has Russia Won the Polls in Iran?[26] Putin's swiftness to applaud Ahmadinejad was not esteemed by almost all the Western countries.[27]

In 2006, Russia provided $1 billion cost of Tor-Mi modern air-defense systems to Iran, that are capable of guarding a target from up to 48 incoming planes or missiles to a range of six kilometers. Iran also has an enduring contract with Moscow for up to $7 billion in conventional weaponries, including MiG-29 fighters' and other military equipment. In this light, Putin's proclamation in 2006 that Hamas success in elections was a crucial impediment for American efforts in the region has unlocked the door to unreliable elucidations.[28]

Responsibility of Evil: Question of Responsibility

As per Connolly, for question of responsibility there must be some indispensable standards when it comes to social practices, as without such standards responsibility is an ambiguous practice.[29]Responsibility in the case of the Israel-Palestine conflict is still an ambiguous practice as there are no such indispensable standards that can lodge the problem of evil within it. Moreover, to reconstruct the idea of responsibility there must be a locus of responsibility.[30] The locus of responsibility in the existing conflict has been shifted from state to international

community so the question of responsibility is still undecided. Even now the role of the non-state actors has made the question of responsibility more provocative. Evil is at work in relation to the other (non-state actors) as well to own self (Arab-Israeli Identities).

Recognition v.s Recognizability

In the words of Judith Butler, "One "exists" only by the virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, being recognizable."[31] In order to gain recognition, a state, category, identity, person, agent, organization, etc. need to be recognizable within existing framework and within its patterns of classification. Since in this sense of acknowledgement recognition presumes a preceding credentials of the object that has to be recognized and since in turn such credentials presupposes the possibility of differentiating those objects or actors, that are acceptable for recognition from those who are not, concrete practices of recognition will always clinched by the underlying patterns of categorization.[32]

It does not propose that these epistemic contexts for recognition cannot change or the recognition of an agent or object does not have an impact upon what can be seen, known or recognized. However, it also suggests that a change in recognizability is instituted with such a change in the new ranges of visibility, i.e. a part of the procedure of becoming recognizable.

Recognition, in the prevailing epistemic framework reproduces and presupposes its objects and agents by the ways in which it struggles for sovereignty in agency and identity. Endeavoring for sovereignty treats identity as self-governing and treats the actions of the others and one's self as completely foreseeable. In actual, identity is not only the ground for action but is somewhat dependent upon the surrounding actions and discourses. It is the result of speech and actions in public. It comes into being by the conducts and the words of public by which the actors' appearances in the world is made.[33] These responses and actions are unpredictable, and that is what makes in the first place 'being recognized' necessary by others.

Being Recognizable: Identity Beyond State

Within the domain of international relations, recognition is seen either to proclaim a polity as state or to constitute it. As per declaratory theory of IR, an actor is recognized as state in international relations by fulfilling a certain set of criteria – a defined territory, a permanent population, a government and aptitude to build its relations with other entities.[34] This suggests that recognition affirms the existing beings, rather than bringing objects, beings or entities into existence. As a result, statehood exists without being recognized by the other states or entities.[35] In contrast, the constitutive theory of international relations states that for international agency,

recognition is an essential prerequisite. A polity becomes a global actor only by being recognized by other states, having rights and responsibilities.[36] The constitutive element of international theorizing of recognition is becoming more relevant in contemporary international relations.

The term non-state actor applies to (i) Regularly organized groups of warriors with a political structure and a military command structure (ii) Non-regularly organized groups of fighters with or without a hierarchical political structure and with or without command structure (iii) Spontaneously assembled groups who embroil in irregular acts of collective violence with or without a political leadership and a command structure (iv) Mercenaries acting as self-sufficient groups of combatants; and (v) Expatriate volunteers who engage for a period of time in fight or in support of combat operations, either as separate constituted or as a part of duly constituted or ad hoc units.[37]

Although, these non-state actors are not officially recognized as state actors by international law but by default they have a recognizable space in international relations. Their recognizability is due to the transnational dimension of their representation as well as in pursuit of their interests, their struggle beyond borders. Constitutively, they have both the status of recognition along with recognizability. The states, which they serve as proxy, recognize the value of their representation but the states who compete against them, identify them as terrorist groups,[38] enhancing their status by merely giving them the status of 'terrorists', recognition is being extended to these non-state actors. They have no legal status in International law, yet they are recognized as non-state actors with various forms of identities. Within religious identity, they are further recognized on the basis of sectarian division.

The media has a strong role in their identification on religious lines but the labeling of their identity on the basis of religion for instance 'the party of God (Hezbollah)'is also a factor that portrays their identity unitarily as religious actors. This labeling is not due to the religious influence but for the accomplishment of their interests. Thus, the recognizability of the non-state actors by the regional and global actors is interest-based.

Conclusion

The great power politics has used peace and war as a tool to generate crisis and maintain status-quo in the Israeli-Palestinian struggle. The great power politics in the conflict has complicated the dimensions of the conflict by supporting their regional proxies (Iran, Saudi Arabia) and the regional players have further inflated the conflict by supporting their proxies (Hezbollah, Hamas). The ideological conversion of the conflict has further enhanced these proxies' (non-state actors) influence by

gaining political legitimacy on behalf of the support they get from their regional and global benefactors.

The external players' patronage for their proxies is not one sided as there are some compensatory pressures on these proxies while considering them (external actors) as the first problem of evil. In response to the support they receive from their benefactors, these proxies have to act according to the strategies of their advocates in order to enhance their sphere of influence. Hezbollah has to defend Iran's ideological stance in the region while Saudi Arabia has to accept the policies which can bring more fruit to its ally, the U.S. Moreover, Hamas cannot go against Iran as it gets its support from its proxy, Hezbollah, in spite of Hamas not being a follower of Shiite ideology. Saudi Arabia has condemned Israeli persecutions of the Palestinians but being the ally of Israel's promoter, the U.S., it cannot oppose openly Israel's violations of human rights in Palestine.

The Russian strategy of supporting Iran in the region to counter balance the U.S. and Israel not allowing Russia to counter Saudi Arabia or other Sunni Arab states due to its close alliances with Syria and Iran and Israel and these Sunni state's ideological clash with Iran only complicates the already complex picture. The great power politics and the non-state actors in the conflict have confounded the identity/alterity nexus by making the question of responsibility ambiguous. The recognizability of these non-state actors by the regional and great powers has contributed enough in portraying the negative image of Muslims and Islam as 'other' within the identity politics in international relations. Being recognized by their patrons they pursue an identity beyond state.

NOTES

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