

## Changes in the U.S. Palestine-Israel Policy in the Biden Era

In recent years, the Palestinian National Authority has been facing the hardest problems in its history. The main reason for this has been the approach of Donald Trump and US foreign policy under his administration to the Palestinian-Israeli problem. Trump has made historical decisions on Palestinians and Israelis in each year of his presidency. First, he signed the resolution recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, as promised during his campaign, and moved the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. And then he recognized the Golan Heights as the land of Israel. Besides, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) office in Washington was closed, some veteran Palestinian politicians were denied US visas, the consular serving Palestinians in East Jerusalem was closed, and consular affairs were directed to a unit at the U.S. Embassy in Israel.

Palestine has got into a big economic jam because of the policies of the Trump administration. In August 2018, The US explained that it had cut both the funding provided to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) which supports 6 million refugees and the \$ 200 million in aid to the Palestinian Authority. Cutting aids were used as blackmail in order to realize the "Deal of the century" plan, prepared completely through Israeli perspective. The Mahmoud Abbas administration was threatened by an economic crisis to force him to accept the plan aimed at legitimizing the existing occupation and expanding it to further eliminate Palestine.

The Palestinian National Authority has welcomed the last US election because of the loss of Trump, who preferred a pro-Israel US policy regarding the region, and the victory of Joe Biden, considered as the continuation of Obama. The Biden administration was believed to prefer the two-state solution and the end of unconditional support for Israel. The decisions, taken on Palestine in the first week of Biden's presidency, also support this assessment.

On January 26, Richard Mills, the acting US envoy to the UN, announced in a speech to the Security Council that Biden would reactivate aid to Palestine and reopen Palestinian diplomatic missions that had been closed in the United States.

Mills, who said that the United States will support the two-state solution in the new term, also remarked that Israel's government and the Palestinian Authority should avoid steps that endanger the two-state solution, such as the annexation of territory, settlement activities, demolitions, incitement to violence, and providing compensation for individuals imprisoned for acts of terrorism.

The Biden administration welcomed Tor Wennesland to succeed Nickolay Mladenov as UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. He has extensive experience in the Middle East going back to 1994 when he was the Adviser on the Middle East Desk in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the process that led to the Oslo II Agreement. In addition, Biden's call to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about a month after taking office, despite meeting with the leaders of many countries, supported the expectation that a policy that would include Palestinians would be developed. But to say that the Biden administration will be a fair peacemaker between Palestine and Israel in the next four years and take into account the usurped rights of Palestine would be overly optimistic.

The Biden administration is not expected to back down from decisions that are a legacy of the Trump era; the recognition of the Golan Heights as Israeli territory, the recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, and the relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. It is also known that he will support the normalization process of Israel's relations with Arab countries. This normalization process strengthens the anti-Iranian front and expands Israel's field of action in the region. Changes in Arab countries' rhetoric about Palestine and a sharp drop in financial aid to the country suggest that the Abraham Accords may have more negative consequences for Palestinians.

The presence of large numbers of Jews in Biden's family and cabinet also suggests that Israel's interests will be considered in the decision-making process. Biden's three children - both he and his wife are Catholic - are married to Jews. Vice President Kamala Harris' husband Doug Emhoff is also Jewish. Given that Trump's Jewish son-in-law, Jared Kushner, is considered the architect of the US pro-Israel Middle East policy, it is estimated that Jewish members of the Biden family will influence US politics in favor of

Israel. Biden, on the other hand, has also brought Jewish names in strategic positions such as the Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of Homeland Security, Director of National Intelligence, Chief of Staff, and deputy director of the CIA. The introduction of Jews to high-level positions enjoyed wide Israeli press coverage.

Biden's many visits to Israel since the 1970s, his years-long friendship with Netanyahu, and his statements that Israel is the protector of US interests in the region are situations that may affect Biden's approach to the Palestinian-Israeli problem.

A positive background and experience related to Israel in Biden's political life, the influence of Jews in his immediate vicinity both in his private and professional life, and statements that Israel will continue to receive \$ 38 billion of annual military aid can lead to deepening cooperation in Israeli-U.S. relations.

Biden will use the language of diplomacy and consider the norms of international law in his policies, unlike in the Trump era, when his reckless support for Israel continued. Established order will be maintained in the relations between the United States and Israel, which have much different and deeper dynamics than the relations between any two countries.

The main issue of Israel-US relations can be tested is the US approach to Iran. During the Trump era, the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran, the imposition of sanctions against Iran, and the assassination of Qasem Soleimani have escalated tensions in the region and led to the formation of an anti-Iran bloc led by Israel and the Gulf states. Iran's expansionist foreign policy has been considered the main problem in the region, and the defining issues of earlier periods, such as the Palestinian issue, have been ignored. The nuclear deal, which took effect in the Obama era and was withdrawn in the Trump era, might be reenacted by the Biden administration. However, in the past four years, new dynamics have emerged in the Middle East. Moreover, the results of the presidential elections in Iran in June 2021 are vitally important for the future of US-Iran relations. This is because choosing a radical name will deepen the current tension and polarization in the region. Biden's return to the nuclear deal with the current or future Iranian administration and lifting sanctions on Iran will provoke a backlash from Israel and many Arab countries. In this case, the United States will have to develop a different policy in the Middle East.

The coronavirus pandemic and its economic and social fallouts, and the rising struggle against China in the Pacific, will create the main agenda items of the Biden administration and remove the Middle East from its priority issue. But in the long run, the Biden administration will return to pre-Trump US policy based on a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli problem. The failure to obtain any results from the numerous negotiations over the two-state solution in the past years, and the use of these peace talks by each administration in its interests shows that a durable solution in the region cannot be achieved during Biden's presidency.