

# The US Role in the Madrid Peace Process: A Conceptual Approach

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The Madrid Peace Process has been dominated since its beginning in October 1991 by the U.S. as the most important extraregional power. Although Russia is the second official co-sponsor beside the US, it was the United States, who has fostered the Arab-Israeli negotiations substantially by preparing a framework for the meeting of the parties or by suggesting bridging proposals on their own. Moreover it has played a crucial role in implementing the reached accords, either by providing the necessary financial means or by offering political and security-related guarantees. Therefore it is the only player in the international system, which has the political power and the necessary capacities to urge the regional parties to compromises and to enhance security in the region.<sup>(1)</sup> Moreover it offers security not just to Israel, but also to the oil producing, "conservative" monarchies in the Arab-Persian Gulf, mainly Saudi-Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE.

By trying to conceptualize the American policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1990s this paper dicusses the question, whether we can speak of a „Pax Americana" as a regional order in the Middle East; what the pardigms of this regional order are, and why this order heavily depends on regional dynamics in the Middle East.

Some remarks about the the concept of regional security in the Middle East have to be made: Arguing that today's problems of security can only be understood when taking into account different regional contexts, Barry Buzan has introduced the term "regional security complexes". Proposing the concept of "amity-enmity patterns", Buzan offered a political criterion for the definition of regions in terms of security: Regions can be determined by the interactions of state and non-state actors concerning security problems. Other authors have developed this idea further and used it for coping with the new complexities of the Post-Cold war world. Adjusting itself to different regional environments, American Middle East policy is not one-dimensional, but multi-faceted.

Three preconditions have to be taken into account for the US Middle East policy during the 1990s: First, the end of the cold war, which enlarged the space for political maneuvering on an international as well as on a regional level. With the end of that conflict the pattern of superpower interaction changed from confrontation to cooperation. The US could use these new options to structure the Madrid peace process and to push it forward. Second, the Kuwait crisis 1990/91, which induced changes in the regional balance of power and new political orientations, which made the Madrid process possible, e.g. the political weakening of the PLO and Jordan and the temporary cooperation of Syria with the US. The third precondition is the American obligation, dating back to the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, to secure the existence and the well-being of the state of Israel. Grounding on this special relationship the US offers great amounts of financial and military aid during each fiscal year to secure Israel's qualitative edge. We have to bear these preconditions in mind to analyze the US policy in the Middle East and its different roles in post-Oslo peace-making.

Four American roles can be differentiated, which depend on the success of the Madrid Process, the policy of the regional powers and the „structure" of the regional order, which can further or constrain American influence:

The role of a *Facilitator* is the position, which the U.S. administration prefers most. This role is possible, when the regional parties have agreed principally to negotiate on the basis of the formula "Land for Peace" and are able and willing to reach bilateral understandings. Then the U.S. can restrict itself to fostering the Arab-Israeli talks by setting a framework for negotiations, but doesn't have to take part in them or even suggesting American peace plans.(2) In this case the political costs for the U.S. are more or less marginal; regional security and progress in the peace process stems mostly from regional parties, not from the US.

We could find the American role of a facilitator especially in the Israeli-Palestinian talks during the Rabin, the Peres and the Barak administrations and during the Israeli-Jordanian negotiations, which led to the bilateral peace treaty of October 1994. A main precondition for the US acting as a facilitator is an Israeli government, which has accepted the formula "land for peace" and is willing as well as able to implement the necessary steps. For this reason the Clinton administration has always preferred on the Israeli side of the Middle Eastern negotiating table a government led by the Labour party, because the US expected these administrations to be less transigent than Likud governments and therefore allow substantial progress in the peace process. This is the reason, why the Clinton administration made more or less clear, which outcome of the Israeli elections in 1996 and 1999 it preferred.

In case, that the regional parties can't agree on any agreements, e.g. in the Israeli-Syrian negotiations from 1991 until 1996, one party proves her intransigence for different, mostly domestic reasons, like the Netanjahu administration, or doesn't accept the basic formula of the Madrid Process any more, the U.S. have to act as a *Broker*. In this role, they are closely involved in the bilateral negotiations in the Middle East. Fulfilling this task, they urge the regional parties to compromises by a policy of "Sticks and Carrots". They offer bridging proposals on their own (e.g. the American plan for a Israeli 13.1% withdrawal from the Westbank and the Gaza Strip), guarantee the reached accords and arbitrate between the regional parties (e.g. in the context of the Hebron protocol of January 1997). In this case the US have to commit themselves to the region more than they actually want.

A closer look on the Israeli-Syrian negotiations underlines this assumption: In the American strategic perspective an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement would be the cornerstone of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. Therefore the Clinton administration has tried to restart those negotiations and to be a direct mediator between the two parties. (3)

Moreover, the bilateral relations between the US and regional parties can be a effective leverage to influence the success of Arab-Israeli negotiations. By improving or worsening their relationship to a Middle Eastern government, e.g. by not meeting high-ranking members of the administration and withholding political or financial support, the Clinton administration has expressed its disagreement with specific policies and exerted political pressure, which can be resisted to only by paying a high political prize.

By analyzing the Israeli-Syrian talks an additional aspect of US policy in post-Oslo peace-making becomes evident. In case of an Israeli-Syrian agreement both sides will demand American compensations for the compromises, they have reached: Israel will expect advanced satellite technology and warning system as well as American security guarantees to keep its security position even after a withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Syria will expect to be eliminated from the State Department's list of countries supporting international terrorism and drug trafficking. Moreover the new President Asad will hope to gain American support by getting financial aid from international monetary institutions. Therefore the US could find themselves in a role comparable to that after the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty 1979: Offering securities, naming possible compromises, paying a peace dividend and pushing for enhanced cooperation.

When the peace process seems to be on the edge, another, broader role of the U.S. in Middle East security-building emerges: the American role of a *Stabilizer*. From this perspective

Washington tries to structure the regional order in a way, that the peace process isn't substantially threatened by any state or group in the region or by any extraregional power. This aspect of US policy is reflected in the American efforts, either to integrate other powers of the international system into the American Middle East policy approach, e.g. the European Union(4), or to contain their influence in the Middle East, e.g. France, China and Russia. That's one of the reasons, why the efforts of some European states, mostly France, to offer alternative third-party mediation to the Arab states and Israel, thereby bypassing the US, weren't successful. For the same reasons the United Nations have been marginalized by the United States in the efforts to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Also the American policy towards the states of the Arab-Persian Gulf serves the purpose of regional security and stability by containing the influence of destabilizing factors. The "Dual Containment" approach of the Clinton administration reflects among others the political aim to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction into the region(5) and to reduce the influence of states, whose policy might be a threat to the peace process and to Israel in special. In this role the U.S. emerges as the most important player offering security to regional parties, mostly by formal or informal bilateral agreements with regional parties.

Another aspect of this stabilizing role is the American policy to contain the influence of radical groups in the Middle East, who try to endanger the peace process by terrorist attacks. This approach includes also Islamist groups.(6) To avoid any serious threats to the continuous negotiations of the Madrid process, the US have been willing to engage in every kind of security cooperation over the last years, either bilateral with Israel or in a multilateral framework like the Summit of the Peacemakers 1996 or the most recent meeting in Sharm-el Sheik.

To secure the stability of the region on a mid- and long-term-basis it is crucial in a US perspective to develop the necessary economic interdependence to raise the standard of living, especially in the Westbank and the Gaza Strip, and to offer a peace dividend, which hasn't to be necessarily paid by the US, but secured by intra-regional economic cooperation. Following this goal, the Clinton Administration has promoted the development of institutions, which should foster the development of the "New Middle East". It was an American initiative to invite to the Economic Summits for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and to establish a Middle East Development Bank. Beside these multilateral efforts the Clinton Administration has supported the economic development of the Palestinian self-

administration by disbursing \$500 Mio. in the period between September 1993 and September 1998, being the second largest donor after the European Union.(7)

A last role of the U.S. has to be mentioned, which actually is included in every other mentioned role, but emerges clearly in the case, that the Madrid process may suffer from serious backlashes; that Iran or Iraq would be ready to use their WMD capacities or threaten one of the oil monarchies in the Arab-Persian Gulf or that the security and existence of Israel would be seriously in doubt. In this hypothetical case, the U.S. policy in the region would be reduced to the role of a *Security Guard*. The American policy to secure the qualitative edge of Israel's military capabilities and the "Dual Containment" policy towards Iraq and Iran are reflections of this approach. In this case regional security would almost completely depend on U.S. involvement.

On this background it seems appropriate to characterize U.S. policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict during the 1990s as a regional security system, in which the U.S. are heavily engaged, carry the main burden of offering security to regional parties and to transform the structure of intraregional relations from a state of "Balance of Power" to patterns of interdependence or, on a mid- and long-term basis, even to moments of integration. Assuming, that by aiming at these goals, the U.S. is ready and willing to overcome the resistance of single regional parties, the regional security complex of the Middle East can be described as a political system, which is on the one hand „penetrated" by the United States(8). On the other hand the U.S., despite its standing as sole superpower in the international system, is not the omnipotent hegemon in the Middle East and cannot overcome all regional obstacles to a comprehensive peace. The political influence of the United States in the Middle East therefore is crucially dependent on intra-regional and even intra-state dynamics.

## Notes

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