



Rashid Khalidi Public Lecture at the Islamic University, Gaza
Title: US Foreign Policy towards Palestine
April 2011

IUG Introduction:

We welcome you all to this lecture. It is a great honor to the Islamic University in Gaza to host an outstanding figure in modern history. He is Dr. Rashid Al Khalidi .He earned the Bachelor's degree from the University of Yale and the Ph.D. degree from the University of Oxford .

He worked as a lecturer in several American Universities and he is currently working in the University of Columbia .Dr. Rashid has many publications in the modern history. He published several books including "Sowing Crisis" and the "Iron cage ". Dr. Rashid will talk for about 40 minutes, more or less, after which time he will be ready to answer your questions.

We also welcome Dr. Mahmoud Al Amoudi, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dr. Jaballa an ex - Vice President of the University and Dr. Nazmi Al Masri the Assistant Vice President for External Affairs .We also welcome the students and the staff of the University .We hope that you will enjoy this lecture .

Rashid Khalidi:

Peace be upon you. It is now 9a.m our time, but to you in Palestine it is 4 p.m . I will talk for about "40" minutes about the American policy towards the Palestinian issue and the Israeli occupation in President Obama's era.

As a matter of course, I will concentrate on some of the clearer aspects of this policy. You in Palestine see different sides of the story. You see the American made artillery and the American made aircraft. You always see and hear of the continual American support for the Israeli policies which lasted for a long time .I don't talk to you as people who know nothing about the American policy towards their cause, but as people who know much about the American political approach towards the region. Today I would like to talk about some changes which have recently taken place during Obama's administration towards the Palestinian issue and the Israeli

occupation. For about two months the American Israeli relationship has been witnessing some tension, especially after the vice president's Joe Biden's visit to occupied Jerusalem in March.

During this period there had been a series of studied offenses to this American high ranking official despite his known pro-Israeli policy and his strong support to Israel. Israel insulted this American official when it revealed a plan to build more Jewish dwelling units in the occupied East Jerusalem during the meeting of the vice president with the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu.

It also published plans to expand the settlement activity in other parts of the occupied territories after the meeting. Israel offended this American official in a flagrant manner. As it is known the American Administration asked the Israeli government to freeze completely all settlement activities in Jerusalem and the West Bank during talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis in Ramallah. These were pre-meditated insults by the Israeli government and a flagrant challenge to the American Administration. As a matter of course, some people in the Arab world, in Palestine and here in America and even in Israel may say that these differences have no significance. These surface differences between the two allies, America and Israel are not important and the evidence is that Israel does not deal with the elected Palestinian government since 2006 and again with full support of America. In addition to several other Israeli situations which are fully supported by the USA.

Some politicians say that these minor differences such as the difference between the American vice president and the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu have no importance at all. This is true; there are many things that have not changed at all in the American policy since Obama had access to the office in November, that is to say 15 months ago. Many things have not changed. This is true. The United States is still reluctant to recognize the right of the Palestinian people to elect their representatives and their government. The USA is still supporting Israel militarily and politically without limits, and in the same manner as it used to do during the previous American Administration beginning from the era of President Harry Truman who supported the partition of Palestine in 1947. But I would like to refer to some of the factors which took place on the American arena. This is only one part of the American Israeli relationship. The Israeli newspapers have been talking about tension in the American Israeli relationship for months.

They are talking about unprecedented crisis in the relationship between America and Israel. The coverage of the Israeli press of the American Israeli relationship reflects a slight change in the policy towards Israel. The American newspapers also spoke about some tension in the American Israeli relationship. As for the Israelis any minor problem between the USA and Israel is considered a big problem because the Israeli officials are used to full and complete support to Israel from the US. This coverage by the Israeli and American press may reflect a little change in the American approach. But it is not very clear in the American press. My analysis is based on the American press, in addition to the Israeli press.

During the last few days, the American press reported a lot of information about a real crisis in the American Israeli relationship. This information shed light on the background of Obama-Netanyahu differences and referred to the existence of at least a contradiction between the point of view of Washington and Tel-Aviv after the statements made by some of the American officials, including General David Petraeus, the commander of the US central command and Admiral Michael Mullen, the Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of the staff. The first as you may know is the commander of the US Forces in the Middle East and Central Asia and in charge of the American operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus he is the most important field commander in the American Army. The second is the highest ranking officer in the United States Armed Forces. What did Petraeus say in a testimony before one of the armed forces' committees "The Arab rage resulting from the western polices towards their cause reduces the depth of the relations with the US".

General Mullen said something like that before the Congress' Committee and he stressed the need to solve the conflict. Mullen reiterated something like that before one of the Congress' Committees and stressed the need to solve the Palestinian Israeli conflict in order to maintain the American national interests. President Obama personally said that the solution of the Palestinian Israeli conflict is a necessity to the United States.

The most important thing which was said in this regards is what the Israeli newspaper Maarev quoted the American Vice –President as saying during a meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister: "The Failure to solve the Palestinian issue costs the United States money and blood in the Middle East and this negatively affects the United States." What does this saying mean?

In fact seemingly nothing has changed in the essence of the American policy towards the Palestinian Israeli conflict; there is only a verbal change. There is a prevailing attitude in the US now saying that there is no longer any justification for the existence of a distinguished relationship between America and Israel. For the first time since the sixties this attitude based on the belief that there is no justification for a distinguished relationship with Israel prevails. I am not specialized in politics or predicting the future. The Israeli American relationship was established during the cold war. At that time it was said that Israel was a strategic asset to the US in the confrontation of the Soviet Union in the Middle East.

This was in the sixties and it became the prevailing American Approach in the region after the 67 war. From that time, the USA became the biggest supplier of advanced weapons and funds to Israel.

Before that as you may know the support to Israel used to come from France and not from the United States .This was the prevailing attitude during the cold war. But after 20 years from the cold war, some American politicians began to say that Israel is no longer a strategic asset to the US, but a heavy strategic burden on the United Sates. But this change is only verbal in the strategic foundation.

This verbal change in the Israeli American relationship does not mean an actual change in this relationship.

Nevertheless, there are other bases for these relations. These relations existed before this strategic justification of the cold war .America supported the partition of Palestine resolution in 1947. America supported Israel in several spheres before the existence of this strategic justification.

There are many other foundations for the support of Israel. Some are religious reasons, including the existent religious motives for the American support to Israel, and also the success of the Israeli propaganda in the USA for a long time. But there are other reasons which are important too, including the absence of any efforts to transfer a real image of the situation in our region to the American public. There are now serious efforts by the Palestinians, the Arab and Islamic forces to do so. This new change in the American strategic view towards Israel has no significance without a similar change in the Palestinian, Arab and Islamic positions. There are allegations that Israel is the only democratic state in the region. Of course this is a lie,

but most of the Americans believe it .There is no anti-propaganda of any kind on the part of the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims in the United States to face Israel .This dose not mean anything without a change in the attitudes of the Arab and Islamic parties . In my opinion, it is not possible to achieve any national objectives during the division. Some Americans claim that there is a government in Gaza and another in Ramallah. The Palestinian Government is weak. How can we deal with people who have no united leadership?

I see that the Palestinian people will not be able to achieve any goals without ending the rift and without opening a national dialogue to agree on the national objectives.

It is impossible for the Palestinian National Liberation Movement to affect the American policy by any means without adopting the approach which it was supposed to follow from the very beginning and reconsider all what had been said and what is being said about these goals .This movement should be able to manage the Palestinian, Arab and Islamic conflict with Israel .The Palestinian National movement in my opinion is currently witnessing its most difficult days since the catastrophe .There are big differences in the Palestinian society and the Palestinian National movement is facing its hardest phases and days since the fifties because of the Palestinian rift and the lack of a clear strategy of any of the Palestinian parties in the face of the difficult situation they are encountering. The American claim that the Palestinians do not know what they want, they are divided and they have no existence on the Arab and international arena is aimed at justifying their support to Israel.

Until now there are no radical differences between the United States and Israel, but these differences are verbal only .The current differences between the two countries do not reflect an important difference. There are differences between the American politicians supporting Israel especially in the strong Jewish Lobby and those politicians who believe that the American policy, especially in the government is unfair. For the first time since a long time ago, we witnessed a difference between America and Israel. This difference is not connected with settlement on the Palestinian territory only but with the strategic bases of the American Israeli relations because of the lack of a clear vision towards the enemies and friends. Until now there is no comment on the part of Israel, nor on the part of its supporters in the United States on the views of Petreus , Mullen, Gates and Obama who believe that

the American policy towards Israel is detrimental to the American National interests and Israel too.

Until now we have not heard any word from Israel and it has not responded to these fresh opinions. The most important view is that there is no solid foundation for the American Israeli relations. Israel dose not achieve any American interest in the area as many of the Americans see. This is what was repeated by the top American officials. The rights of the Palestinian people were usurped, they were driven out of their homes and they live in camps. Without adopting a clear vision and agreement on the approach to be followed it is impossible to allow any Palestinian voice to enter. The Arabs are silent. Most of the Arab regimes follow the American approach. They don't differ with the US at all even in minor issues.

The Islamic states have no importance in the American public opinion. However the American military officials began to feel the importance of making a significant change in the American approach because of the opposition to the American policy by many of the Muslim masses in countries like Pakistan and others. They are upset with the American bias to Israel. Until now the Islamic countries have no voice .So we as Palestinians should understand the importance in these changes. We should understand that these are just verbal changes and they are short from being radical changes. We have to affect the American policy, not by being courteous to America, but by joining lines and re-arranging our national goals in an attempt to affect the American public opinion and to have access to the American elite. We should tell the Palestinian leadership that they are not required to do what the Americans want them to do. But it is important to say one unified thing to the American people about our cause and the real situation in our region, a matter which is completely absent from the American arena. The only thing available on this arena is Israel .There is opposition from the American civil society and the American Jewish community itself who got bored with the Israeli propaganda. This phenomenon should not be a surprise to us, but we should know how to deal with it .There is a division in the American Jewish community, especially in the leadership of this community.

This division is increasing every day. It seems that these people no longer believe the lies in the American propaganda and media. We should understand this division and try to escalate it. The lack of any official

Palestinian voice and non-existence of unified Palestinian goals embodying what the Palestinian people want is detrimental to the Palestinian cause. This issue should be explained to the American people and the Israelis as well.

I want to say that we have to study carefully and accurately all these aspects. This is correct. The bias of the United States to Israel and the American support to the Arab regimes is also clear. But we do nothing to push forward the Palestinian issue and the goals of the Palestinian people. This new current in the United States should be encouraged. This current which is represented by the military and the strategic thinkers should be encouraged. There is another current which is that of the youth in the Jewish community who criticize the Israeli policy towards the Palestinian cause. Such matters should be carefully studied. We should study how to achieve our goals.

For a long time the Palestinian politicians thought that it is enough to declare what they want. But this is not true. What matters is how to work on the ground tactically and strategically. Since the late 19th century and after the occupation of a big portion of Palestine in 1948, we have not studied our goals. We should know how we can achieve our goals. We should study the most effective powers in the world, and the British policy before 1948.

As a liberation movement we should study the settlement movement, the American Israeli relations since 1948 and what has been done by the Arab countries since the establishment of Israel, if we want to know how to manage this conflict.

5752

Currently we are not managing this conflict. There are other forces in the region which are Israel, Iran and Turkey. These forces do not include any Arab country and all of them are non-Arabs. The Arabs have a role to play and the Palestinians have their own role because the conflict is our own conflict and it does not concern any other party except us.

We have to study this enemy, the united States, Europe and the Western World as a whole. We sometimes depend on the diplomacy in the United Nations, but this organization is under the influence of the United States.

I and my colleagues who speak in the American Universities are always warmly welcomed by the American public. The door is open for us, if we know how to deal with such a situation. But this requires an action more

than my speech and the speech of my colleagues in the American Universities. It requires a unified Palestinian stand and the unification of the divided people. I repeat this. I know it is not a far reaching goal. I know that there are difficulties in joining our lines. But without this unity and a unified approach, it is almost impossible to liberate Palestine.