
The U.S. Foreign Policy under Trump Administration to Recognize Jerusalem as the State Capital of Israel

Hasbi Aswar

International Relations Department, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta – Indonesia

Email: hasbiaswar@uii.ac.id

Submitted: 18 August 2018 | Accepted: 16 October 2018

Abstract

A speech from the President of United States, Donald Trump, who explicitly state Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel triggering debate that threatens harmonization of the Middle East. Disagreement appear from South East Asia state up to European state regarding to Trump's statement, which turn into United States foreign policy. Trump's statement described as the main reason of increasing tension Palestinian – Israel conflict. This essay argues that The US policy toward Jerusalem was merely influenced by domestic politics in the sense that to satisfy Trump's main voters of the Republican Party that is Evangelical Christian base.

Keywords: Foreign Policy; Domestic, Politics, Middle East.

Abstrak

Sebuah pernyataan kontroversial dari Presiden Amerika Serikat, Donald Trump, yang secara tegas menyatakan Jerusalem sebagai ibukota dari Israel memancing perdebatan yang mengancam harmoni di Timur Tengah. Sangkalan keras banyak bermunculan mulai dari negara-negara Asia Tenggara hingga Eropa atas pernyataan Trump yang kemudian merepresentasikan kebijakan luar negeri Amerika Serikat. Pertanyaan keras dari Trump dianggap memperkeruh keadaan dari perselisihan antara Israel dan Palestina daripada menurunkan tensi konflik. Esai ini berargumen bahwa pernyataan yang keluar dari Trump untuk mengakui Jerusalem sebagai ibukota resmi dari Israel, dipengaruhi oleh keadaan dari politik domestik Amerika Serikat, guna melunasi janji kampanyenya dari Partai Republik yang mayoritas basis pemilih berasal dari Kristen Evangelist.

Kata Kunci: Politik Luar Negeri, Politik, Domestik, Timur Tengah.

INTRODUCTION

On 6 December 2017, Trump declared a new controversial speech and announcement that recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This recognition followed by Trump policy to relocate the US embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The new embassy will open in May 2018. This new policy of the USA then got response differs from the many states and the world. For Israel, this recognition welcomed

and praised but the majority of states criticized and rejected this policy.

Later, so many governments condemn trump's speech, from Middle Eastern countries, South East Asia, Europe, even from the people in America. Some permanent members of the UN Security Council proposed for condemning this policy but later vetoed by the US. Later, the UN

General Assembly passed a motion to condemn Trump by 128 supported the motion, 9 opposed and 35 abstained.

This new policy was also responded by the people of the world through demonstration that happening in many countries. In Palestine, in the USA, Pakistan, Netherlands, Germany, Lebanon, Jordan, Australia, Montenegro, Iran, Morocco, Poland, United Kingdom, Greece, and Indonesia. Even, a Militant salafi group in Palestine launched rockets to Israel as the part of its anger of Trump policy.

Many critics also came from many political observers and analysts who argued that Trump policy would only prolong and worsen the conflict instead of supporting the peace talks between Palestine and Israel. This article purports to discuss the nature of Trump's policy to recognize Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel. Again, this article also will discuss the influence of domestic politics that shape Trump's foreign policy toward Israel & Jerusalem.

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND THE US FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD ISRAEL

In the process of foreign policy making, there are three levels that influence that process, the individual decision maker, the nation-state level and the systemic level. At the

individual level, it analyzes the role of decision maker's characteristics, personality, ways of reaching decisions, and beliefs. At the nation-state level or unit level, it analyzes how the internal or domestic aspect of the state determine state behavior such as political system, state ideology, national wealth, military power, territory and population, social identities (religion & ethnicity), government organization as well as the role of political parties and interest groups within the state. The last level is that global or systemic level, in this level structural factor becomes an important variable to analyze the behavior of states such as distributions of power, attitudes, as well as the global issues like environmental issues, disease, terrorism, conflict and etc (Mansbach & Taylor, 2012, 8-9).

The terms of US foreign policy, influenced by these three variables on every foreign policy decision-making process. Particularly, on domestic factors issues that influence the process of foreign policy making, at least five factors that always influence in the US, they are president and Congress, executive-branch politics, interest groups (lobbying), News Media and public opinion (Jentleson, 2010, 67).

On the issue of US foreign policy toward Israel, the Israel Lobby is one most influential lobby among the

interest groups in the US. This group for a long time has shaped the foreign policy of the US toward Israel. Basically, this lobby is not a unified movement or organization rather a loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively work to shape US foreign policy in pro-Israel direction. The people of organization can be from the Jewish group or from Christian Evangelical groups or people.

In doing its activity, this lobby group or people do many things to ensure the protection of Israel interest in the US foreign policy such as participating in the election, making campaign contributions, molding public opinion, pressuring Congress and the executive branch etc. AIPAC (American-Israeli) is known as the core of the lobby's influence in the US politics. One example of AIPAC role in the US politics is that this lobby group will support everything (financial, media campaign) for the pro-Israel US politician. On the other hand, to politicians who are hostile toward Israel, AIPAC will also contribute to defeating them by supporting their opponents (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006, 14-17).

According to Mearsheimer and Waltz (2006), the US Foreign Policy toward Israel is not really for the US strategic interest but more to the influence of the Israel lobby in the US

politics. Indeed, the pro-Israel policy of the US has created many bad things to the US international politics. First of all, it has created a negative perception among Muslims toward America all over the world as well as created a feeling of hatred toward America and as the result creating Islamic terrorism that threat to the US. Secondly, Israel also cannot be relied on as a loyal ally as sometimes it disobeys the US request and reneges on promises it has made on some agreements. Even, Israel reportedly has provided sensitive US military technology to Cina as the potential of US rivals (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006, 5-6).

CURRENT US FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD JERUSALEM

The status of Jerusalem in the history was actually under UN-Administration in the sense that neither Israel nor Palestine had the right to claim this place. According to the UN General Assembly's Resolution in 1947 called to separate Jewish and Arab states but excluded Jerusalem for this two-state solution and was to be under the UN-Administered international city. This resolution was supported by the US. However, after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war this UN resolution two-state solution no longer came into existence because Palestinian regions are occupied and divided by Egypt that

occupied Gaza and the Jordanians took over the West Bank. Israel came to control West Jerusalem, while Jordan took over East Jerusalem, including the Old City and its Muslim, Jewish, and Christian holy sites.

Following the 1948 war, US granted Israel a full diplomatic recognition with Tel Aviv as its capital despite Israel claimed that West Jerusalem as its capital city and began to establish its government infrastructure there. During the six-day war of 1967 Israel occupied the west bank and East Jerusalem, the US opposed this occupation and considered that east Jerusalem as an Israeli occupied territory. Moreover, the US looked to UN resolution 242, which proposed for a land of the peace settlement between warring parties as the basis for a future resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

By 1990s, as the result of Oslo Accords, the US eventually would recognize a part of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital and another part of the Palestinian capital (Sciarcon, 2018). In 1995 the US Congress produced the Jerusalem Embassy Act that declared: a) Jerusalem should remain undivided while it protects all of its ethnic and religious groups, b) Jerusalem should be recognized as the capital of Israel, and c) the U.S. embassy should be moved to Jerusalem. The requirement to move the US embassy should be

waived in the six-month interval (Slonim & Watson, 2000). In reality, Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama issued waivers since then but never realized. Trump did so and again with an announcement in December 2017.

In his announcement in the white house, 6 December 2017, Trump argued that the declaration of recognition Jerusalem as the capital of Israel marked the beginning of a new approach to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. He mentioned that previous presidents failed to adopt and implement in 1995 congress act due to laxity of courage or for peace reason. But Trump believed that there should be a new formula, recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, to create peace process in Israel-Palestine conflict resolution.

Trump emphasized in his speech that Israel has made Jerusalem for a long time as its capital city. Jerusalem is the seat of the modern Israeli government, the home of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, the Israeli Supreme Court, headquarters of many government ministries as well as the official residence of the prime minister and the president. This statement of recognition is then followed by an initiative to move US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Whitehouse, 2017).

According to the proponents of Trump decision, such as Martin Indyk & Daniel Shapiro, they argue that US diplomatic representation to Israel is supposed to base at the country's seat of government, particularly since the ambassador and embassy staff frequently conduct business there. Furthermore, the US almost universally recognizes whatever capital a country chooses for itself, and Israel should be no exception. Thus, the diplomatic impact of such a move could be contained by location the embassy in West Jerusalem (Laub, 2017). The opening of the new embassy of the US in Jerusalem will be on 14 May 2018. Even Trump will come and see the opening of that embassy (the New Arab, 2018).

After Trump's announcement, many critics raised up toward the US from many countries even from the US close allies in Europe including Britain, Germany, Italy, and France. In Palestine, President Mahmoud Abbas said the United States had disqualified itself, as a mediator and will no longer accepted of its role in the political process in the issue of Israel-Palestine. Abbas insisted that Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the state of Palestine, and is not for sale for gold or billions (The New Arab, 2018). On the other hand, Palestinian negotiator and politician, Saeb Erekat, said that moving the embassy would be the end

of the peace process and threaten to unleash extremism and violence (Frantzman, 2016). Turkey Prime Minister and Saud Arabi's King Salman bin Abdul Aziz have said the Islamic world should act with unity against the US decision.

A day after Trump announcement, the United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting, 7 December 2017, where 14 out of 15 members condemned Trump's decision and said that it was in violation of UN Resolution and international law. This emergency meeting was requested by Bolivia, Britain, Egypt, France, Italy, Senegal, Sweden and Uruguay but this meeting failed to produce a resolution because of vetoed by the United States (Beaumont, 2017).

On 13 December 2017, Erdogan invited leaders and representatives of 57 Muslim countries as the member of the organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to gather in Istanbul in response to the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This emergency summit has announced final communiqué to reject and condemn the unilateral decision by the president of the USA who recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This decision is considered as null and void legally; attacking the historical, legal, natural and national rights of the Palestinian people,

undermining all peace efforts; impetus to extremism and terrorism, and a threat to international peace and security. This communiqué also calls to all member states of OIC to give high priority for Palestine in their daily discourse and foreign policy agenda.

Furthermore, through this communiqué, OIC member states reaffirm their commitment to support the Palestinian people right to pursue their self-determination and political independence as well as to support to the comprehensive –peace based on the two-state solution with East Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Palestine. OIC member states also emphasized that Trump`s declaration is a dangerous declaration as it is a violation of international law, and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the

U.N. Security Council resolutions No. 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), the foundations of the peace process that stipulate that City of Al-Quds Ash- Sharif as a final status issue that the US also signed these agreements. And the most important thing in this communiqué is all member states declared to recognize East Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Palestine and invited all countries to follow their step to recognize the state of Palestine and its capital, East Jerusalem (Daily Sabah, 2017).

On 21 December 2017, an emergency session of The United Nations General Assembly was held and as the result majority of the members declare that a unilateral US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel`s capital is null and void. 128 countries voted in favor of the resolution rejecting the US decision, 9 countries voted against and 35 abstained (Aljazeera, 2017). This resolution was actually non-binding and only symbolic but the veto indicated the world rejection to this new US policy to Jerusalem as well as contributed to America`s diplomatic isolation.

One month before Trump declaration, the University of Maryland and the Nielsen Scarborough polling organization conducted a “Critical Issues Poll” about American people perception of the plan to move America`s Embassy from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. This poll chose 2000 American people, from Republicans and Democrats as well as independent people. This poll showed that 63% American opposed and only 31% supports the move. Even, Republicans who support this move only 49%, a very small difference with Republicans who oppose 44%. Both Democrats and Independents people who oppose are respectively 81% and 60% (Zuesse, 2017).

Tabel 1. Critical Issue Poll

	Total	Republicans	Democrats	Independent
Support	31%	49%	15%	28%
Oppose	64%	44%	81%	60%

Source: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/poll-by-2-to-1-americans-oppose-moving-u-s-embassy-to-jerusalem/5622652>

THE INFLUENCE OF DOMESTIC POLITICS ON TRUMP'S POLICY

Many observers and foreign policy analysts try to analyze the reason behind Trump's policy to Jerusalem. Some say that this new policy would go against the very priorities that the administration has set for itself in the Middle East: fighting Islamist militancy and confronting Iranian influence. While other mentioned that Jerusalem can be the perfect issue for Iran and Islamist militants to use in mobilizing support against the United States and those who endorse its policies (Telhami, 2017). Indeed, Trump's policy can heighten the sense of hopelessness among Palestinians and will lead to embolden the extremist in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as well as can be a threat for the US and Israel security in the Middle East (Sciarcon, 2018).

Foreign policy analysts and observers came up with similar conclusion that Trump policy toward Jerusalem is not really because of for pursuing the US national interest in the Middle East nor for international

commitment or the concern of allies, indeed it has nothing to do with the US Interest and potentially can create many worse things to the US international politics. The real reason for new US foreign policy is because of domestic reason. In the context of foreign policy studies, Trump's foreign policy is more influenced by the state level (Sciarcon, 2018).

The first domestic influence on Trump policy is that Trump was motivated by the need to get support from Evangelical Christian base as he suffered through a historically unpopular first-year presidency. Evangelical Christian was known to constitute a high percentage of Republican voters and have long viewed the recognition of Israeli control of all Jerusalem as a chief priority. After Trump recognition, Two-thirds of Evangelicals say Trump's policy is already leaning toward Israel. Trump is also considered that has given rights to Evangelical more than any other president in history, indeed Trump has appointed some Evangelists in his administration such as such as Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch and Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos (Telhami, 2017; Sciarcon, 2018). Martin Indyk and Steven Spiegel agreed with this argument, Spiegel mentioned that Trump's policy is to please Trump's base of Christian and

Jewish conservative supporters. During the presidential campaign, Trump had repeatedly promised to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and to move the US embassy to Jerusalem. So, Trump policy is easily understood to fulfill his campaign pledge (DW, 2017).

Surprisingly, this trump policy did not get wider support from the broader American Jewish community, the reason is on one hand most American Jews are staunchly opposed to Trump's domestic agenda while, on the other hand, many American Jews believe that the US unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital actually harms the chances of peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Furthermore, many American Jews have negative views of Israel's current government and that many younger American Jews have begun to distance themselves, or feel detached, from Israel (Sciarcon, 2018). The second factor that broadly mentioned is Sheldon Adelson factor. He was reportedly upset that the Trump administration delayed relocating the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Sheldon is known as one influential person that backed Trump since his presidential candidacy. Adelson is the CEO of the Las Vegas Sands Corporation, and he is one of the world wealthiest individuals. This man is known as an important

financier of militarist pro-Israel groups as well as a prominent supporter of right-wing politicians in both the US and Israel. He has backed Republican Jewish coalition, the Zionist organization of America, Freedom's watch and the Foundation for defense democracies (Rightweb, 2018).

In addition, Adelson has been a major donor to Republican Party and major supporter of Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Adelson and his wife Miriam reportedly had spent more than \$80 million on Republicans in 2016 and contributed \$35 million to help elect Trump and also gave \$5 million to Trump's presidential inauguration (DePetris, 2017; Clifton, 2017). Adelson even offered for the US government to help for establishing a new embassy building in Jerusalem (Lederman, 2018).

In conclusion, the reason behind the US new policy toward Jerusalem clearly it is not based on the US international interest especially in the Middle East, nor to support the process of conflict resolution in Palestine-Israeli conflict. However, the rhetoric of the US president shows differently. Many observers concluded and expressed that it is easy to understand that the US policy to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is for the domestic reason that is to fulfill Trump promise to

Evangelical Christian supporters as major supporters of the Republican party as well as to satisfy pro-Israel Republican donor.

This policy must be taken by Donald Trump to show and prove his promise on Jerusalem after many times he mentioned in his political campaign even though so many critics and protests that came from US political allies in many countries. In fact, many US observers worried that this controversial policy will worsen the US image in the world and particularly in the Muslim world.

CONCLUSION

On December 2017, the US president, Donald Trump, has announced a new policy toward Jerusalem. He recognized that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and he also planned to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This new policy created many responses from many countries and people, mostly reject and condemn this policy. Many protests and demonstrations were also held in many countries in the USA, Europe, and the Muslim countries.

In reality, this new US policy has not been considered as not for the US international political interest let alone a new formula for solving the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The US policy toward Jerusalem was merely

influenced by domestic politics in the sense that to satisfy Trump's main voters of the Republican Party that is Evangelical Christian base. Another factor is to satisfy the major donors of Republican Party that support of Trump in general election. Donald Trump created this policy although it was considered to contrast its strategic policy in the Middle East. This issue shows how domestic politics can have a big influence to drive the US foreign policy toward other countries.

REFERENCE

- Aljazeera News. (2017) *UN Jerusalem resolution: How each Country Voted* (Online). Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/jerusalem-resolution-country-voted-171221180116873.html> (Accessed: 02 May 2018).
- Beaumont, Peter. (2017) *US outnumbered 14 to 1 as it vetoes UN vote on status of Jerusalem* (Online). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/18/us-outnumbered-14-to-1-as-it-vetoes-un-vote-on-status-of-jerusalem> (Accessed 02 May 2018).
- Clifton, Eli. (2017) *Trump's Biggest Donor Pushed For Jerusalem Embassy Move* (Online). Available at: <http://lobelog.com/trumps-biggest-donor-pushed-for-jerusalem-embassy-move/> (Accessed: 04 May 2018).
- Daily Sabah. (2017) *Istanbul Summit: The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Declares East Jerusalem Capital of Palestine, Urges US to Withdraw From Peace Process* (Online). Available at: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/istanbul-summit-the-organization-of-islamic-cooperation-oic-declares-east->

- jerusalem-capital-of-palestine-urges-us-to-withdraw-from-peace-process/5622821 (Accessed: 04 May 2018).
- Daniel R, DePetris. (2017) *Trump's Jerusalem Declaration is About American Politics, not Peace in the Middle East*. (Online). Available at: <https://qz.com/1148872/trumps-jerusalem-declaration-is-about-american-politics-not-peace-in-the-middle-east/> (Accessed: 02 May 2018).
- Frantzman, Seth J. (2016) *Comment: The Colonial Origins of US Policy on Jerusalem* (Online). Available at: <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Terra-Incognita-The-colonial-origins-of-US-policy-on-Jerusalem-475763> (Accessed: 01 May 2018).
- Jentleson, Bruce. W. (2010) *American Foreign Policy: The Dynamics of Choice in The 21st century, fourth edition*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Knigge, Michael. (2017) *Two Reasons Behind Donald Trump's Decision to Recognize Jerusalem as Israel's Capital* (Online). Available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/two-reasons-behind-donald-trumps-decision-to-recognize-jerusalem-as-israels-capital/a-41720587> (Accessed: 02 May 2018).
- Laub, Sachary. (2017) *What's At Stake With the U.S. Recognition of Jerusalem* (Online). Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/whats-stake-us-recognition-jerusalem> (Accessed: 02 May 2018).
- Lederman, Joshua. (2018) *Sheldon Adelson offers to help pay for US Jerusalem Embassy— Report* (Online). Available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/sheldon-adelson-offers-to-help-pay-for-jerusalem-embassy-report/> (Accessed: 05 May 2018).
- Mansbach, Richard W. (2012) *Introduction to Global Politics: Second Edition*. New York: Routledge.
- Mearsheimer, John J. & Stephen M. Walt. (2006). "The Israel Lobby and The US Foreign Policy", *London Review of Books*, 28 (6): 1-82.
- Slonim, Shlomo & Geoffrey Watson. (2000) *Jerusalem's Status and the Evolution of U.S. Policy* (Online). Available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/jerusalem-status-and-the-evolution-of-u.s.-policy> (Accessed 02 May 2018).
- Telhami, Shibley. (2017) *Why is Trump undoing decades of U.S. policy on Jerusalem?* (Online). Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/12/05/why-is-trump-about-to-declare-jerusalem-the-capital-of-israel/> (Accessed 01 May 2018).
- The New Arab. (2018) *Trump Rrejected a Plan to Move the Embassy for a \$1 Billion Budget* (Online). Available at: <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/4/28/trump-slashes-1-billion-budget-request-for-embassy-move> (Accessed: 02 May 2018).
- Whitehouse. (2017) *Statement by President Trump on Jerusalem* (Online). Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president> (Accessed: 02 May 2018).
- Zuesse, Eric. (2017) *Poll: By 2-to-1, Americans Oppose Moving U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem* (Online). Available at: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/poll-by-2-to-1-americans-oppose-moving-u-s-embassy-to-jerusalem/5622652> (Accessed: 04 May 2018).