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## The Reasons behind the US Differing Support of Tibet and Palestine

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Nicole Scartozzi

A country's statehood status permits them the exclusive right to self-advocate for their citizens in various International Organizations (IOs). The platform of IOs allows states to address accounts of foreign victimization in a legitimate setting through institutions associated with the UN. The inability of disputed territories such as Palestine and Tibet to effectively partake in these international institutions makes the overall livelihood of their people dependent on influential states. The United States is one of the most powerful members in the international system with capabilities to influence other actors economically, militarily, and veto resolutions in the UN. Under these circumstances, the US would ideally be the best strategic partner for such vulnerable members, such as Palestine and Tibet. People assume that actors in the international system including the US act rationally. However, there is a debate on whether their intentions are out of self-interest or morality of larger ideals. Analyzing why the United States economically and politically supports the Tibetan government but not the Palestinian government can provide greater insight into a state's behavior. More specifically, looking at this international puzzle through a constructivist and realist theoretical framework will employ two differing justifications to determine which holds superior rational.

Through the analysis of political theories, like realism and constructivism, one can further gain insight into this international phenomenon of state motivation. Classical realists, like Thucydides, Hans J. Morgenthau, and Thomas Hobbes, argue that states are self-interested maximizers of power without the ability to fully trust other fellow states due to defense insecurity.<sup>1</sup> A state's uncertainty of territorial security can be seen in the marginalization of disputed territories in structural institutions due to their presence undermining the stronger states they inhabit. China and Israel are exemplary states that inhibit disputed areas within their borders, such as Tibet and Palestine, from engaging with full capability in the international arena, highlighting the potency of the argument by Thucydides: "...The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."<sup>2</sup> This illustrates that in conflictual, asymmetrical relations between states and disputed territories, one experiences the loss of morality at the expense of self-interest.

This idea is due to the foundations of realism describing the world as it is, not how ideally it should be. For instance, this concept can be illustrated in renowned political scientist Kenneth Waltz's writing, *Man, the State and War: a Theoretical Analysis*, where he blatantly

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Crane, *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity: the Limits of Political Realism* (Berkeley, CAC: University of California Press, 1998), 35.; Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth W. Thompson, *Politics among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace* (New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 2014), 84.; Thomas Hobbes, "Chapter 30: Of the Office of the Sovereign Representative," essay in *Hobbes: Leviathan: Student Edition*, edited by Richard Tuck (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 239.

<sup>2</sup> Crane, *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity*, 27.

disregards individuals outside of the political entity of the state allowing the reader to assume their trivial relevance. For example, he writes, “War may result because state A has something that state B wants. The efficient cause of the war is the desire of state B; the permissive cause is the fact that there is nothing to prevent state B from undertaking the risks of war.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, one can argue that disputed territories are secondary, illegitimate actors in their host countries that warrant no rights under realist thought. This essay will accept this premise and understand that even though these disputed territories carry no weight in the international field, under realist thinking, the US benefits from supporting the Tibetan government in a way the country would not from assisting the Palestinian government.

“International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power.”<sup>4</sup> This quote by Hans J. Morgenthau depicts the importance for countries to maintain power—the status quo—or to increase their potential and actual power at any cost. One can argue the US choice to financially and politically endorse the Tibetan government is a strategic tactic to highlight human rights abuses in China. This ploy aims to redirect China's international policy, such as aggression in the South China Sea, to one of an internal policy ultimately achieving the US's interest in the region—maintaining a stronghold in Asia. US-China relations are built on the conflictual interest of achieving political dominance over the other. The South China Sea is the most recent platform to continue this struggle of power but is a part of a deeper cyclical pattern. For example, the two actors' repetitive competition for political superiority is displayed in their various opposing alliances, as seen in the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War.

One rationalization for this rivalry is China's past inferiority in the world system, which enabled China to be sliced and subsequently subject to unethical foreign occupation in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This can be illustrated in numerous cases with the British occupation of Hong Kong after the Opium Wars, the Sino-Japanese wars with the Russians that occurred on Chinese soil, and the German occupation of Jiaozhou Bay until the end of World War II. Thus, regardless of China's ethical justification for maintaining and increasing power, its rise is inevitably seen as a threat to US hegemony. The security dilemma illustrates the inability of the US and China to realize the morality behind the other's power buildup, which keeps them in a perpetual state of conflict.<sup>5</sup> Realism is dependent firmly on logic, and Morgenthau's view that all problems are susceptible to rational thought gives validation to both sides' lust for power; though the US and China's insecurities prevent them from effectively communicating their concerns to one another. Negotiations require a level of vulnerability and honesty that neither side is willing to make in their relationship—i.e. inter-state interactions—in order to obtain a trusting dynamic. Therefore, they try to outspend each other monetarily and energetically.<sup>6</sup> An example of this is the United

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: a Theoretical Analysis* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2018), 231-235.

<sup>4</sup> Morgenthau and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 111.

<sup>5</sup> Shiping Tang, “The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis,” *Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (October 8, 2009): 587-623, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410903133050>.

<sup>6</sup> Morgenthau and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 132.

States' calculated scope to focus on Tibet, China's largest territorial insecurity of separatism disguised as a humanitarian concern to the outside world.

The three million dollar increase in US funding to the Tibetan government-in-exile illustrates the US commitment to sustaining the Tibetan cause both in and outside of China.<sup>7</sup> At first glance, the US donation seems to come from humanitarian intent, but in reality, this is done based on self-interest. The lack of uniformity in US support to similarly disputed territories governments, specifically Palestine, is a key indicator morality is not the determinative motivation for US assistantship. Rather, the United States attempts to find a strategic regional partner to assist in its maximization of power. For the reasons, there was no possibility of a regional alliance in Asia involving China. But the absence of other relative powers in the area meant the US had to balance the influence of China's rein by itself. For example, the US attempted to weaken China's prestige by giving the Dalai Lama, the leader of Tibet who is perceived by China as a domestic terrorist, a platform to voice his message of "cultural autonomy."<sup>8</sup> However, if the US had the option between a viable state actor and non-state actor partnership to counter China's power, the US would choose the state actor. This strategic decision is because, under realist theory, a state could provide assurances to the preservation of US regional control financially and militarily, while a non-state actor cannot, due to its inferiority in the international system. Unfortunately, a state actor was not an option in Asia for the US, but the US did have a potential for a state actor partner in the Middle East, Israel. However, the US-Israeli alliance would come at the expense of US-Palestinian relations.

"Immature thought is predominantly purposive and utopian. Thought which rejects purpose altogether is the thought of old age. Mature thought combines purpose with observation and analysis."<sup>9</sup> This excerpt from a publication, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* by E. H. Carr, warns against the pitfalls of the human mind to think actions are done with moral intent over objectively driven goals. This subject is demonstrated in how Israel offers the US a stronghold in the Middle East and due to that, the US prioritizes Israeli interests over the Palestinian government's conflicting needs. The concept of the Palestinian "right to return" to a land now claimed by Israel directly challenges Israel's territorial integrity. Thus, based on the controversial history between Israel and Palestine, particularly how Israel acquired its statehood displacing large volumes of Palestinian people, the US could not be impartial in the Israel-Palestine strife and obtain an effective partnership with either party.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the US stood politically and economically with the Israeli government as a result of its superior statehood status. The US

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<sup>7</sup> Jamphel Shonu, "US Congress Approves Increased Funding for Tibetans in Tibet and Exile," Central Tibetan Administration, March 29, 2018, <https://tibet.net/us-congress-approves-increased-funding-for-tibetans-in-tibet-and-exile/>.

<sup>8</sup> Emily Wax, "Tibetan Leader Warns Of Cultural 'Extinction'--Dalai Lama Marks Uprising's Anniversary," The Washington Post (WP Company, March 11, 2009), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/10/AR2009031000206.html?noredirect=on>.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (London: Macmillan, 1940), 65.

<sup>10</sup> Joel Beinin, "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the Arab Awakening," *Palestine - Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 18, no. 1 (2012): 52-60.

strategically chose Israel as its ideal partner because Israel enjoys a plethora of capabilities including building a military that Palestine could not due to its disputed territory label. For example, some academics believe that “engaging non-state armed actors has posed a distinct challenge to international peace-building and state-building efforts.”<sup>11</sup> As a consequence, Hamas’ military buildup in Gaza exemplifies the inability of a non-state military to be met with acceptance in the international system as his regime creates regional instability. Thus, by the US supporting the stronger actor (in this case, Israel) the state would directly derive the most benefits from this uncontested partnership.

The foundation of the US-Israeli alliance was built on securing Israel’s physical security from domestic terrorists like Hamas in exchange for achieving US objectives. As a result, the US interest in ensuring a strong Israeli state comes at the cost of a virile Palestinian government within Israel. The US willingly makes this concession in order to maintain surveillance operations in the Middle East dire to its own security concerns. For example, “the US and Israel collaborated on one of the most-sophisticated malware systems ever created, Stuxnet, to infiltrate Iran’s cyber infrastructure and slow progress towards nuclear weapons without firing a shot.”<sup>12</sup> This quote illustrates the financial and militaristic investments the US has in Israel. Due to the high success in acquiring both its self-interests in this alliance, the US wants to maintain the regional status-quo of power in the Middle East but opposing leadership in the Palestinian governments poses a risk to this political hierarchy and threatens its ally Israel, sequentially challenging US foreign investment in the state.

If the US was not biased towards the Israeli government in ensuring its own interests, morally, the US would still be unfit to support the Palestinian governments under realist thought. The opposing leadership of Hamas and Fatah in Palestine incur risks to the international order that the Tibetan government could not base on its unified messages, ambitions, and authority.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Hamas’ de-facto government in Gaza is labeled a terrorist organization by the US, based on their tactics of suicide bombing and systemic use of violence, while the Palestine Authority headed by Fatah encourages peaceful co-existence.<sup>14</sup> These opposing ideals of leadership weaken the functionality of both governments since the Palestinian people become politically divided and as a result, the governments have low authoritative control over the people they lead. This enables anarchy to assume the power vacuum and allows this disputed area to be viewed negatively by a majority of states. In the international system, states may be in a perpetual state of conflict; however, there is uniformity in their makeup that Palestine lacks,

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<sup>11</sup> Claudia Hofmann and Ulrich Schneckener, “Engaging Non-State Armed Actors in State- and Peace- Building: Options and Strategies,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 93, no.883 (September 2011): 603-621, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1816383112000148>.

<sup>12</sup> Alex Lockie, “Here’s Why the US and Israel Are Such Close Allies,” *Business Insider*, February 18, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-israel-allies-2017-2>.

<sup>13</sup> Moregenthau and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 90.

<sup>14</sup> “Foreign Terrorist Organizations,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>; Qadura Fares and Hatem Abdel Kader, “The Changing Face of Fatah?: Voices of a New Generation,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, November 6, 2003, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-changing-face-of-fatah-voices-of-a-new-generation>, 2.

posing a risk to international order. The concept of political stability (order) aligned with realist thought highlights why economically and politically, the US cannot support Palestine as it goes against the most basic of realist theorem.<sup>15</sup> The remainder of this essay employs the same theoretical question with a constructivist investigation to identify other reasons why the US would have differing support between these territories.

Constructivism is a political theory that is based heavily on the way individuals relate to each other. This school of thought provides great insight into the cultural environment that cultivates people's inherent beliefs.<sup>16</sup> For instance, constructivist Alexander Wendt believes if people encounter a self-help order in politics, this is from the process of states' engagement rather than the structure of the international system.<sup>17</sup> This demonstrates the powerful impact of human behavior on shaping their internal community within states rather than this being external to their control. Thus, people's identities and interests are constructed through interaction--since people create societal/state norms, they can also redefine them. This concept is demonstrated in the quote, "Anarchy is what states make of it."<sup>18</sup> Wendt highlights how the realist explanation is inadequate alone to describe the international system due to the lack of recognition of individual power as people possess the ability to exert influence on states' dynamics.

To conclude, under the constructivist theory, the more people understand our habitat, the further they expand their knowledge. Constructivism adds value for the study of international relations mainly in the emphasis of explaining how individual actors can learn from their past mistakes and do better in the future. This offers an optimistic view of international politics, which can assist in investigating why the US has different approaches towards the Palestinian and Tibetan governments. Under a constructivist analysis, the paper will be examining the ideas, norms, and practices which inhibit Palestinian support from the US that Tibet reframes from as an actor.

The US political and economic support of Tibet is not dependent on chance, rather, on the shared values of democracy, non-violence, and co-existence. These shared beliefs allow Tibet's rise to be met with acceptance while a powerful Palestine is viewed as a threat due to its insufficient commitment to these values. An exemplifying case is Palestine's failure to universally embrace Israel's right to exist. This inability of acknowledgment is an important ideal to social constructivism because the security environment of a state is both materially and culturally/conceptually constituted.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Palestine jeopardizes the socially constructed norms of peaceful co-existence in international politics that the US has spent extensive time and influence cultivating for Israel. Thus, one can assume the US current assistantship towards the

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<sup>15</sup> Moregenthau and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 98.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics (1992)," *International Theory* 46, no. 2 (1995), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-23773-9\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-23773-9_7), 112.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>19</sup> John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization* (London: Routledge, 2006), 43.

Tibetan government does not incur the same risks that supporting the Palestinian governments would to the US idea of international order. These differing beliefs permit the US and Palestine to socially construct identities of each other in relation to their perceived negative actions embedding further obstacles towards Palestinian aid. This illustrates that conflicts are both ideational and material in international politics. However, there is a possibility of transformation because if these beliefs and ideas change, the social relationship can change for the better.<sup>20</sup> Until then, Israel will ideologically remain as a barrier to Palestinian governmental support from the US.

The US and Israel have an extensive history that has led to the two states adopting similar cultural, historical, and religious identities. For example, both nations began out of immigrant societies, seeing themselves as a place for people who believed in their messages. Such that, the “American Dream” and the “Holy Land” both incorporate the ideas of a better life for individuals. Both of these terms encompass states executing morality principles towards their citizens over self-interest concerns. By contrast, China as a communist society and with its opposing values of social orientations in governance is more worried about self-preservation than the livelihood of its people. As a result, the US and China do not share this type of positive affirming identities the way the US does with Israel. Thus, supporting Tibet within China’s borders does not come at a moral predicament the way going against Israel by aiding the Palestinian government does. This ideological explanation illustrates how political and economic assistance have different significance in these two varying cases but “structurally” are the same. According to constructivist theory, actions of a state are aligned with its identity which is why the US assists the Tibetan government and cannot offer buttress to the Palestinian government.<sup>21</sup> Wendt highlights how states exist within a world of their own making, rather than adhering to international norms they have no control of. Specifically, if China wants to influence the US stance on Tibet, it has to improve its own relationship with the US.

China has denounced the US numerous times for the US assistance to the de facto government of Tibet within its borders. However, under constructivist thought, the US support of the Tibetan government is heavily reliant on the US and China’s differential ideals of human rights. For example, President Obama reiterated the US stance on Tibet being one of humanitarian concern: “I again affirmed America’s unwavering support for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people, including freedom of assembly and expression, freedom of the press and freedom of religion... denying ethnic minorities equal treatment are all problematic, in our view, and actually prevent China and its people from realizing its full potential.”<sup>22</sup> This excerpt illustrates that if the US and China could agree on what conceptually constitutes the fundamental care of people within any border, then there would be no need for

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>21</sup> Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” 138.

<sup>22</sup> “Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People’s Republic of China in Joint Press Conference,” National Archives and Records Administration, Office of the Press Secretary, September 25, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/25/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-joint>.

monetary assistance to the Tibetan government's cause. This universal definition for China and the US could only be achieved by working together to fundamentally transform their viewpoint from seeing the other as an obstacle to the strategic partners they could be. This would require the states to put aside their short-term interest in the attempt to acquire a lasting peace, not guaranteed, but reliant on their individual efforts collectively as a whole.

Constructivism and realism can be complementary as explained in this essay. Both offer insights into this observable inconsistent US foreign policy pertaining to why the US offers political and financial buttresses to the Tibetan government and not the Palestinian government. However, they differ in the logic behind the United States' motivation coming from social influence both morally and ideally (constructivism) or self-interest intent as well as security concerns (realism). In this case, the dilemma is neither one nor the other, but a combination of the two influences. Realism is flawed with oversimplification and due to that, this theory does not account for the US and Israel's shared identities, enabling for a moral conflict by supporting Palestine. The main theme of this paper has been explaining the US differing relations with Tibet and Palestine in regard to the states they inhabit, demonstrating the importance of the physical state that constructivists overlook. As a result, to look at this issue separately would be doing a disservice to the international relations field. The true indicator of the superior rational theory is dependent on individual outlook. Politicians will prioritize morals or self-interest due to their own backgrounds and beliefs. This example is not illustrating pure constructivism because it lacks the standardization for individual opinion—some people simply are selfish/bad in nature. Thus, both constructivism and realism are equally valid in explaining this conflict together and separately.