

Public opinion cannot change US policies



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By Ebrahim Beheshti
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Public outcry against Israeli war crimes in the Gaza Strip is visibly evident across various cities in the United States, a staunch supporter of Israel. From large-scale street protests to online advocacy campaigns, there has been an unprecedented display of solidarity with Palestinians since Israel waged a devastating war against the besieged enclave in a disproportionate response to a surprise attack by Hamas on October 7. Surprisingly, findings from a survey conducted by Harvard University revealed that 51% of American youths desire the dismantling of the "state" of Israel, favoring its replacement with a Palestinian state. Could the influential role of public opinion potentially instigate changes in American policies? Iran Daily has spoken with Jahanbakhsh Izadi, an international relations expert and university lecturer to get his take on this matter.

In the past three months, as Israeli crimes in Gaza have crossed all boundaries, we have witnessed mass public protests. Do you believe that such pressure from public opinion can potentially prompt a shift in America's support policy toward Israel?

A: The influence of public opinion within American society extends beyond the confines of the Gaza incident. There are multiple factors to which public opinion reacts. Alongside the massive demonstrations and support campaigns for the people of Gaza, there exists a presence of Zionist Christians, comprising about 80 million individuals, who envision the resurgence of the promised savior, the Israeli regime, as a pivotal aspiration. They have a radio station with an extensive listenership of 24 million.

In the US, whenever an issue garners prominence in public opinion, particularly those that challenge existing policies, the government has the capability to manage the fervor through fabricating its own narratives. Essentially, the political system controls the anger or agitation within public opinion. For instance, when widespread protests emerged against Israel and America's supportive stance toward the regime, we witnessed politicians and statesmen exerting pressure on Israel to let in aid to civilians, or called on it to stop targeting non-combatants. Even the United States did not veto a Security Council resolution aimed at providing aid and merely abstained. Such stances and measures appear to be in line with the policy of controlling or pacifying public opinion.

While I acknowledge the impact of public opinion in shaping policies, it should not be viewed as an absolute proposition. Influ-

ence is contingent upon the national interests of the United States. For instance, the US remained involved in Afghanistan for two decades and engaged in a decade-long conflict in Vietnam, despite public opinion opposing such policies. Therefore, I do not believe that public protests in the US alone will result in a change in American policy toward Israel. It seems that America's strategic interests currently align with Israel's in containing Hamas.

Recently, the results of a survey conducted by Harvard University revealed that 51% of young Americans advocate for the dissolution of the Israeli state and the establishment of a Palestinian state, in contrast to the current stance of the country. What's your insight about such a gulf between American public opinion and decision-makers?

A: American society has evolved into a polarized entity. From the perspective of American strategists, this polarization is the root cause of the United States' diminishing influence. When discussing the global decline of America, many intellectuals and think tanks look for its root cause within US internal dynamics. The widening divide within American society weakens the nation's resolve to exert global dominance. This divergence is manifesting in various arenas, such as the situations in Gaza and Ukraine, where the United States has failed to achieve its objectives. Therefore, it is crucial for American intellectuals and think tanks



to acknowledge the impact of public opinion and assess to what extent American positions on conflicts like Gaza or Ukraine exacerbate internal polarization.

The Harvard University survey results indicate a deepening polarization within American society and a disconnect between official government policies and public sentiment. Could this compel American decision-makers to alter their approach toward Israel and Palestine?

A: No, it is unlikely. The nature of America's relationship with Israel is of strategic importance, rendering public opposition insufficient to induce change, particularly in the short and medium term. Joe Biden, a representative of the more pacifist party in America namely the doves, has expressed that if Israel didn't exist, it would need to be created. He has also made it unequivocally clear that he is a Zionist. Consider, then, how close are the relationship of the US hawks with Israel. The United States views Israel as its sole strategic and dependable ally in the West Asian region. While public sentiment may manifest in protests, expressing opposition toward Israel and even American policies, it cannot alter the strategic nature of the American-Israeli bonds.

Regardless of the level of influence public opinion holds in shaping American policies, the Harvard University survey has unexpectedly revealed shifts within American society. In this

very society where the political system exerts control or manages public sentiment through various means, a striking 51% of young individuals have viewpoints that diverge from their government's positions. The pressing question arises: is this opposition merely an outburst of excitement and protest directed toward democratic politicians, or does it represent a form of activism aimed at instigating profound social change?

Public opinion experiences fluctuations influenced by emerging technologies, particularly within the realm of media, and American society is no exception to this trend. While it is true that a portion of these demonstrations and protests can be attributed to transient expressions of public sentiment and humanitarian concerns, it would be erroneous to categorize all of them as mere reactions.

Certain attitudes and reactions within public opinion constitute active engagement. As we assert the polarization of American society, it becomes evident that a fundamental form of activism is emerging within this societal fabric, one that critiques and protests against prevailing policies, with a focus on shaping the future. This implies that individuals hold distinct visions for themselves and the future of America. A profound debate is taking place within the community, weighing the options of maintaining America's global presence or shifting attention inward. Substantial segments of the American population advocate for relinquishing at least some spheres of influence and redirecting focus internally. Thus, fundamental changes have taken root in American society that are incongruent with prevailing policies.