

The intrigues of an eternal conflict between Israel and the Arabs in Palestine

A perpetuating conflict characterizing the Middle East since the inception of the 20th Century especially since 1948, the once known Arab- Israeli wars has now metamorphosed into a Israel-Hezbollah conflict, Israel-Hamas conflict, Israel-Gaza conflict etc.

It all began with the settlement and the right of return question for Jews to Palestine instigated by the creation of the World Zionist Organization by Theodore Hezerl in 1897. The land in question was that which straddled the Jordan River to its West and East Bank (though the core agitation was majorly for lands to the West Bank of the River Jordan). Adding to this land agitation was the religious and cultural delineation between the Jews and Arabs. The Arabs being predominantly Muslim and the Jews being Judaizers both attest to being custodians of the World's major religions viz; Islam, Christianity and Judaism and both claiming a common progenitor in Grand Patriarch Abraham.

THE JEWISH AGITATION LINES

The Jews claim rights to Palestine by 'Divine right' as stated in verses of the Pentateuch. Nevertheless, following historical lines, the modern day Jews are also regarded as descendants of ancient Hebrews who first settled Palestine or Canaan (as it was then called) by conquest from the 12th century BC? After series of wars and political upheavals, the Hebrews were deported from Canaan by Assyrian and Babylonian rulers and the final rout to Jewish presence in Palestine was delivered by Roman Emperor Hadrian in 135AD when a ban was placed on any form of Jewish presence in Jerusalem and Greater Jerusalem (Judea) on the pain of death. These periods is referred to in Jewish history by Josephus as the great Shoah.

Jews has since then lived in Diaspora and clogged around communes with a

central identity of a Synagogue. From that time onwards, Jews had distinct referrals to their settlements. Jews of Europe were referred to as Ashkenazi Jews, and those who settled around the Middle Orient and North Africa were referred to as Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews. With distinct religious observations, Jews were sometimes targeted for destruction at their various settlement locations such as during the Spanish Inquisitions, several deportation orders from England and other European Countries during the Middle Ages, the Russian Pogroms and ultimately the widely acclaimed Jewish Holocaust attributed to the Nazi regime during the Second World War.

ARAB AGITATION LINES

The Arabs as known to today's contemporary World are a group of people endemic to the Middle East and North Africa most of whom are largely adherents to the Islamic religion.

The groups of peoples referred to as Arabs are an agglomeration of several nomadic tribes delineated by several clansteads once endemic to the Arabian Peninsula. During the initial spread of Islam upon the death of its founder (Mohammed), a United Arab Islamic Militant force rode out of the Arab Peninsula and conquered far reaching lands as far West to the Iberian Peninsula of Spain and Portugal to the steppes of the Hindu Kush Mountains of Afghanistan in the Near East. Apart from the massive conversions of subjugated peoples and kingdoms to Islam, there was a growing resentment against Arabization that came with Islamization of these subjugated peoples. This is eminently seen today in the Kurdish agitation in Iraq, Berber discontent in North Africa, the Darfur conflict of Sudan which are all remnants of Arab Muslim vs Non Arab Muslim agitations.

Thus, the Arabs since the 7th century AD have spread their physical presence from their enclave in the Arabian peninsula to dominate the religious, political and cultural lives of the entire Middle East and North Africa whilst assimilating and wiping off existing cultural identities of these lands.

THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION?

The land referred to as Palestine is that which straddles the East bank of the Mediterranean Sea to the West Bank Jordan and from the sand dunes of the of the Negev desert in the South to the Anti Lebanon Mountains in North.

Anciently referred to as Canaan (the land flowing with Milk and Honey), it was originally peopled by several Semitic groups before it was conquered by wandering Hebrew tribes in the 12th century BC. After series of conquests and deportations, the land was almost emptied of its Hebrew presence in the 2nd Century AD before it ultimately conquered by the Arabs in 7th century AD. From then on, the several heterogeneous peoples that populated the territory became assimilated/ adopted the ruling Arab culture.

The name 'Palestine' in itself is the Greek referral of 'Philistine'- a group of ancient Indo-European peoples who once settled and founded 5 city states along the East Mediterranean coast namely; Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron and Gath. These peoples were ultimately subjugated by serial wars with the Assyrian-Babylonian Empires and ultimately lost their cultural identity through waves of conquest and deportations by the subjugating armies.

The Ottoman Empire succeeded the Arab led Islamic Caliphate of the Middle East. With its capital at Constantinople (Modern day Istanbul), the Ottoman Turks established an empire covering the Hejaz region of the Arabian peninsula in the South, parts of North Africa, the Balkans, the Anatolian Peninsula and Mesopotamia.

THE AGE OF NATIONALIZATION AND EMANCIPATION

Though Sunni Muslims themselves, the Arabs began to resent a weakened, pro secular Ottoman Government and readily accepted Allied promise of emancipation from Ottoman rule in return for an alliance during the 1st World War and followed it up with the Arab revolt of 5th June 1916 in support of British/Allied effort to dismantle an already waning Ottoman Empire.

With promise of liberation and emancipation at hand, the Arabs pursued this cause vigorously as Allied powers established spheres of influence amongst themselves in conquered territories

TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS

An agitation for a Jewish state to solve the looming 'Jewish question' in Europe and moves by the Organization evoked the British in making the Balfour Declaration which guaranteed a Jewish homeland in Palestine under the watchful eyes of British trusteeship.

The Allies (Britain, France and Russia), further signed the famous 'Sykes and Picot' agreement which partitioned the Levant into Spheres of British and French influence. Thus, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq were created with the first two under French control while the British controlled Egypt, Iraq and Iran.

THE FIGHT FOR THE SOUL OF PALESTINE

A wave Arab Nationalism in the 1920's & 30's saw the independence of most Levantine Countries, except the region referred to as Palestine which was under UN mandated British trusteeship. Considering the cultural and political differences of the agitating groups (Arabs and Jews), the UN promulgated a partition plan for two separate countries to emerge on the land referred to as Palestine.

The lands to the East Bank of the Jordan river was designated as exclusively Arab

and was called Trans-Jordan (modern day Jordan). Jerusalem and Bethlehem were designated 'International Status' to be administered by the UN due to their religious significance to Jews, Christians and Muslims whilst the lands to the West Bank of the Jordan River was partitioned between Arab and Jews for two distinct separate states to emerge.

The Arabs rejected the partition plan outright. The Jews reluctantly accepted with hopes for lasting peace and unilaterally declared independence calling their land 'Erez Y'Isra'el' (Israel). The Arabs declared war on the emergent

Jewish state with the intention of grabbing more land and exterminating the Jewish population of Palestine. The Jews defeated the belligerent Arabs, captured more territory and turned out hundreds of Thousands of Arabs as refugees. The Arabs retaliated by expelling over a million indigenous Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews from their lands and confiscated their properties.

UNENDING WARS OF ATTRITION

Ever since the 1947-1949 Arab-Israeli wars, several others have followed in 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982. With the ego of the Arab governments of Egypt and Syria punctured in surprise defeats in the hands of Israeli forces each time at battle, the Egyptian and Jordanian governments signed a peace treaty with Israel and recognized the Jewish rights to Palestine. Other Arab countries have still stood firm on the initial Arab denial of Jewish rights to Palestine.

As Arab governments backed down from an outright direct military confrontation with Israel, Palestinian Arabs have taken up their cause in their hands ever since with the emergence of militant groups such as Fatah, Islamic Jihad, Hamas etc to agitate for their independence.

Sporadic wars of attrition has been fought between Israel and these militant groups ever since each time at the slightest provocative instance such as stone throwing Palestinians against Israeli forces, Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank etc.

PLACATIVE OPTIONS

Regardless of the side supported, humanitarian emotions are always raised anytime the usual conflict/intifadah breaks out between Israel and Palestinian Arabs. Nevertheless one cannot neglect the historical antecedents to the conflict. What if the Arabs had accepted the 1947 UN partition plan? Would the world be experiencing any conflict in the Levant? Surely there has been a grave historical mistake by the Arabs.

Both sides, Arabs and Jews have come a long way in spilling blood for every

inch of territory. Palestinian Arabs have been displaced and so also Mizrahi and Sephardic Jewry have been annihilated from Arab lands.

No matter the emotions, the Israeli-Arab agitation will continue so long as there's blood to be shed unless both parties acknowledge the following:

Jews have come a long way and have sacrificed all their homelands and around the World including in Arab countries and so have a right to Palestine.

Noting that there has been mass wave of forced emigrations which has altered the pre 20th Century cultural landscape of the Middle East such as the Armenian genocide/deportation, the crushing of the Assyrian uprising in Iraq and the Kurdish question, Arab refugees from Palestine should be allowed to settle in whatever countries they fled to else Arab countries should be ready to be receptive to their kith and kin

The Jewish State should realise the need for a peaceful coexistence with the Arabs of the West Bank and should realize the human cost in flesh and blood of any attempt in seizing additional territory.

If these facts are not acknowledged by both parties, it will be a continuous warfare of intermittent truce until all the Souls perish in the struggle for territorial control.

The advance of Isis: implications of a new REDLINE in the Middle East

“Rush O Muslims to your state. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis” (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi)

On the first day of the Muslim fast which marks the commencement of the month of Ramadan corresponding to 1st July 2014 or 1st Ramadan 1435AH, the leader of the neo-caliphate enactment Islamic group also known as ISIS declared an Islamic State in the territories under the control of his group

which straddles from Aleppo in Northern Syria to Diyala province in Iraq; effectively nullifying any existing border between Iraq and Syria whilst concomitantly invalidating any government control over these areas in both countries.

These actions were not neoteric, in fact, it had long been beginning to come and what was only left of that precipitate was the effect of that declaration and the harsh realities it meant for the peoples of the affected territories, neighbouring countries, the international diplomatic cosmos of World powers and other Nations of the Planet Earth.

The current civil and political instability in the Eastern Levant was precipitated by the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which toppled a stable Iraqi regime presided by Saddam Hussien, and the evasive consequence of the Arab spring which has perennially condemned Syria to a bitter warfare of attrition. Of all the Countries affected by the Arab Spring, the Syrian case remains most volatile and bloody; claiming fatalities of nearly 200,000 lives, displacing over 2000,000 civilians, and leaving heavy patches of ruins in all cities across the Syrian Urban and rural landscape.

What began as a protest for regime change snowballed into that of sectarian strife pitting the majority Syrian Sunni population against the minority Alawite led Syrian government. With Western powers wary of intervention, the Syrian scenario pitted a proxy warfare with sectarian regional powers sponsoring their military interests. The

Syrian government found a ready ally in Iran (a regional Shiite power) and a readymade fighting man power in Hezbollah (a Lebanese based Shiite militant group). In response to the sectarian dimension of the Syrian conflict, Sunni led militias such as Jabat al Nusra, ISIS (Islamic State in Syria and the Levant) and several others sprang up to fight the 'infidel' Alwaite or pro-Shia supported government. In no time, the Syrian conflict metamorphosed from a civil one to a religious one.

Across the Syrian Eastern border in Iraq, the government had been grappling

for control of the country since the withdrawal of US and other allied forces. The ensuing unrest in Iraq assumed a sectarian cum religious dimension as the Kurds opted for autonomy whilst the Sunnis and Shiites grappled for political power. The once repressed Shiites under Sunni Saddam Hussien gained political power being the majority (65% of Iraqis are Shia Muslims) amidst Sunni cries of marginalization. In between the Iraqi political discontent was a wave of pockets of insurgency by Islamic militias against what was seen as an American perpetrated government in Iraq. This insurgency was later mostly exclusively perpetrated by Sunni based militias against Shiite and government interests.

With regional and religious rivalry in the brew, Shiite militias and governments led by Shiites received military and support from Iran whilst Saudi Arabia and other gulf states actively funded Sunni Militias.

AN IMPLOSION OF THE ESTABLISHED ORDER

With the Syrian situation attaining a stalemate, ISIS (a Sunni led Islamist Militia) seized Raqqa (a provincial capital in Northern Syria) and declared it a model for a proposed burgeoning Islamic State and claiming that they had the entire Middle East at sight for a Caliphate. Taking advantage of the security and political impunity in Iraq, ISIS fighters crossed over and disgraced an established multibillion dollar US funded Iraqi army; seizing Mosul, Tikrit, Anabar and Nineveh provinces in a lightening advance and threatening to march on Baghdad. For reasons best known to ISIS, it has slowed the pace

of its advance whilst seeking to consolidate control on the swathes of territory under its control across Syria and Iraq.

IMPLICATIONS

The military exploits of ISIS has had a reverberating effect across the Middle East and even amongst Sunni led governments. The ISIS fighters are just a few kilometres away from the borders of Saudi Arabia and Jordan and providing a new impetus to crumble an already endangered Shiite led Syrian

and Iraq government. For once, the quest of ISIS is now seen as a valid threat to an established order in the Middle East.

PERMUTATIONS

All through the wake of the Arab spring, the US and her allies have refrained from directly intervening militarily apart from Libya where air support was used to defeat the Gaddafi government. Rather, western intervention has been through cautious military advisory tactics and equipment (whether lethal or non lethal) to militant group they deem sympathetic.

Whilst tension and mistrust amongst Iran (a regional Shia power) and the rest of a Sunni dominant Arab Middle East remain high, both parties do not want to see a crumbling of established order in their respective domains.

A crumble of established order will add a renewed impetus for Kurdish independence a cause which will distort the boundaries of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran—all of which are not ready to lose territory.

Continued heightened tensions will ensure the partition of Syria and Iraq along Sectarian lines, deflating existing borders and threaten the corporate borders of Jordan and Saudi Arabia all of which who have tribal affiliations across the borders.

A continued push by ISIS will threaten Jordan and Saudi Arabia and later on Iran and Turkey. Remotely, Israel and Lebanon will come into the fray and it will be hard for the US not to fight.

At this juncture, the bi-polar powers cannot afford to stand arms akimbo. And maybe this explains why Russia has provided Iraq with jets to bomb ISIS positions with a fore running support of Syrian attempt

In all, the latest trend in the Middle East precipitated by the action of ISIS may precipitate another gun power for a global conflict. Let's hope Armageddon is not yet here!

"We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on

the ground, that a **red line** for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized..... “That would change my calculus. That would change my equation.” (Barack Obama; 20th August 2012)